

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM WALLS:  
ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGIES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE,  
1868-1910

Anne Lindsey Bruder

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill  
2009

Approved by:

Advisor: Eliza Richards

Reader: Robert Cantwell

Reader: Philip Gura

Reader: Joy Kasson

Reader: Timothy Marr

©2009  
Anne Lindsey Bruder  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

ANNE BRUDER: Outside the Classroom Walls:  
Alternative Pedagogical in American Literature and Culture, 1868-1910  
(Under the direction of Eliza Richards)

This study examines women's innovative extra-institutional methods and spaces of learning in American Literature and Culture between 1868 and 1910. "Outside the Classroom Walls" argues that we can discover a genealogy of unconventional and progressive models of instruction not in that era's schoolhouse curricula or in the writings of well-known pedagogues, but in its imaginative literature, in the unpublished letters of the first American correspondence school, and in the live exhibits of a labor museum. In Louisa May Alcott's domestic novels for adolescents, Anna Eliot Ticknor's epistolary *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*, and Jane Addams's *Labor Museum* and autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, we find various manifestations of a radically egalitarian strain of education that existed in opposition to traditional learning environments that were often inhospitable to individual needs. These educational experiments, both real and unreal, were refuges and their students and teachers exiles from the nation's female academies, public grammar and high schools, and newly-opened women's colleges. The unintended result of this exile was that the era's most exciting and significant educational innovations initially happened outside of the conventional classroom, but were then disseminated throughout it. The hallmark of these pioneering

pedagogues was their cultivation of a shared imaginative space between teacher and student in which traditional hierarchies of class, race, gender, and age were attenuated. In the process of working beyond the classroom walls, these writers transformed the meaning of education in America, bridging the gap between antebellum domestic instruction and the public and political initiatives most commonly associated with the Progressive Era.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Among my earliest school memories are those that any teacher would cringe to hear. In elementary school, I was placed on a behavior contract because I asked too many questions and in high school my calculus teacher, long tired of explaining derivatives to me, bellowed in front of the whole class: “Anne, why must you insist on being so *obtuse*?” I hid under the piano in nursery school and locked myself in the girls’ bathroom in junior high. School, it seems, didn’t work so well for me.

It was my good fortune, then, that all of this changed under the caring guidance of Robert Schine, who at Middlebury College convinced me that my questions were valuable, and that I could trust them to guide my future pursuits. Since then, I have been still more fortunate to work with a dissertation committee at the University of North Carolina that has continually believed in me and in this project, even when neither I nor it warranted their belief. Robert Cantwell simultaneously introduced me to Jane Addams and to the very best kinds of teaching. Timothy Marr, whose prodigious enthusiasm buoyed both my spirits and my ideas time and again, helped me think big and realize what it was that I had turned up in the archives. Joy Kasson gave me the chance to teach what I love, convinced me that this project really did have to be about women, and counseled me through it all. Philip Gura started me off on the right foot, supplied me with treasures in the form of old schoolbooks, and remained a steady source of guidance and good cheer. And finally, Eliza Richards, director and friend, arrived at UNC during a key point in my graduate education, just as I was starting to think about literature and pedagogy. With equal measures of patience and gentle prodding, she shepherded me through this project and generously shared her tremendous intelligence and keen sense of the way texts work. I’ve little doubt that it will take me a lifetime to repay the debt I owe her.

I am grateful to the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina for providing me with an Evan Frankel dissertation

fellowship and to the Graduate School at UNC for granting me an Off-Campus Research fellowship that supported my archival work at the Boston Public Library, the Houghton and Schlesinger Libraries at Harvard University, the American Antiquarian Society, and the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library. I am indebted to the librarians at each of these institutions for the assistance they provided me.

In a solitary profession, I've been privileged to feel rarely alone. I learned from Maura and Jonathan D'Amore, Nick Gaskill, Matthew Spencer, Bryan Sinche, Tara Robbins, Karah Rempe, Kelly Ross, Aaron Shackleford, Elizabeth Stockton, and Elissa Zellinger. Gregg Flaxman, John McGowan, and Jane Danielewicz gave gentle guidance and unfailing support. My fellow summer scholars at Andover asked tough questions and waded with me through the answers. Thank you to Emily Moore, Tasha Hawthorne, Chris Jones, and Joe Kugelmass. Bob and Vicki Zwerdling lent me a bed in Boston next to the Public Library time and again, and Ada Fan shared with me her alcove for a day of writing one November that led to many more. Katherine Stirling patiently listened to every development and every mistake, and nevertheless remains my dear friend. Elena Oxman and Armistead Lemon Wilson began this whole thing with me, spent seven years sharing their wisdom and showing me that I could finish it, and will—I hope—be there long after its done.

And to my parents, John Bruder and Carolyn Keith, and Mimi Bruder and Don Hunt, who were endlessly patient and unquestioningly supportive. To my Grandparents, Virginia and Franklin Riggle, of blessed memory, autodidacts who grew up with little on farms in the Midwest but with whom I never felt a moment of scarcity. To all of my siblings, but especially to my little sister, Molly Jean Bruder, whom I failed every time we played school as children (I always got to be the teacher), but who continues to teach me more than I ever did her. To Arlo, beloved witness and guide. And finally, to Joshua Aaron Guthman, without whom this would have taken another seven years to finish and with whom I look forward to a beautiful post-graduate life. To him this work is lovingly dedicated.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .....	ix
Prologue .....	x
Introduction - Home Learning .....	1
I. Plumfield: A Home Transformed .....	7
II. Three Teachers .....	15
III. An Alternative to What? .....	35
Chapter One - Centering on the Student: Progressive Pedagogy in the Age of the Alcotts .....	36
I. Teaching in the Temple .....	45
II. Intermezzo: A Dream .....	61
III. Experience in the Novel, Experiencing the Novel .....	65
IV. Circulating Alcott: Lessons for the Classroom.....	86
Chapter Two - “The Little Seed Which You Planted is Now a Wide-spreading Oak”: Women’s Epistolary Education in the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, 1873-1897.....	95
I. The Work of Benevolence .....	100
II. Women’s Intimacy and National Belonging.....	111
III. Circulation: Publicity, Gender, and Geography.....	128
IV. Commencement .....	152
Chapter Three - “What has the artist done about it?”: Jane Addams, Education Reform, and the Work of Art.....	154

I.	The Barrage of Books: Jane Addams and the Failure of American Schools.....	161
II.	Culture as Understanding: Jane Addams's Artist .....	172
III.	Learning in Action: The Hull-House Labor Museum.....	181
IV.	Follow My Lead: Transporting Hull-House.....	200
	Epilogue.....	222
	Bibliography.....	234



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Correspondent's Remarks on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Society Homework .....	108
Figure 2. An Ergograph.....	171
Figure 3. Original Caption: "Hilda Satt Polacheck Oct. 1913 (Russian Spinning)" .....	194
Figure 4. Soulemama.com.....	231

## INTRODUCTION

### Home Learning

This is a study of three homes: one of them imaginative, one of them remote, and one of them public. Each was an American home whose foundation—both literally and figuratively—was laid during a time when True Womanhood’s virtuous domesticity remained in ascendance, even as its corollary, submissiveness, began to fade into the past as women gained opportunities for work and learning outside of the home during and after the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> The women of these three homes remained committed to cultivating and preserving an affective and nurturing place for personal development, but they were equally committed to transforming domestic maternal affection and nurture into the basis of public forms of social and cultural development. Like other “social housekeepers” of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, these women realized that the nation’s rapid expansion, industrialization, and social development threatened the increasingly anachronistic sanctity of the domestic sphere. But instead of cordoning their houses off

---

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-174. Estelle Freedman argues that: “submissiveness was always the weakest link” and that the women’s institution building at the end of the nineteenth century testifies to its diminishing power. See “Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930,” *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979): 518. Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 45. Solomon claims that by 1870, two million women—or one in every eight over the age of ten—were employed outside the home.

from modernity, the women of this study opened their homes to facilitate educational advancement.<sup>2</sup>

Each of the homes in this study was also a *schoolhouse* of a sort, a place in which female educators taught themselves and others. But the teaching in these homes was unusual. The droning recitations that dominated nineteenth-century schoolrooms could not be heard in these unconventional learning environments. Nor would visitors find the traditional school's emphasis on rote memorization, student subordination, and the taming of individual self-expression. Instead, from the homes of this study came manifestations of a radically egalitarian strain of women's teaching that existed in opposition to the conventions governing the traditional American classroom. These unusual places of learning were refuges and their students and teachers exiles—whether made so by class, race, gender, or geography—from the era's academies, public grammar and high schools, and colleges. The unintended result of this exile was, as this study argues, that the era's most exciting and significant educational innovations happened outside of the walls of the traditional classroom.

And who were these uncommon teachers tendering their unconventional methods? They were Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), Anna Eliot Ticknor (1823-1896), and Jane Addams (1860-1935), and this study examines their pedagogical work—their *homework*—as instances of educational theorizing and reform that operated beyond traditional

---

<sup>2</sup> "Social housekeeping," "public motherhood," "municipal housekeeping," are all terms used to describe a wide range of reform efforts that middle-class women undertook during the Progressive Era to address social problems associated with urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. See Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 141-158.

classrooms. But why locate American educational reform in the creative work of at least two women who are rarely considered teachers and one, the Boston Brahmin Anna Ticknor, who is rarely considered at all? Louisa May Alcott, beloved by generations of readers, is usually considered a children's novelist. Jane Addams is heralded as a path-breaking social worker and the founder of Hull-House, not a pedagogical luminary. And Anna Ticknor, who began the first correspondence school in the United States, remains unknown. A novelist, a social worker, a letter writer. If we look more closely, however, we will see they are, perhaps, best understood as teachers, as women who harnessed their creative energies and channeled their cultural resources into educational reforms that, because they unfolded outside of conventional institutions or were conveyed by unusual means, rarely get considered when we survey the history of American education.

By Alcott, Addams, and Ticknor's time, the prospects for pedagogical innovation were dim. On the one hand, earlier reformers had struggled mightily to bring a semblance of order to the nation's ragbag of schools. Horace Mann, the leader of the New England Common School movement, despaired that the nation's splintered educational "system" meant that "if any improvement in principles or modes of teaching is discovered by talent or accident, in one school, instead of being published to the world, it dies with the discoverer."<sup>3</sup> Mann and his fellow nineteenth-century reformers' campaign for educational systematization slowly earned victories as the century unfolded, but these hard-to-come-by successes presented new problems. The reformers' overweening emphasis on "efficiency

---

<sup>3</sup> Horace Mann, *Lectures on Education* (Boston: Ide & Dutton, 1855), 19.

and uniformity” had left little room for pedagogical innovation.<sup>4</sup> Trained by state normal schools with their standardized examinations and homogenized curricula, new teachers entered classrooms prepared to teach well, but not to teach differently.<sup>5</sup> Unconventional teachers found other homes.

These other “homes” were the genres examined here: the novel, the letter, the autobiography, and the museum. They welcomed unconventional teaching, sheltered it, nourished it, circulated it, and, in useful ways, disguised it. Ideas that might have seemed dangerously subversive in other venues found acceptance—love, even—when nestled in the pages of a novel or scribbled, say, on a note written from a Boston woman to a Wisconsin farmer's wife. Louisa May Alcott's imaginative literature did not find itself cramped by the uniformities of the normal school, neither did the personal letters Anna Ticknor used to teach women cut off from the possibility of attaining an advanced formal education nor the autobiography Jane Addams penned to delocalize and popularize her pedagogical innovations at the Hull-House Labor Museum. And in one crucial respect, the efficiencies of these cultural productions—the novel, the letter, the autobiography, the museum—outstripped even the standardized pedagogy and codified curricula of the Common School movement.<sup>6</sup> For the book and the letter were eager travelers. Borne swiftly along the

---

<sup>4</sup> Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 71.

<sup>5</sup> Jurgen Herbst, “Teacher Preparation in the Nineteenth Century: Institutions and Purposes,” in *American Teacher: History of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 213-236.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that nineteenth-century American educational reform was highly varied by region. For instance, while women replaced men as teachers in Common Schools of the northeastern states (becoming the majority therein by the end of the century), southern schools—with different anxieties about white women's work outside the home and differing social

thousands of miles of new railroad track laid down during the mid-century transportation revolution, letters and books spread ideas far more widely and rapidly than institutional reforms dependent upon the patient training and retraining of instructors over the course of a generation.

Louisa May Alcott's novels, for instance, penetrated the West and renovated the way classroom teachers understood their students and their needs long before New England reformers' calls for a pedagogy founded on mutual respect between instructor and student were formally implemented on the frontier.<sup>7</sup> But Alcott's novels, from which this study embarks in Chapter One, could do still more. Though easily disregarded by some as mere fantasy, her imaginative fictions evince what Christopher Castiglia has termed in the antebellum context an "archive of the socially possible."<sup>8</sup> They were inspired blueprints of educational improvement—spearheaded by her venerated heroine Jo March—that were, in time, taken up in living practice by Jane Addams and others in the Progressive Era.

Imaginative literature of all sorts and epistolary correspondence had the capacity to speak across class, race, and gender divides. Hence, these forms opened up an available space of egalitarian exchange that formal models of classroom-based education, those beholden to conventional hierarchies, could not. While very few, if any, of the students of these unconventional methods learned exclusively from the novels, letters,

---

structures—were far slower to hire women in large numbers. See Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo, *Women's Work?: American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 34-70 passim.

<sup>7</sup> Beverly Lyon Clark, *Louisa May Alcott: The Contemporary Reviews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 158.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Castiglia, *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 13.

autobiographies, or museums examined here, these forms did change the tone of what was possible for those who were exiled from—or whose specific needs were overlooked in—traditional learning environments. Alcott, Ticknor and Addams each created a shared imaginative space between teacher and student in which traditional hierarchies of class, race, and age were pared down and their powers attenuated. Instead of delivering pedagogical pronouncements from on high, each of these women’s “teaching” (an act broadly understood here to be that of facilitating another’s learning) produced an intersubjective exchange between the word (as constructed in the novel, the letter, and the autobiography) and the reader, and also, between readers themselves. In doing so, each of these women worked to transform the meaning of education in America, bridging the gap between antebellum domestic moral instruction and the public and political educational initiatives most commonly associated with the Progressive Era.

Alcott, Ticknor, and Addams linked these two historical modes of instruction by conscientiously forging their pedagogical innovations within a home space. This strategy camouflaged radical reform with a domestic patina not easily seen through. Under the cover of domesticity, each of these women empowered her students with authority to subvert—albeit sometimes quite subtly—the gender, class, and ethnic restrictions that otherwise dampened their public participation. So opaque was their domestic rhetoric and so careful were their public initiatives, however, that even feminist historians of the 1970s, who identified powerful and intimate bonds of “sisterhood” across the nation, drew a firm line between the life of the home and the work of the nation.<sup>9</sup> Later historians revised this

---

<sup>9</sup> See Carol Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1 (Fall 1975): 1-29; Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*:

notion of separate spheres and began to suggest that even as women employed such ideology and rhetoric, they often lived their lives in a very different fashion. Their discoveries provided a convincing reminder that women's writing of the nineteenth century should not always be read earnestly or mimetically.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the work and writings of Alcott, Ticknor, and Addams all stray beyond the boundaries of antebellum domestic isolation into increasingly public forms of educational innovation.

### I. Plumfield: A Home Transformed

Consider for a moment Alcott's imaginative Plumfield, a representative place wherein we witness the transformation of the intimate, private home into an increasingly public, but no less intimate, house of learning. Peeking into its windows, we come to see

---

"*Woman's Sphere*" in *New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). Cott revised her original thesis in her republication of *Bonds* in 1997 (see xvii-xxviii passim). In her new preface, she testifies that she had come to believe in gender as a "relational" discourse. Strongly influenced by Jeanne Boydson's studies of nineteenth-century women's labor as direct implicated in the development industrial capitalism, Cott acknowledged that margins between what she once thought of as separate sphere had grown very faint. Jeanne Boydson, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher; a Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973) and Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*. The next generation of scholars lowered the wall between public and private spheres. In showing the work of the home to be implicated in the policies of the nation, historians accused nineteenth-century women's reform efforts (from benevolent societies to domestic writings) of racial exclusion, imperialism, and as participating in the alienating labor practices of industrial capitalism. In collapsing the separation of spheres, Gillian Brown, Amy Kaplan, and others showed the practices of the domestic space to be embroiled in the nation's public affairs. Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 3 (1998): 581-606. Gillian Brown exposes the fusion of liberal individualism and domesticity, which together create a dominant bourgeois ideology. Amy Kaplan reveals women's pernicious role in imperialist nation building. See also Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), and Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).



the ways in which such a transformation—effected from *Little Women* in 1868 to *Jo's Boys* in 1886—enables a dramatic reformulation of pedagogical practices. Critics have historically claimed that Alcott's most popular trilogy “reinforce[s] the notion of separate spheres and affirm[s] a vision of domesticity” that her feminist works, like *Hospital Sketches* and *Work*, ultimately disavow.<sup>11</sup> While these latter works may be more overtly feminist, the claims of their singularity miss the means by which Alcott deliberately deploys the domestic in the *Little Women* series only to overturn divisive separate spheres ideology. Shortly after she published *Little Men*, Alcott explicitly connected improving female education in the 1870s—in terms of both access and excellence—to women's ability to silence the stubborn rhetoric of domestic responsibility:

Let us hear no more of ‘woman's sphere’ either from our wise (?) [sic] legislators beneath the State House dome, or from our clergymen in their pulpits...Let the professions be open to her; let fifty years of college education be hers...Then, and not until then, shall we be able to say what woman can and what she cannot do.<sup>12</sup>

Alcott herself creatively instigates this rhetorical change by reorganizing Plumfield into a new and fluid educative space, no longer isolated from public concerns. In doing so, she joined in the mid-century “material feminist” movement to “increase women's rights in the home and simultaneously bring homelike nurturing into public life.”<sup>13</sup> Within the *Little Women* series, Jo March's experiential pedagogy is rendered a socially acceptable alternative

---

<sup>11</sup> Monika Elbert, ed. *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930* (University Alabama Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 189-190.

<sup>13</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1982), 4-5.

to the day's restrictive classroom. Its radicalism is softened by domestic nurture, making it more appealing to readers who might otherwise object to its unorthodoxy.

At the opening of *Little Women*, Plumfield is the stately mansion respectfully inhabited and maintained by the aging and irascible spinster, Aunt March. Her home is a virtual feminine sanctuary, decorated with care and ruled by one who strictly adheres to the prescriptions of nineteenth-century domestic advice literature. Fulfilling Catharine Beecher's call for women's sacred self-sacrifice and domestic forbearance (advice that Beecher herself never followed), Aunt March preaches such tenets to her nieces.<sup>14</sup> She furiously reminds Meg of her mandatory self-denial and domestic obligation: "You ought to marry well, and help your family; it's your duty to make a rich match, and it ought to be impressed upon you."<sup>15</sup> A companionate marriage, she argues, was a luxury that the insolvent Marches could not afford, nor could she conceive of women's labor outside the home as an alternative to the marriage market. Plumfield of this first novel is also the place where Jo, instead of attending school, serves as her aunt's dutiful—if at times rebellious—companion. In this capacity, she reads to her from Christian tracts and receives unwanted "long lecture[s] on my sins."<sup>16</sup> Even though its parlor is, according to Jo, "about as festive as a churchyard" and Aunt March nearly as prickly as Amy's snappish schoolteacher, Jo

---

<sup>14</sup> Catharine Esther Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science: Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1869).

<sup>15</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1869; reprint New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 181.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. Once Jo's reading puts Aunt March to sleep, she has time to read from novels deemed dangerous to female development. She provides herself, then, with an alternative curriculum inside the house.

rejoices when she inherits the property following her aunt's death.<sup>17</sup> But Jo cannot afford—nor would she incline—to maintain the home as a private residence. Instead, Plumfield, with its “room for dozens inside” becomes, in Jo's domestic reconceptualization, a “flourishing school.”<sup>18</sup>

Under Jo's superintendence, Plumfield's ethos remains domestic and familial, but both of these are radically reconstituted. Instead of reverberating with Aunt March's lectures on a woman's duty to marry well and maintain a dignified private space, Plumfield becomes what Milette Shamir has termed an “overwhelming conceptual space,” that turns the private home into an unobstructed place in which of all sorts children come and go—springing up “like mushrooms and flourish[ing] surprisingly”—and comprise a new and widely inclusive “family.”<sup>19</sup> Jo extends maternal nurture outward to her refashioned family, disregarding the bounded private space that Aunt March had assiduously guarded. Even as Jo recognizes that her aunt “would have lamented had she been here to see the sacred precincts of prim, well-ordered Plumfield overrun,” she also knows that only in abandoning the constraints of personally restrictive and isolated domesticity is she able to create “a sort of...paradise” for her adoptive children, the young students of Plumfield.<sup>20</sup>

Where Aunt March had trained her nieces in careful domestic chores, making them “wash

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>19</sup> Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 25. Shamir describes the middle-class domestic space as “burdened with conflicting and even paradoxical definitions of the private, with visions of liberal and domestic interiority, with ideas of solitariness and social and familial intimacy.”

<sup>20</sup> Alcott, *Little Women*, 376.

the cups every morning, and polish up the old-fashioned spoons...dust the room...Not a speck escaped Aunt March's eye, and all the furniture had claw legs and much carving, which was never dusted to suit," Jo thinks otherwise.<sup>21</sup> The meticulously dusted and ornate furniture of Aunt March's day disappears in Jo's house, a place that she elects, against all prior domestic advice, to "furnish" with "the style of boy in which she most delighted."<sup>22</sup> In outfitting it with living "furniture," Jo's Plumfield comes to signify what—in a different context—Gillian Brown termed a "utopian rehabilitation" of domesticity.<sup>23</sup> Plumfield's structural transformation from a bourgeois home into a spartan school facilitates pedagogical practices grounded in domestic maternal nurture and "disciplinary intimacy," but equally oriented to address extra-familial and increasingly public needs.<sup>24</sup>

Plumfield of Alcott's *Little Men* (1871), the second novel in the series, is a place where students learn through experiential practice and revised domestic relationships. Jo's students refer to her as "Mother Bhaer," and with this title, she conjoins maternity and instruction in an edifice that continues to resemble a home. Jo's instructional authority arises from her ability to nurture children, but she does this work in a way that addresses the heterogeneous needs of all of her students and, by extension, her readers at large. A single instructional approach, Jo realizes, will not suffice for a multiplicity of needs and learning styles. Even as "prim people wondered why banister-sliding, pillow-fights, and all

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>23</sup> Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Richard H. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (University Of Chicago Press, 1995), 13-47 passim.

manner of jovial games were allowed under the once decorous roof,” Jo forsakes hierarchical and genteel manners for altruistic and egalitarian learning: “‘Help one another,’ was a favorite Plumfield motto.”<sup>25</sup>

Alcott opens access to the conventionally intimate home so that its lessons can travel more widely. For instance, Jo’s young son Teddy, whom she originally claims to be “too young to play a very important part in the affairs at Plumfield,” comes to signify basic human needs that, in turn, teach all of her students, both girls and boys alike, to become nurturing caregivers.<sup>26</sup> Teddy’s needs, in fact, catalyze the transformation of the most rough-and-tumble student, Dan, from a selfish bully into a selfless guide. The lessons Teddy facilitates illustrate Alcott’s attempts to reconfigure conventionally gendered practices and to reeducate her students by making what was traditionally deemed female domestic nurture into an essential part of all students’ educational development that will, in turn, extend Plumfield’s influence into their later, more public lives.

Though the Plumfield of *Little Men* overturned earlier notions of household maintenance (educationally-liberating pillow fights replaced proper pillow fluffing) it preserved vestiges of at least semi-private domesticity. When *Jo’s Boys* opens in 1886, though, Plumfield is yet a different place still, illustrating the final wave of Alcott’s domestic revolution. In this final novel “quiet Plumfield was transformed into a busy little world.” As the “rapid growth of the city shut in” both Laurie and Amy’s home and Meg’s cottage, they all transport their households to Plumfield’s formerly bucolic grounds. Laurie

---

<sup>25</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *Little Men* (1871; reprint, New York: Signet Classic, 2004), 13, 120.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

also establishes a “fine college” on the “hill where kites used to be flown.”<sup>27</sup> American urbanization and institution building of the 1880s has displaced the former privacy of Plumfield. It is increasingly suburbanized by escaping city dwellers and within sight of Laurie’s college, an educational institution less reliant on domestic nurture, but nonetheless still proximate to it. And this proximity is essential. Even as the college and the home are now separate, they remain mutually dependent, with students fluidly shuffling between them. In this way, Alcott geographically bridges domestic moral instruction of an earlier period (and an earlier novel) with its descendent, the co-educational college that Laurie develops through an extension of Jo’s Plumfield pedagogy: “Busy students were going to and fro along the paths once trodden by childish feet.”<sup>28</sup> This act of imaginative affiliation held particular resonance for female students, who by 1886 held a “high place in this little republic” of the college and Plumfield, and who would come to “play their parts worthily in the great republic which offered them wider opportunities and more serious duties.”<sup>29</sup>

Plumfield’s transformation into an increasingly public place from 1868 to 1886 is representative of the pervasive extension of feminine nurture outward from the home during the postbellum period. In the context of this study, it is also representative of the way in which educational innovations both instigated and mediated that change. When Anna Eliot Ticknor began her Society to Encourage Studies at Home in 1873, she insisted

---

<sup>27</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *Jo’s Boys* (1886; reprint, New York: Bantam Classic, 1995), 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

on running the organization out of her own house in Boston. In initially converting her family's personal library into an office (instead of renting such a space outside of the home), Ticknor insisted that she was preserving the sanctity of women's domestic work, including her own. And yet, the Society's very structure required women to breach their selfless roles in the home in order to make time for their own intellectual development. Scattered over the entire nation, the students' own—and often rural—homes became places from which women launched their learning into increasingly public forms of knowledge transmission. But even as numerous Society students and their teachers went on to open their own schools and publish the products of their learning in popular periodicals, each member had to negotiate carefully her particular relationship to domestic responsibility in the face of liberating intellectual opportunity.

Jane Addams's settlement house in industrializing Chicago was, like the Plumfield of *Jo's Boys*, ever more surrounded by the evidence of urban growth. But even as the city grew up around Hull-House, it too unfurled itself outward from an initial single home to a dozen additional buildings. Charles Hull's original mid-century mansion remained Addams's own home, but her settlement project as a whole eventuated in a far larger and more public community. Its fundamental orientation, however, remained domestic. Consequently, many of its programs were imbued with a form of women's affective nurture that historically originated in the private home. This is not to suggest, however, that Addams and her settlement residents unequivocally imposed their own domestic habits onto defenseless immigrant neighbors. Rather, Addams and her fellow residents gradually

came to reshape their own domestic and private practices in a new context and with new commitments that changed the way in which they themselves lived.

## II. Three Teachers

The pedagogues of this study—Louisa May Alcott, Anna Eliot Ticknor, and Jane Addams—all enjoyed unusual forms of privilege. And yet, instead of consolidating these advantages in traditional forms (e.g. elite marriages or established institutions of power), each of them looked beyond her birthright and shared her own privilege with others in a democratic form. Louisa May Alcott did not, of course, have the economic advantages of Ticknor or Addams. Her father, Bronson Alcott, was notoriously impecunious and his principles often kept him lodged in the world of ideals instead of in the world of practicalities. Notwithstanding her financial hardships, Louisa May Alcott did have tremendous cultural capital, inherited both through her mother's elite lineage and her father's social and intellectual congress with the leading thinkers of the day, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller. Anna Ticknor and Jane Addams, on the other hand, were born into upper and upper-middle class affluence respectively. Ticknor, the daughter of Boston Brahmin and professor George Ticknor, enjoyed a genteel education amongst Europe's majestic cathedrals and treasured works of art.<sup>30</sup> At Harvard, George Ticknor pushed to transform the college's rigid curriculum into an elective system. He also held leadership positions in Boston's myriad cultural

---

<sup>30</sup> Anna Eliot Ticknor fictionalized her Grand Tour for American children in her *An American Family in Paris* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1869). This text includes a variety of implanted history lessons given by the father, Mr. Lewis, who is a thinly veiled version of George Ticknor.



institutions—such as the Atheneum and the Public Library—and in its financial and civic establishments as well.<sup>31</sup> Jane Addams's father, John Addams, was a young entrepreneur when he chanced his luck and moved west in the mid 1840s. He quickly purchased a local mill, helped guide railroad expansion through Illinois, and was politically—if provincially—active as a state senator, all before his daughter Jane was born in 1860. All of these men—one with an extraordinary vision and friends to match, one with moneyed New England status, and the other flush with the rewards of intelligent enterprise—provided their daughters with extraordinary educations that set them apart from the vast majority of nineteenth-century women who infrequently received any form of post-secondary schooling, not mention post-primary education.<sup>32</sup>

There is, then, no denying that each of these women in this study enjoyed unusual opportunity, and in the case of Ticknor and Addams, there is also no denying that their educational projects may appear, at first glance, to be little more than assertions of social control through the imposition of white, middle-class values in the face of real challenges brought on by industrialization, urban poverty, and new immigration.<sup>33</sup> Similar charges

---

<sup>31</sup> For an account of George Ticknor's investments in Boston's cultural development, see David B. Tyack, *George Ticknor and the Boston Brahmins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>32</sup> Less than two percent of Americans attended post-secondary schooling at the close of the nineteenth century. Colin B. Burke, *American Collegiate Populations: A Test of the Traditional View* (New York: New York University Press, 1982), 49-89. Quoted in Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 81. As great as their intellectual gifts were, each of these fathers also cast a long shadow over his daughter, one that in all cases took time and effort to surpass.

<sup>33</sup> Lori D. Ginzberg writes against this type of interpretation of women's social work in the nineteenth century in her *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 2. Until the emergence and acceptance in the 1970s of feminist histories of nineteenth-century women, their benevolent and reformist projects were often seen as insignificant if not deleterious. This older

have been leveled against a wide-range of women's mid-century benevolent work that some have seen as complicit, in its attempts at circumventing working-class dissent, with the interests of industrial capitalism.<sup>34</sup> The innovative educational projects under investigation in this dissertation were neither unapologetic tools of laissez-faire economics nor selfless acts of unadulterated munificence. They were, instead, projects that both imagined and created the conditions of productive social—and educational—interdependence in the face of an increasingly stratified nation. But even as their offerings were enriching and generous, these teachers could not, of course, effectively transpose their class status on to their students, suggesting the material limitations to this form of democratized learning. Nevertheless, each project, to its own extent, implicitly critiqued the popular Emersonian rhetoric of self-reliance in favor of pedagogic interconnection that used affective female networks to disseminate egalitarian learning practices. Through an alternative form of women's reproduction—none of pedagogues of this study married or had children of her own—each democratized her own education, and consequently lent both intellectual and social authority to her readers and participants.

Each of teachers under examination here transformed her own education into a mobile mechanism for learning that arose from the needs of nineteenth-century Americans. Louisa May Alcott's early education was a blend of conventional district schooling in the early 1840s and the eccentric teachings of her parents and their friends. In

---

scholarship is best represented by Clifford Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960).

<sup>34</sup> For example, see Nancy Christie, "Women, the Public Sphere, and Middle-Class Culture," *Journal of Women's History* 20 (2008): 240.

her first years, Alcott “never went to school except to my father...[he] taught in the wise way which unfolds what lies in the child’s nature, as flower blooms, rather than crammed it, like a Strasburg goose, with more than it could digest.”<sup>35</sup> Bronson Alcott, whose teaching I examine in detail in Chapter One, taught his daughters the alphabet by contorting his body into the shapes of letters and addressed their spiritual development through stories and earnest conversations on metaphysics.<sup>36</sup> He concentrated his instruction on developing—and disciplining—his daughters’ consciences; fiction, he believed, provided a means of reaching their affections. It could, in fact, lead them to moral perfection. In his landmark study of Bronson Alcott’s child-rearing practices, Charles Strickland argues that for Alcott fiction “enabled the child to measure himself against the ideal.”<sup>37</sup> Many years later and in her own novels, Louisa May Alcott returned to her father’s belief in the pedagogical power of compelling narratives to aid children in their construction of improved selves.

Like other children of her generation, Louisa May Alcott did attend school in short intervals once her family moved to Concord in 1840. Her primary learning, however, always remained with family and friends outside of the conventional classroom. She learned arithmetic alongside her sister, Anna, on the plank benches of the local brick schoolhouse.<sup>38</sup> But unlike other children, she also traipsed through the neighboring woods

---

<sup>35</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *Her Life, Letters, and Journals*, ed. Ednah D. Cheney (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1890), 29.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Strickland, “A Transcendentalist Father: The Child-Rearing Practices of Bronson Alcott,” *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1969): 55-57.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Madeleine B. Stern, *Louisa May Alcott* (1950; reprint, New York: Random House, 1996), 40.

with Henry David Thoreau, who in nature taught botanical identification alongside the mysteries of birdcalls and animal behavior.<sup>39</sup> Sophia Foord, their tutor one summer in Concord, let the girls search for wild strawberries instead of memorize excerpts from McGuffey's *Reader*, and when Louisa May tore the back of her dress while climbing a tree, Foord thought it a perfect opportunity to teach her human anatomy.<sup>40</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson let her follow her own intellectual interests by weaving herself through the volumes of his own library. And so in her early years, as she was taught by her father to master her base desires and train her sights on her soul's development, Louisa May Alcott also enjoyed the freedom to follow her own interests with the guidance of Concord's luminaries. The translation of this education—albeit with significant transformations—into a written narrative for children is the work of Alcott's novel *Little Men*.

While the details Anna Ticknor's early education remain largely obscured, the trajectory of her studies—and her parents' orchestration of them—is discernable in the few extant records of her learning.<sup>41</sup> During her childhood and adolescence in the 1820s and

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 20-21. Thoreau began his professional life after Harvard as an actual district schoolteacher in Concord, but he resigned within weeks of his appointment after a disagreement about the use of corporeal punishment in the classroom. He founded his own school, the Concord Academy, in 1838 and taught therein until 1841.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>41</sup> It is unfortunate that so much of Ticknor's personal life has been effaced, but there are reasons to believe that she planned for this eventuality, and her decisions in this regard suggest something of the precarious place of the public and enterprising woman in the period. As I argue in Chapter Two, Ticknor assiduously selected which of her Society's documents were to be preserved in the Boston Public Library, an institution that her father helped found. She deposited thousands of its records into the library, but none of her personal papers. And so we must look elsewhere for pale traces of her own life. She did, for instance, include sixteen passing references to herself in the more than 1,000 pages of her father's memoirs that she carefully edited in the years following his death. Herein are a few critical details of her experiential education that help explain the Society's eventual curriculum, but they also and perhaps more importantly, illuminate the frustrations

1830s, Anna Ticknor, it appears, received clear instructions on her future domestic role while simultaneously receiving her father's "close personal attention" to her education. He regularly read to her from his personal library and sent her letters with embedded Shakespearean jokes and shared literary allusions.<sup>42</sup> His personal attention also entailed his individualized instruction for her during at least three multi-year tours through Western Europe, ones comprised of language study, visits with leading literary figures of the day—from Maria Edgeworth to Thomas Carlyle—and landscape painting courses in French ateliers.

Even as Ticknor was encouraged to read widely and study diligently, her domestic future was never in doubt. When her younger brother died in 1834, she received a mournful letter from her father (she had been sent to the country so as not to contract his illness), reminding her that: "In a few years you will be able to help us in such sicknesses, and that will be a great comfort to you."<sup>43</sup> George Ticknor's letter, though heavy with the sorrow of the family's loss, is nevertheless quite clear about where his daughter's future lay. It would be in the home, and she would come to feel rightly about her responsibilities therein. While the tender instructions that Anna Ticknor received at age eleven may, at a glance, seem more nurturing than controlling, at fifteen, her future appeared set in stone. Writing to decline a second invitation to Maria Edgeworth's home, George Ticknor explains why his family cannot make the trip: "My eldest daughter [Anna], who is now

---

women in the period had to face after attaining excellent educations but then finding one's family and society stubbornly resistant to professional ambition. See: *Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876), Vol. 1 and Vol. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, Vol. 1, 384; Vol. 2, 227.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 397-398.

fifteen, needs to be at *home*, where she is destined to live, and cannot have what the French call *une existence complète* any longer in the land of strangers.”<sup>44</sup> In 1838, when George Ticknor penned this letter, his maturing daughter was, to an overwhelming degree, “destined” to pass her life in the home. But whether his italicized—and thus emphasized—“home” referenced his own house on Park Street in Boston, the United States (their *homeland*) in general, or a home of Anna’s own, is unclear. In any of these interpretations, her father declares, without a trace of hesitation, that she will not have a complete existence outside of the domestic sphere. In this requirement for Anna, in fact, he effectively inverts the conventional Grand Tour mentality that measured a complete existence by its proper exposure to cultural legacy of Europe.

Anna Ticknor never married, but she did return to Europe with her family in the years following her father’s letter to Edgeworth, and she continued to accumulate the cultural capital expected of a woman of her station. She never did move out of her father’s home, and for the rest of her parents’ lives, she remained their faithful companion, even as her younger sister married and left the family to begin her own household. Anna Ticknor remained, in fact, under her father’s roof and under his guidance until he died in 1871, when she was forty-eight years old. She then dutifully turned her attention to recording his cosmopolitan life in two edited volumes. Only once she completed this project at age fifty, did Anna Ticknor finally feel free to implement her plan for an educational revolution from within the home.

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 174. Italics original.

In 1873, she opened the nation's first correspondence school from her family's Park Street parlor and thereafter transformed the meaning and purpose of her own life at home along with the lives of thousands of women scattered across the world. In packing her sizable education into a mobile form (she, in fact, provided an epistolary "Grand Tour"), she offered dozens of courses and made costly texts widely available to all Society students through her lending library. Even as she replicated college curriculums (of both men's and early women's colleges), she overturned their institutional hierarchies and extended to women—as Catherine Beecher and others had done previously—agency and advanced study from within their own homes. In her Society to Encourage Studies at Home, teachers became students and students became teachers; learning happened between and amongst teachers and students. This pedagogical experiment and Ticknor's subsequent achievement is the subject of Chapter Two of this study.

Jane Addams, with whose work this study ends, openly expressed great ambivalence about her own formal schooling. Unlike Alcott and Ticknor, who were too old (and Alcott would have been too poor) to attend the new women's colleges of the last quarter of the century, Addams was amongst the first generation of American women to attend these and other institutions of higher learning in large number. Her protracted attempts to reconcile her formal education at Rockford College with the needs of America's immigrants powered the educative projects at her Hull-House settlement in the middle of industrial Chicago. For Addams, her Rockford education was either too provincial or too self-inflating to serve as a useful model for her social work. Nevertheless, both her Labor Museum and her autobiography were animated by her own educational influences, those

developed at Rockford and in her young learning with her father in Cedarville, Illinois. In Chapter Three, I explore Addams's decades-long struggle to integrate formal, book-based instruction with her progressive pedagogical practice at Hull-House. Addams took a holistic approach to teaching at her settlement and through her many writings. Instead of condoning off the family and its struggles from the student's learning process—as local Chicago schools had done—Addams's addressed personal development through a familial, nurturing mode of instruction. This integration of formal study, experiential learning, and emotional engagement is Addams's central contribution to American education.

Gender, as we have seen, was both an impediment to and an enabler of Alcott, Ticknor, and Addams's teaching. Varying degrees of economic privilege differentiated these three in terms of their own educational opportunities, but all had to face a world resistant to women's full participation in the public life of the nation. This is not to suggest reductively that all nineteenth-century women shared a singular experience of sexism. But each of the women under examination here did have to contend with a unique version of what Addams's termed "the family claim," that deeply entrenched American notion that educated women ought to remain in the home in order to raise up a new generation of responsible, patriotic citizens. Though neither Alcott, Ticknor, nor Addams had children, each found herself no less responsible for her family's emotional and financial needs. At various periods in their lives, they each chafed at familial duties that smothered their ability to fulfill their own ambitions. But Ticknor and Alcott fulfilled them nonetheless. Ticknor remained a devoted companion to her parents, postponing the opening of her correspondence school for women until after her father's death. Louisa May Alcott, with a



penurious childhood never far from view, grew tired of “providing moral pap for the young,” but continued writing it because it best supported her extended family.<sup>45</sup> Jane Addams, the youngest of the three, resisted the family claim. After her father died, Addams founded Hull-House rather than become, as was expected, the caretaker of her widowed stepmother. Addams had freed herself from the family claim, but like Alcott and Ticknor, she remained a ward of the American public, which, as always, looked skeptically upon women whose work ranged beyond the narrow circle of domesticity.

But gender was both a cruel jailor and a strange liberator. The same familial obligations that bound Anna Ticknor informed her deep sympathy with the similarly obligated women who became her students. It was Ticknor’s genius to develop a mode of learning that quenched these women’s intellectual thirst without, in theory, disturbing the domestic arrangements that had thwarted their ambitions for educational advancement. Consider, too, how Alcott navigated these waters. One of the reasons Alcott’s heroine, Jo March, remains so compelling is because of the gendered expectations that she so memorably defied. Her initial refusal to conform to the ideal of Victorian womanhood provided a model for girls’ resistance and rebellion. Readers often choose to remember the tomboy Jo who had “larks” with Laurie and who longed to be a man, instead of the relatively compliant wife of Fritz Bhaer. But it is the integrated Jo of *Little Men* and *Jo’s Boys* who renovates domestic hierarchies, heeds her vocational desires to be a teacher, and returns to her own profitable writing career. Jo finds a way, in other words,

---

<sup>45</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, and Madeleine B. Stern (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 204.

to fulfill her desire for domestic satisfaction while not abandoning her professional ambitions. Jane Addams enacts this fictional balancing act in practice at Hull-House. Moreover, in her autobiography (a narrative space particularly well-suited for the negotiation of private desire and public participation), Addams forges a complex answer to essentialist constructions of gender.

### III. An Alternative to What?

As Alcott, Ticknor, and Addams worked outside the formal, institutionalized classrooms of the late-nineteenth century, they also worked within and against a much larger schooling regime whose roots lay in antebellum America's Common School movement. Spearheaded in the 1830s by northeastern reformers such as Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, the Common School movement was both a product and a source of the socio-economic changes transforming the agrarian republic into a modern, industrialized state. In the face of burgeoning immigration, rapid industrialization, and the pell-mell of urbanization, Common School reformers preached a gospel of uniformity, productivity, and morality and thus found themselves aligned with the state, which had long sought to ensure the production of disciplined individuals and responsible citizens.<sup>46</sup> State intervention in education had failed in the early national period, but the institution

---

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence Cremin, *American Education, The National Experience, 1783-1876*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 148; Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1985: Varieties of Historical Interpretation of the Foundations and Development of American Education* (New York: Longman, 1986), 47. The eighteenth and early nineteenth-century development in American education was remarkably regional in nature. Because each of the three educational programs I examine in this study originate from northern pedagogues, this brief history of institutional development indexes the northern, and specifically New England, transformations.

building of the antebellum period suggested the possibility of large-scale public organizations serving as interconnected systems of moral reform and mental discipline. Though Common Schools were supported by area property taxes and retained the local character of earlier district schools, their governance was increasingly centralized by the state, especially in urban areas. Meanwhile, the Common School system itself worked to replace the hodgepodge schooling of the past with newly codified curricula and teaching methods.<sup>47</sup>

Even as Common School reformers universalized education, they did not significantly increase school attendance, nor did their work swiftly or dramatically reform pedagogical practices. Their efforts and the later extensions thereof, in fact, continued throughout the century. Many students, especially in rural areas, often remained in large, ungraded schools, and spent their class hours memorizing and reciting common lessons.<sup>48</sup> This is not to suggest that the latter activities were always mind-numbingly worthless. Recitations forged a kind of classroom solidarity, and they certainly enabled the continual oral circulation of common texts—and poetry especially—in the American imagination.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Carl F. Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 190; Kaestle, *Pillar of the Republic*, 66-70; Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), ix; David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 5-6; Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 218. Katz troubled his earlier temporal correlation between institutional development and social change in “The Origins of Public Education: A Reassessment,” in B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese, *The Social History of American Education* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 100-103.

<sup>48</sup> Jennings L. Wagoner and Wayne Urban, *American Education: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 113.

<sup>49</sup> See Angela Sorby, *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865-1917* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005). Various editions of the McGuffey’s

But memorization and recitation pedagogy placed little value on individual experience or creativity, attributes that reformers, who believed in the fundamental worth of the child and his experience, tried to integrate into the school space.<sup>50</sup> In large part, these early voices for child-centered reform in the 1830s and 1840s were overwhelmed by both the stubborn resistance of established teachers and the development of normal schools, teacher training conventions, longer terms, and standardized textbooks that came to lend order to a country that grew ever more diverse as the Civil War approached. And though the Common Schools were a part of Andrew Jackson's commitment to the common man, they were never open to all. They did bring different economic classes within educational proximity, but nevertheless, they excluded African Americans and Irish Catholics.<sup>51</sup>

Women, however, played an increasingly prominent role in these schools even as they remained in subordinate positions.<sup>52</sup> In 1800 the vast majority of the nation's instructors were men. By 1900, seventy percent were women. Horace Mann had concluded

---

*Reader*, which were among the most common schoolbooks of the century, included popular prose selections that retained their place in the American imagination as well. Ruth Miller Elson's *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* remains a valuable study of the cultural work of these early textbooks (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1964).

<sup>50</sup> William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 81-91 passim.

<sup>51</sup> Charity schools for the nation's poorest students existed from the late eighteenth century onward, but primarily located in urban areas, their overall impact was far less significant than that of common schools. Spring, 55.

<sup>52</sup> Deborah Fitts, "Una and the Lion: The Feminization of District School-Teaching and Its Effects on the Roles of Students and Teachers in Middle-Class Massachusetts," in Barbara Finkelstein, ed. *Regulated Children/Liberated Children: Education in Psychohistorical Perspective* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1979), 140-157; Redding S. Suggs, Jr., *Motherteacher: The Feminization of American Education* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978). While female teachers increasingly staffed elementary schools, women rarely attained administrative or higher education appointments.

by the 1830s that women's maternal instincts made them particularly well-suited for grammar-school teaching, as the classroom was but a segue to their future training of their own children in moral virtue and disciplined attention. But beyond their trustworthy roles *in loco parentis*, women came with a cheap price tag, and Horace Mann, like other reformers, was not one to pass up a bargain. Women's entrance into respectable, paid employment, however, offered little in the way of real authority. Women displaced men as grammar school teachers over the course of the century, but the latter retained all the administrative privileges, dictated the terms under which women conducted their classrooms, and barred women from teaching positions in high schools, advanced institutions for which they were deemed inadequate. Even under these inequitable conditions, teaching did provide women with an expanding, if temporary, professional outlet that Catharine Beecher celebrated as a "way in which thousands of intelligent and respectable women, who toil for a pittance scarcely sufficient to sustain life, are to be relieved and elevated."<sup>53</sup>

This story—about the sweeping social forces that shaped the development of nineteenth-century American education and the means by which that education, in turn, transformed American culture and civic life—has been told before and told well. Far fewer are the micro-studies of pedagogical practice. Mary Kelley's *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America* is a unique attempt at this kind of close investigative reporting that mines extant curriculums and student writing in an effort to assemble a thoroughgoing portrait of antebellum female academies. Kelley's fascinating

---

<sup>53</sup> Catharine Esther Beecher, *The Duty of American Women to Their Country* (New York: Harper and Brother, 1845), 64.

sources of women's education lay bare the contradictions between students' unassuming educational practices—recitations, oral examinations, compositions—and their creation of subjectivities that challenged the period's gendered norms and eventuated in their participation in civil society. But even as Kelley insightfully pieces together student experience and corresponding personal development by way of these materials, she, like other educational historians of the period, arrives at a common descriptor of classroom practices: "rote memorization and recitation prevailed."<sup>54</sup> In other words, even with the surviving products of female learning and the academies' public documents, Kelley cannot entirely access pedagogy that defied standard recitation and memorization. Kelley's methods are not at fault. Rather, the paucity of records of actual daily teaching practices from the antebellum period make such work difficult, if not impossible.

By looking outside of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries' conventional classrooms, I am able to reveal pedagogical practices that exceeded recitation and memorization. This dissertation relies on a range of sources—both documentary and imaginative—that lay bare unusual instructional methods. These, in turn, allow me to analyze educational development from the inside out. In other words, instead of concentrating exclusively on the results of learning (e.g. where students end up or what kind of social or cultural power they attain), I focus on the means through which learning happened. For instance, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's under-examined transcription of daily practices at Bronson Alcott's Temple School is an extraordinary source of pedagogical history. She published her detailed observations as *Record of a School* in 1836, and this text

---

<sup>54</sup> Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 92.

grounds my analysis of Bronson, and later, Louisa May Alcott in Chapter One. The text exposes the often-fraught relationship between an educator's intent and his practice, between his theory and his students' reception. Moreover, the extant compositions and personal letters of the correspondents and students in Anna Ticknor's Society to Encourage Studies at Home have an equally dynamic quality, as they showcase the particular—and rather peculiar—methods members used to acquire an advanced education at a time when relatively few women attended either high school or college. In the pedagogy embedded in her Hull-House Labor Museum and in pages of her autobiography, Jane Addams formulated modes of learning that would eventually reach classrooms across the country. Because John Dewey dominates discussions of Progressive Era learning, many of Addams's pedagogical innovations have either been overlooked or misrepresented as products of Deweyian insight. By returning to Addams's original formulations, we can not only recover her pedagogy's affective work—a subject Dewey rarely engaged—but begin to retell the history of education in the Progressive Era.

"Outside the Classroom Walls," then, delves deeply into a variety of sources to analyze intersubjective pedagogical practices between extra-institutional educators and their students. Personal letters to Louisa May Alcott and Jane Addams reveal the ways in which readers—their extra-diagetic students—used their texts dynamically: for personal edification, communal classroom learning, and occasionally, for subversive self-formation. Even with these sources, it is, of course, impossible to recover in totality the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reader's experience of these texts or of what in the literary field Hans

Robert Jauss has termed the reader's "horizon of expectations."<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, their letters evince historical methods of using these cultural productions in both affective and remarkably pragmatic ways, from attenuating one's domestic isolation in rural Georgia to training a schoolteacher in pedagogical patience in the expanding mountain West. Together these sources chart an alternative genealogy of nineteenth-century American pedagogical development distinct from its institutional context.

In arguing that the texts and cultural productions of Alcott, Ticknor, and Addams constitute alternative pedagogical tools for readers, students, and visitors, this study joins a larger critical conversation located at the crossroads of literature and education. Scholars such as Sarah Robbins, Mary Loeffelholz, and Patricia Crain have demonstrated the way in which young readers internalize literacy lessons as they are simultaneously shaped and represented by didactic—and often religious—material. Focused primarily on the antebellum period and sentimental literature, these studies foreground representations of learning and the theoretical experience of imagined readers. Collectively, they have recovered an important variety of antebellum didacticism that gradually came to function as an alternative route to women's participation in political arenas from which they were formally excluded. These scholars join Mary Kelley in contending that women's investment in their own intellectual culture provided them with the tools for meaningful participation in the public sphere.

---

<sup>55</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 3-45 passim. Jauss's "horizon of expectation" broadly defines a system of intersubjective expectations that readers bring to a text. This, in turn, suggests a multiplicity of possible interpretations but also circumscription of those interpretations by any particular cultural and historical moment.



This dissertation relies on this recent scholarship and eagerly enters into its ongoing discussion, but it also extends the conversation's tone and direction. The aforementioned studies concentrate primarily on the antebellum results of learning (e.g., social and political participation) whereas this study's approach is to focus on the actual processes of educational acquisition through innovative, literary forms of instruction in the postbellum years.<sup>56</sup> This relatively under-examined period, wedged between the work of Horace Mann and John Dewey, has been seen as a kind of dull intermission in the sweeping reforms of the earlier and later periods.<sup>57</sup>

But efforts toward educational change between 1870 and 1900 were not insignificant. Broadly categorized as "new education," the most significant practice to come out of this period was the child-centered classroom and its attendant critique of the domineering role of books in the lives of American students. Ironically, even as reformers began to question the value of book learning, they took their fundamental orientation from decidedly literary sources. European romantics, such as Wordsworth, Blake, and Rousseau helped found the cult of the child, with its attendant belief that childhood itself was an uncorrupted state. It was not long after that European educational theorists Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) converted poetic renderings of youthful innocence into pedagogical practice by developing methods that founded all learning in children's firsthand experiences in the world. As William Reese has pointed

---

<sup>56</sup> In this sense, my study builds most directly on Angela Sorby's *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865-1917*, the single sustained consideration of the use of postbellum pedagogical literature in classroom.

<sup>57</sup> Reese, *America's Public Schools*, 46.

out, Pestalozzi gloated that he did not read a book for more than thirty years and Wordsworth commanded his readers: “Books! Tis a dull and endless strife / Come, hear the woodland linnet...Come forth into the light of things/ Let nature be your teacher.”<sup>58</sup> In America, Emerson excoriated the “bookworm” and Thoreau cast a weary eye on schools and their disciplinary regimes. In postbellum America, Froebel’s followers opened the country’s first public school kindergartens, and Pestalozzi’s acolytes preached a gospel of instruction through tangible objects and sensory experiences that would replace public schools’ common fare of textbooks, memorization, recitation, and corporeal punishment. Though reformers fought for curricular change (centered on the devaluation of book-based learning and the revaluation of student experience) and made some inroads in certain school districts for more than twenty years, the gradual development and then wide-scale implementation of written examinations in the late 1870s and 1880 proved the death knell of the “new education.” Schools began to mold themselves around quantifiable standards for report cards, class rank, and promotions. By the end of the century, cramming and memorization of written material once again dominated the schoolroom, just as oral recitations had during the antebellum period.

The innovations of Alcott, Ticknor, and Addams all occurred within this larger conversation about the value of books and their role in education. As school reformers struggled to reconcile the value of physical activity and experience with a disciplined accumulation of knowledge, each of the women in this study offered a compromise of sorts. They all did so in and through deliberate textual constructions that revealed the

---

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Reese, 95.

limitations of books even as they relied on the word as the foundation of their pedagogical practice. In her *Little Men*, Alcott uses the novel to teach her readers how to use books properly and to balance their reading with essential experience in the world. She centers her imaginative classroom on the child, but exposes the limitations of this practice. Anna Ticknor, who at first glance appears to be a devotee of the “old education,” combined book-based learning with a generic form, the personal letter that, in fact, compelled a new kind of personal engagement with texts. The result of this merger was her Society’s precarious, but successful, balancing act between traditional memorization and student-centered pedagogy. Any stultifying effects of the written examinations that she used to assess her students’ progress was more than made up for in their familiar letters that merged personal experience with academic study. Finally, Jane Addams struggled continually with the role and value of books in her unusual teaching at Hull-House and in her autobiography. Ultimately, though, Addams splits her judgment, committing to the “new education” for students poorly served in Chicago’s classrooms, but reserving a pedagogic role for the written word in women’s self-development through autobiographical construction and consumption.

Careful analysis of the mechanisms of learning both in literature and in experimental educational communities, then, shows how imaginative pedagogic interventions taught American students and how, in turn, these students disseminated their learning broadly. They were methods that stood in stark contrast to the self-expressionless recitations that echoed through classroom walls from the founding of this nation well into the twentieth century. The suppression of individual voices under these

conventional practices—be they women’s, children’s, or immigrants’—was the insidious work of the nineteenth-century American classrooms and it was the target of Louisa May Alcott, Anna Ticknor, and Jane Addams’s pedagogical reforms. With equal measures of unabating faith and social acumen, all of these women recognized the tremendous possibilities of education, both for the single student and for the developing democracy. They also knew that in order to liberate students, education had to give voice and authority to individuals denied power. More important still was education’s ability to train individuals to work collectively—within networks and neighborhoods, on the pages of popular novels and on the stationery of personal letters—toward social reform. Recovering these innovative methods and tracing the origins of progressive pedagogy outside the classrooms is the work of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Centering on the Student: Progressive Pedagogy in the Age of the Alcotts

“Stick to your teaching, Miss Alcott. You can’t write.”

– James Fields to Louisa May Alcott, 1854

“If it hadn’t been for Louisa May Alcott’s books there might be no progressive education.”

– Barbara Auchincloss, *The New York Times*, 1941

On June 20, 1870, a thirteen year-old Baltimore girl named Minnie penned the first words in her new diary. But instead of using the blank pages as an unrestricted place to record her private feelings and experiences growing up in an Orthodox Quaker household, she ventriloquized another’s voice as the means by which to both guide and comprehend her particular life. The diary begins:

Journal kept by Jo March  
Commenced June 20<sup>th</sup> 1870  
*Ain’t going to be sentimental*  
*“No no not for Jo” (not Joe)*  
*Not for Jo March if she knows it*  
*No No No.*<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1999), 18.

Jo March, Louisa May Alcott's best-known and most beloved heroine, gave Minnie a nervy and defiant voice through which she could articulate her bold intentions without feminine modesty or anxiety about gracefully and exactly fulfilling her duties to family, god, and nation in the pages of her intimate writings. Her diary, begun in the voice of another, gradually helped transform Minnie into the equally bold, defiant—and often quixotic—educator, M. Carey Thomas, one of the founders of Bryn Mawr College and its president for nearly thirty years (1894-1922). The feisty Jo March, it seems, enabled Thomas to escape—if only at first imaginatively—the expectations of her conservative father, her school, and her culture. Jo March also provided her with an unconventional, if fictional, path through which to channel her early educational ambitions.<sup>2</sup>

M. Carey Thomas, who read both *Little Women* and its sequel *Little Men* as soon as they were published, is just one of many pioneering female educators who discovered in Jo March something they could find neither in their childhood classrooms nor in their families' parlors. In July 2006, I attended the Orchard House Summer Conversation Series and Teacher Institute. One afternoon in the now sun-bleached barn Bronson Alcott built for his Concord School of Philosophy, I pulled up a chair next to two elderly women, one whose long teaching career began in her native Berlin and the other a retired educator from Boston. I listened as they reminisced about reading Alcott's novels in the 1940s.

---

<sup>2</sup> Thomas did not only write as Jo March, she also "became" Jo in her friendship with her cousin Frank Smith, who in turn played the role of Laurie. They addressed each other by these names, wrote letters using them, and gave other family members supporting roles from the novels. Barbara Sichermann argues for the radical nature of these everyday performances; after all "as Quakers they should not have been reading fiction at all." See Sicherman, "Reading *Little Women*: The Many Lives of a Text," in Linda K. Kerber and Kathryn Kish Sklar, ed. *U.S. History As Women's History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 256.

Boston: "If you grew up not feeling good about all that gender stuff at school, then Jo—who is, of course, Louisa—was for you."

Berlin: "Women couldn't just go acting like Jo at my school or in my father's house."

Boston: "Is that how *Little Women* saved your life?"

Berlin: "She [Jo] was the primal source of my passion."

Taken together, M. Carey Thomas's diary from the 1870s and this very recent conversation from 2006 demonstrate the enduring power of Louisa May Alcott's novels for young women who felt confined by culture's corset, and who found in Jo March an imaginative outlet, a trusted guide, and a model teacher. Even young women who were restricted from "acting like Jo" in their "father's houses" or their in their schools, came to rely on the liberating power of Alcott's heroine and ultimately shaped themselves in her very image. Jane Addams "read and reread" Alcott's novels during her childhood in the 1870s.<sup>3</sup>

Nestled in rough-hewn pine boxes, these same novels bumped across Appalachian mountain roads as part of a traveling library begun at a small college in rural Kentucky. In these cases and others like them, Alcott's novels served as an alternative curriculum founded on the principle that fiction could serve as a blueprint for the reader's own future.

*Little Women* remains Alcott's most enduring work, but it is its 1871 sequel, *Little Men* that most clearly illustrates the means by which Alcott used the nineteenth-century

---

<sup>3</sup> Jane Addams to Vallie E. Beck, Cedarville, 16 March 1876. Addams analyzed Alcott's strategies in at least several letters to her cousin Beck. After finding little inspiration in Alcott's *Rose In Bloom*, Addams writes, "I think Miss A. must have an ideal hero in her mind that runs through all her works more or less, for Charlie is something like 'Laurie' in *Little Women* and Tom in *Old Fashioned Girl* don't you think so." Jane Addams to Vallie Beck, Cedarville, 3 May 1877. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan et al., *The Selected Papers of Jane Addams: Vol. 1: Preparing to Lead, 1860-81* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 137, 147. Addams's study of Louisa May Alcott extended beyond her childhood. As a student at Rockford Seminary in 1878-1879, she took an "American Literature" course in which Alcott was featured on the syllabus.

novel to reform the American classroom. *Little Men* is a book about learning to learn. It is a novel that teaches readers how to teach. And it is ultimately a text that reveals the stakes of these twin processes, not by hectoring its readers but by enacting the experiential, student-centered instruction its pages depict.<sup>4</sup> The novel charges young readers to use their unique experiences to comprehend the world and its complexities. By illustrating how, with careful guidance, these experiences translate into recognized forms of schoolhouse knowledge, Alcott show her readers how to take charge of their learning and to attend to their further development. Though often overlooked in the history of education, Alcott's pedagogical vision inaugurated an era of progressive educational reform, and her heroine Jo March enabled future generations of female educators to formulate their own innovative educational offerings.

Inasmuch as the novel offered a template for a more democratic form of learning, it also diagnosed a problem that began with the earliest iterations of American educational reform and continues to plague teachers today: namely, how to free children from the strictures of education based on indoctrination while simultaneously shaping them as students. Alcott's novel not only acknowledges this problem, but it offers a remedy in its particular—and often peculiar—form of student-centered pedagogy. Using a hybrid form of instruction, Alcott openly acknowledges the teacher's authority, but instead of seeing it as a threat to students' ownership of their learning, she conceptualizes it as a tool enabling instructors to create the conditions for educative experience that lead to students' personal growth.

---

<sup>4</sup> Such pedagogical practices came to be the hallmark of progressive education by the end of the nineteenth century.



Louisa May's father, Bronson Alcott, had attempted similar experiments in his own antebellum classroom. Alcott, a transcendentalist, believed that by training his students to turn their attentions toward their own souls, they would learn to rely on their own "minds and hearts" to think and feel rightly.<sup>5</sup> "The child is the book," Alcott insisted. In an era when it was assumed that the instructor was to be the sole creator and distributor of classroom knowledge, Bronson Alcott's classroom seemed very strange indeed.<sup>6</sup> Soon, though, Alcott's radical Temple School experiments lapsed into convention. Try as he might to elicit the child's natural intelligence, Bronson fell back upon the old habits of indoctrination when it seemed that the child's natural intelligence was taking an unnaturally long time to make itself known. Zealous and at times impatient, Alcott ended up indoctrinating a resistance to doctrine. A number of reasons lay behind Bronson Alcott's classroom failure. He worked in a cultural context that remained suspicious of children's natural goodness and was, therefore, wary of granting children even a smidgen of autonomy. He also depended upon European models of decentered instruction that were, in many cases, unsuitable—and certainly unfamiliar—in the American schoolhouse. In

---

<sup>5</sup> In order to both avoid confusion and reduce extraneous reminders, each Alcott will be referred to by their surname in sections that clearly correspond to one or the other. When both Bronson and Louisa May appear in a paragraph or a short section, I use employ their first names. Amos Bronson Alcott, quoted in Odell Shepard, *Pedlar's Progress: The Life of Bronson Alcott* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1937), 126.

<sup>6</sup> Amos Bronson Alcott, *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*, ed. Odell Shepard (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1938), 12. For Bronson Alcott, in cultivating student dialogue, the teacher was able to "read" the child so that, in turn, the child could "read" the truths of himself. Convinced that neither rote memorization nor lecture led to the meaningful education of the child, by the mid-1820's Alcott enacted a pedagogy that displaced the authority of the written text to the soul of the child.

spite of these historical particulars, Alcott's dilemma is a familiar one. It is the dilemma of the progressive pedagogue committed to shaping and liberating the child at the same time.

In the imaginative schoolhouse of *Little Men*, Louisa May would confront and resolve this dilemma—something her father was unable to do in his Temple School classroom. By putting Bronson and Louisa May Alcott's teaching methodologies into dialogue, we can learn much about the deep roots of the movement to liberate the child and democratize American education, a movement whose origins are too often located in John Dewey's later, turn-of-the-century meditations upon the ties between "genuine" student experience and productive reflection.<sup>7</sup> But beyond offering a historical corrective to the story of the decentered classroom, I explore how this particular dialogue between father and daughter reveals their complex and generative interplay. Though Bronson's classroom instruction may at first glance appear a qualitatively different experience than Louisa's representations of learning in *Little Men*, I argue that in its formal qualities, the novel enacts the education that it represents. As the reader of *Little Men* assumes the role of student, Louisa reveals the ways in which the novel itself functions as a privileged site of instructional innovation unconstrained by the pragmatic and symbolic limitations of the schoolhouse that had thwarted her father's efforts. Louisa's novel-based innovations, in turn, become the templates for actual educational reform at the close of the nineteenth century, an influence her father craved but could never attain. The documented circulation of her *Little Women* series in schoolhouses and amongst both students and teachers

---

<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916; reprint, Toronto: Collier-Macmillan Canada, 1966), 139-163.

demonstrates the tremendous pedagogical reach of the Louisa's vision and helps explain this chapter's forceful second epigraph.

Critics have long attuned themselves to educational thematics in Louisa May Alcott's *oeuvre*. In the mid-twentieth century, both William Sears and Abigail Hamblen praised Louisa's depictions of educational innovations while simultaneously awarding Bronson credit for his daughter's ideas.<sup>8</sup> Michael Moon later argued that as the child of a progressive educator who often trained his pedagogical attention on his own children, Louisa May Alcott could not help but inflect her writing with his ideas.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary feminist critics, like Susan Laird and Beverly Clark, have alternatively attempted to disentangle father and daughter in Louisa's novels, affording more invention to Louisa herself.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, Gregory Eiselein perceptively argued for Louisa's "anticipation" of

---

<sup>8</sup> William P. Sears, Jr., "Educational Theories of Louisa May Alcott," *Dalhousie Review* 27 (1947): 327-334; Abigail Ann Hamblen, "Louisa May Alcott and the 'Revolution' in Education," *Journal of General Education* 22 (1970): 81-92. Sears grants Louisa a kind of educational prominence while ensuring that readers credit her father for her pedagogy: "Louisa's educational ideas are surprisingly progressive for a woman of her time. In reality they are the ideas of Bronson Alcott, the educator." Abigail Hamblen accords Louisa more innovation, but nonetheless argues that Louisa "dramatizes" her father's teaching, and "nowhere does the force of Bronson Alcott's mind show more directly than in the description of Plumfield" (86).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Moon, "Nineteenth-Century Discourses on Childhood Gender Training: The Case of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*," in *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 209-215. Moon contends that "As a major object of her father's lifelong project from her infancy, Louisa May produced a body of writing that is a particularly rich site for research into the dissemination of what were seen, at the time, as novel and enlightened modes of child discipline." Moon relies on Charles Strickland's seminal article "A Transcendental Father: The Child-Rearing Practices of Bronson Alcott," *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1969): 5-77.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Laird, "Learning for Marmee's Teaching: Alcott's Response to Girls' Miseducation," in *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*, ed. Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark (New York: Garland Publishers, 1999): 285-321; Beverly Lyon Clark, "Domesticating the School Story, Regendering a Genre: Alcott's *Little Men*," *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 323-353. In her feminist attempt to recover Abba May's influence on Louisa, Laird evacuates Bronson's influence while concentrating on Abba May's. Though committed to an

William James' "pragmatist pedagogy" in *Little Men*.<sup>11</sup> This critical conversation has evolved significantly over the last sixty years; nevertheless, each of its participants has remained focused on Louisa's representations of learning in the *Little Women* series. Insofar as critics have concentrated almost exclusively on such scenes, they have paid far less attention to the way in which her novels enact the instructional processes that they illustrate, whereby the novel becomes a textbook and reading itself becomes an education. Richard Brodhead's Foucauldian conception of Louisa's "disciplinary intimacy," however, does offer an account of the way in which Marmee instills an idealized "domestic ethos" in her children.<sup>12</sup> In turn, *Little Women's* "intimacy," like Marmee's, has the power to "transpose its orderings into the reader's felt understanding through an invisible persuasion."<sup>13</sup> The problem with this ideologically-driven formulation is that it misses the way that Louisa, in *Little Men*, enables both her characters and her readers to mobilize their own authority (not Jo's or Marmee's) to read and interpret texts according to their unique needs and

---

equally autonomous and feminist reading of Louisa's educational philosophy, Beverly Clark acknowledges that, "Little Men in many ways honors Bronson Alcott's philosophy of education." Clark, however, historicizes *Little Men* in the field of British and American boy's school stories in order to show the ways in which Alcott adapts this genre to an enlightened co-educational pedagogy. Both Laird and Clark concentrate on Alcott's progressive "regendering" of the traditional education in *Little Men*. The antithesis of earlier scholarship that overemphasized Bronson Alcott, these interpretations have tended to downplay his significance to his daughter's educational representations. They have enacted a kind of gender switch in the educational interpretations of Alcott, moving the discussion from patriarchal domination to feminist autonomy. Both the criticism that overemphasizes Bronson Alcott's paternal influence as well as that which evacuates it from Louisa's novels miss the real collaborative nature of the Alcotts' pedagogy.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Eiselein, "Contradiction in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Men*," *The New England Quarterly* 78 (2005): 3-25.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 72.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

experiences. By concentrating on the novel's pedagogy as it is both represented and enacted, I argue that Louisa puts her faith in the student and the reader, thereby establishing a viable, decentered model of instruction.

First, though, a caveat: We must remember that “decentering” is a function, but not the theory itself, of a larger epistemology. Though the term itself is most easily defined by what it is not—the lecture—it represents a range of classroom practices that recognize the student as producer, and not the mere consumer, of knowledge. Decentering, then, shifts epistemological authority from the exclusive purview of the instructor to the pupils themselves. It is not and never was, for either Alcott, an end itself. Rather each concluded that decentering would cultivate their students’ self-understanding, which in turn would hone both their self-reliance and their sense of civic virtue. Judy Segal has perceptively argued that the practice unites Piaget’s developmental milestone—“children decenter...as they become socialized”—with the “pedagogic move” itself. Piaget argues that children move progressively through egocentrism to socialization.<sup>14</sup> This developmental progression becomes particularly powerful in the context of The Temple School’s transcendentalist classroom and the fictional Plumfield, places where Bronson and Louisa May Alcott respectively maintained that each student would learn to access her own genius by way of her complete understanding of another. Finally, I use the term to reference the method that Bronson and Louisa May Alcott used to cultivate students’ recognition of their responsibility to self, spirit, and other.

---

<sup>14</sup> Judy Segal, “Pedagogies of Decentering and a Discourse of Failure,” *Rhetoric Review* 15 (1996): 175.

## I. Teaching in the Temple

In antebellum New England classrooms, teachers lectured and students recited. In this model of education, teachers commanded a brigade of students with minds ready to receive knowledge created by others, whether in the form of lectures or textbooks. In this context, Bronson Alcott was a renegade, a teacher who insisted that the child mind's was not, as John Locke contended, *tabula rasa*, but instead brimming with valuable, though inchoate, truths. The result of this conviction was his attempt to enable the student to comprehend himself, his relationship to his own knowledge, and his fellow classmates. The eclectic intermingling of Alcott's pedagogical influences helps explain his conception of the child, his corresponding instruction, and finally his failure to convince others of the efficacy of his methods. Ultimately, these influences convinced Alcott of the timeliness and necessity of a student-centered classroom, and later, they led to Louisa's own educational methods. Finally, they yield an explanation for his shortsightedness in recognizing the inevitability of his overwhelming authority in the pedagogy he created.

Raised in a family of Episcopalian dissenters in Connecticut during the period of Congregational religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening, Alcott evinced what Frederick Dahlstrand called a "mystical faith in a sovereign deity" while simultaneously subscribing to the Enlightenment's "equally powerful faith in human ability."<sup>15</sup> This combination of beliefs combined with a rejection of the doctrine of original sin allowed Alcott to put his trust in God and to believe that every man—and child—enjoyed the possibility of personal reform. Indeed, Alcott's model child is essentially good.

---

<sup>15</sup> Frederick Dahlstrand, *Amos Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Associated University Press, 1982), 23.

As such, “The province of the instructor,” he writes, “should be simple, awakening, invigorating, directing, rather than the forcing of the child’s faculties upon prescribed and exclusive courses of thought.”<sup>16</sup> The best teacher was the one who modeled the life of learning for the student such that the pupil himself could define his own intellectual pursuits while taking cues from the educator.

For Bronson Alcott, as for Emerson and other transcendentalists, Jesus Christ was the greatest human model, instructor, and reformer. Alcott came to define not only his epistemological but also his pedagogical goals by Jesus’ instructional methods. Transcendental monism (or the ruling conception of a universal mind) of Alcott’s day meant that while Jesus was the ideal example of human potential; he was in essence no more divine than any other man. His received inspiration, then, was possible for anyone through a communion with God in the world. This is not to suggest that for Bronson, Jesus was ordinary; instead, he was the very model of the possibilities of education. As George Haefner argues in one of the few book-length critical assessments of Alcott, Jesus’ teaching as transcribed in the gospels became the blueprint of Alcott’s pedagogy.<sup>17</sup> In his “The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture,” Alcott writes of Jesus, “From facts and objects the most familiar, he slid easily and simply into the highest and holiest themes, and in this unimposing guise, disclosed the great Doctrines, and stated the Divine Idea, that it

---

<sup>16</sup> Sheppard, *Journals*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> George Haefner, *A Critical Estimate of the Educational Theories and Practices of A. Bronson Alcott* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1937), 58.

was his mission to bequeath to his race.”<sup>18</sup> Instead of concentrating exclusively on the content of the “great Doctrines,” which would presumably translate into lecture-based pedagogy in the antebellum American classroom, Alcott stressed the innovative methodology of showing by example, rather than verbalizing a truism. The “unimposing guise,” moreover, sufficiently concealed Jesus’ unassailable authority so as to make this message readily accessible. Even as it came from on high, the lessons appeared to rise from the material conditions of everyday life, and thus found universal applicability. Alcott, in turn, modeled his own pedagogy on Jesus’ technique of launching his lessons “from facts and objects the most familiar.” He borrowed from the parables a deductive or logical methodology, even as he concentrated his efforts on both spiritual guidance and academic subjects. He read Jesus’ conversations with his disciples and other worshippers as representative of the highest possibilities of exchange, wherein both participants steadily increase their knowledge through questions and answers that begin at the empirical level, with the objects and senses most “familiar” to the pupil, and then elevate into the spiritual realm.

In twentieth-century pedagogical theory, this kind of reciprocity of learning and teaching between student and teacher became codified as the dominant marker of the student-centered classroom. More than a century earlier, however, Bronson Alcott had already established a particularly powerful rendition of transactional pedagogy as functionally egalitarian: “Conversation, [Alcott] said, is an endeavor to find points on

---

<sup>18</sup> Bronson Alcott, “The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture” (1836; reprint in *The Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists*, ed. George Hochfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 135.



which a company can sympathize in feeling and it is proper, therefore, for those who take part in it to seek a common basis.”<sup>19</sup>

While Alcott integrated the model of Jesus as the ideal conversationalist with the classical methodology of Socratic dialogues, he also looked to contemporary American and European educational thinkers for more tangible pedagogical guidance.<sup>20</sup> In his early teaching at the Cheshire Public School in Connecticut in 1826-1827 and in Philadelphia in 1830-1834, Alcott readily acknowledged the importance of William Russell’s *American Journal of Education* to his philosophical and pedagogical development. The journal provided Alcott with discussions of education aimed at the cultivation of the child’s morality through generated expression instead of imposed knowledge. In its pages, Alcott first discovered the Swiss pedagogue Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827). Pestalozzi’s educational

---

<sup>19</sup> E.B.C., “New Publications,” original source unknown. Article pasted onto page 28 of Amos Bronson Alcott, Journal, 15 January 1869, Amos Bronson Alcott Papers, MS Am 1130.12 (30), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>20</sup> Although Bronson’s influences may seem discordant, it is important to remember that as the son of a farmer in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Alcott only briefly attended a local school when his labor was not needed on the family farm. As a child and early adolescent, he cobbled together a personal curriculum with his cousin, William Alcott, based on the availability of books in his town and amongst his acquaintances. The relative brevity of Alcott’s formal education and his indiscriminate selection of texts meant that the autodidact assembled a unique education for himself. During one of his first teaching jobs in 1826, Alcott began to assemble a “Library for the Instructor’s Use,” including those texts which had the greatest influence on his own teaching. Here the eclectic intermingling of William Russell’s *American Journal of Education*, John Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding*, Robert Owen’s *New Views of Society*, William Maclure’s “An Epitome of Pestalozzian Instruction,” and Maria Edgeworth’s *Practical Education* in a list with thirteen other key texts, suggests Alcott’s myriad influences. Alcott was, however, occasionally apt to deny the influence of these contemporary pedagogues on his own thought. As his Temple School was facing immanent closure in 1837, he claimed that, “the course of my life has been somewhat peculiar; my pursuits, in all their relations, scarce find a parallel in past history. None of the German educators, or public teachers...contemplated changes, either in thought or action, by education, or philosophy, similar to those upon which my heart hath set.” Larry A. Carlson, ed., “Bronson Alcott’s ‘Journal for 1837’ (Part One),” *Studies in the American Renaissance* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981): 58.

idealism, with origins in Comenius, Locke, and Rousseau, centered on his commitment to teaching the whole child—the body, mind, and soul—according to and in sequence with her natural development and in accordance with natural law.<sup>21</sup> In practice, this meant that he instructed through “object teaching,” a method that emphasized students’ original experiences in the form of field trips, rural excursions, and lessons based on and developing out of the empirical. For Alcott, however, this method could only ever be a good starting point, as he made little time in his curriculum for students to explore their worlds. Though the two had disparate aims, Alcott did borrow from Pestalozzi (by way of Russell) a pedagogical commitment to eliciting that essence in the child that predates formal schooling. He sought to use these seeds of knowledge to orchestrate a kind of collective illumination of truth. In order to do so, he needed to intimately involve the student in her own learning.

In the 1834 opening of his Temple School, Bronson Alcott united his disparate pedagogic influences in a curriculum that would train students to find their own paths towards self-understanding. Alcott’s transcendentalist efforts to repair the fraught connection between objects and language would, he believed, help align children’s consciences with God’s plan. Moreover, the Temple School gave an institutional form to American transcendentalism and offered a forward-thinking alternative to New England’s established schools.<sup>22</sup> We have access to the Temple School space and to Alcott’s pedagogy

---

<sup>21</sup> For further information on Pestalozzi’s influence on nineteenth-century American teaching, see Lucille M. Schultz, “Pestalozzi’s Mark on Nineteenth-Century Composition Instruction: Ideas Not in Words, but in Things,” *Rhetoric Review* 14 (1995): 23-43.

<sup>22</sup> From the start, Alcott’s curriculum did include requisite subjects taught at the vast majority of schools: arithmetic, geography, and rudimentary natural history. The historical record, however,

by way of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's *Record of a School*, her transcription of the daily lessons inside of the Temple. Her account, in fact, details Alcott's very first lesson.

Alcott opened his inaugural lesson with a seemingly simple question to his students. He asked what "idea she or he had of the object of coming to school."<sup>23</sup> In a moment of American educational flux—just after the country's major cities began to recognize the pedagogical limitations of Lancaster's system of mechanized learning, just before Horace Mann revolutionized mass schooling, and while teachers still prized student uniformity and rote recitation—this initial question would have immediately suggested that the Temple School was a radically different kind of institution with a new, untried methodology. On the most basic level, Alcott's question presupposed at least some student agency in the very decision to attend his school. In answering their teacher's question, students themselves established their classroom as a decentered space, one in which students defined their own purpose apart from their instructor's agenda. Equally important, the question prompted students to consider their personal motivation for

---

provides us little insight into the methodology Alcott used to teach this type of material. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody is explicit in the opening of her *Record of a School* that "the details of the more scholastic exercises are omitted, because they would not be interesting to the reader. But it is hoped that it will be observed that these exercises take up at least two hours every day." We can reasonably assume that Peabody's decision reflects Alcott's own curricular and pedagogical emphasis on those areas he valued most highly: cultivating the "The Spiritual Faculty," "The Imaginative Faculty," and "The Rational Faculty." Though ethereal in name, these "faculties" could be developed, according to Alcott, by enabling students' self-knowledge and self-analysis, processes beginning with observations of the empirical objects and progressing to intangible, transcendental truths. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture* (Boston: Russell, Shattuck, and Company, 1836), 29.

<sup>23</sup> Peabody, 2. Peabody alternatively acted as an amanuensis, a Latin teacher, and a foil to Bronson Alcott. Although the *Record* consists primarily of a daily account of the morning lessons, Peabody also included an explanatory introduction and an appendix, including several students' writings. Though at times Peabody seems to be an exclusively objective recorder of the narrative, she does occasionally intervene with evaluative comments about the schooling she observes.

coming to school. By insisting on students' inherent ability to formulate their own scholastic motivation, Alcott attempted to reapportion the intellectual power in his classroom.

But Alcott's students initially found such freedom bewildering and responded with tentative, trite answers; they could seem to explain only that they came to school "to learn." While this easy reply may have placated other educators, Alcott's immediate and interrogative response—"To learn what?"—exemplifies his entire pedagogical creed, turning, as he did, the question back on the students in hopes of eliciting honest articulations of their innermost feelings. When next the students began to make a laundry list of typical school subjects—science, art, philosophy—Alcott "intimated that this was not all." Though the historical record does not explain exactly how Alcott "intimated," this very intervention at a moment of student reluctance—be it explicitly coercive or not—illustrates the moment at which the progressive educator faces the dilemma of wanting to free the student from the repressive inculcation of education while simultaneously hoping to shape her into a desired kind of thinker.<sup>24</sup> In the case of Alcott's initial question, his desire to invest students in their own schooling by calling on them to define their own motivation is readily apparent; at the same time, however, he immediately destabilizes the authority he has just granted them by taking control when his students' instincts do not match his idiosyncratic goal. Thus even as he guided his students from the empirical (the object to be

---

<sup>24</sup> Paulo Freire would later term this pedagogical model as the "banking concept of education," wherein, "education...becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor...the scope of action allowed to the students expends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits." *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970; reprint, New York: Continuum, 2000), 72.

understood) to the spiritual (the meaning itself)—while allowing them to interact with one another’s ideas and impressions in a transactional dialogue—he took the final word, the terminal declamation that would reveal the ultimate truth, and as such, his lessons exposed a knowledge hierarchy that he claimed to disavow but nevertheless reinforced. In this sense, Alcott did indeed resemble his hero, Jesus. For Jesus and Alcott alike, their didactic stories and seemingly spontaneous conversations always have a punch line, a moment of revelation hidden in a seemingly democratic conversation. This unspoken and underlying position of control highlights a central conflict in Alcott’s pedagogy, between that which he hoped to elicit from the students and that which he dispensed to them.

Though more directive than he realized, Bronson Alcott believed deeply in the existence and value of students’ innate knowledge. This led to his emphasis on teaching students methods that they could use to educate themselves instead of requiring them to memorize content. This belief led to a number of important pedagogical innovations that persist today. He insisted that his students keep daily journals that provided a content-free space for them to “word [their] thoughts.”<sup>25</sup> The relative permanence of the bound pages—compared to the easily erased slate—turned students from takers of dictation to original authors. In arguing that, “the child is the book,” he endowed student thinking and writing with a previously unappreciated pedagogic weight, redirecting their attention from the published text to their own.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, his transcendentalist emphasis on language and correct and complex meanings, he believed, provided students with the form—the words—

---

<sup>25</sup> Peabody, 51.

<sup>26</sup> Sheppard, *Journals*, 12.

for their prelanguage and a priori truths that would otherwise remain incoherent. Alcott prompted students to help define the very rationale for such lessons by asking them to consider “what a person was like, who had words without any ideas attached?” In a student’s comment that presaged Emerson’s “American Scholar” address, “One said a parrot—one a mocking bird—one an ape.” Alcott, in turn, persuaded his pupils that, “Words, then, are the signs of thoughts,” and in talking about their myriad meanings, students “see how thoughts and feelings are expressed by words.”<sup>27</sup> In an era in which instructors taught spelling by pure repetition without definition, Alcott concentrated his vocabulary lessons on complex meanings instead of on the act of spelling. By validating students’ intuitions, practices like this one worked to distribute epistemological authority to all participants at the Temple School.

Student’s authority, however, was short-lived at the Temple School. The inimical tension between Alcott’s desire to liberate his students from dominant methods and to shape their consciences is best illustrated in a representative lesson on “the affections” and the need for individuals to align their consciences to Jesus’ desires for them. Wanting to invest students fully in the dialogue, Alcott begins the lesson by posing participation as a choice: “Shall you be interested to hear what [Jesus] said?” Students, though, were not apparently interested, and Peabody reports that, “When about eight concluded to go, he stopped them and asked them if they thought it right to go? And having called up many reasons why they should not...some concluded they would prefer to stay, he let the rest go,”

---

<sup>27</sup> Peabody, 73. When Emerson railed against the degeneration of the American scholar in his 1837 Phi Beta Kappa address, he denounced him as “a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men’s thinking.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Sixth (1837; reprint, New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 1136.

but then quickly decided to go “out and call them all in.”<sup>28</sup> In his inability to release his students, Alcott exposes the limits of his confidence in student autonomy. He momentarily gestures toward tolerance and in theory wants to grant his pupils the authority to decide their own course of learning, but when they actually assert that authority in opposition to his own, he compels them to abide by his own desires in practice. In one of very few extant student journals, George Kuhn illustrates Alcott’s intolerance of free expression of dissent: “I left out something as I had done wrong for doing an [sic] wrong opinion of Mr Alcott I was punished in a way which I shall not describe.”<sup>29</sup> Students, it seems, were encouraged to offer opinions “freely,” but they were equally compelled to ensure that they matched their teacher’s.

Here Alcott reveals himself to be (as Elizabeth Palmer Peabody labeled him) “autocratic.” Beginning with Richard Brodhead’s configuration of Louisa May Alcott’s “disciplinary intimacy,” (an internalized system of controlling one’s own behavior without the external use of corporal punishment), scholars have taken a keen interest in Bronson Alcott’s own disciplinary regimen. Often remembered for his endless attempts to reason with his naturally recalcitrant daughters in *Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction*, Alcott inclined toward complete control, though critics and biographers have often overlooked this habit. After Alcott brought all of his students back into the classroom, he “arranged the school for analysis,” meaning that the students’ desks were arranged into a circle with Alcott and a single student (who would act as the subject of

---

<sup>28</sup> Peabody, 154.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred G. Litton and Joel Myerson, “The Temple School Journals of George and Martha Kuhn,” *Studies in the American Renaissance* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

analysis for the lesson at hand) at the center. The circular classroom configuration has been conceptualized in the twentieth century as a physical arrangement meant to give rise to a kind of equalizing discussion in which each student's contributions can be seen and heard by all. If, however, we consider Alcott's autocratic control, then the circle itself—under his central guise—becomes a kind of panopticon where he could keep disobedience in check as well as perform his respect for productive contributions.

The use of questions was Bronson Alcott's favored mode of maintaining the guise of cultivating student autonomy. Unlike the traditional didactic pronouncement, the question's request for a response required student participation in the lesson and is therefore essential to the decentered classroom. Alcott, however, undermines the vehicle with binary queries.

Do you think...the pleasure you have had during the last ten minutes is more satisfactory than that before recess? *Five said yes.* Is there any one who took no pleasure in the lesson this morning? *Two.* Does affection think as much of other people as it does of itself? *Yes.* Has it all it loves within itself? *Yes.* Do you think that the love which this one had, (pointing to Christ) was extended to every body? *Yes.* Does anyone think not? *One.* Who were those he did not love? *He did not love the Jews.* He loved the Jews; said Mr. Alcott. *Then he did love every body, said the child.* If any think they have such love, hold up their hands. *No one.*<sup>30</sup>

With a single exception in this representative dialogue, each of Alcott's questions could only be affirmed or denied; there is no room made for explanatory dialogue among the students. Moreover, Alcott checks for student understanding by quantitative means alone (How many agree? Does anyone think not?). Inasmuch as this question sequence appears to invite student reflection, it directly follows Alcott's command that his reluctant students

---

<sup>30</sup> Peabody, 155. Emphasis my own.



return to the room, thus nullifying students' authority to disagree. It seems that even the two students who profess not to have enjoyed the morning's lesson are brought into consensus through Alcott's strident sequence. Beyond limiting his students' responses with "yes" or "no" questions, when Alcott did pose more open-end inquiries, they almost always came in the form of leading questions. As such, students are at once made to feel that their answers are original and perceptive. But the instructor's authority always dictates the course of the conversation. For example, when one student responds that Jesus "did not love the Jews," Alcott takes no time to explore this apparent misunderstanding or guide the student to a revised understanding; instead he forcefully counters: "He loved the Jews."

Alcott's dialogic control in this lesson on "the affections" enables him to convince his students that mercy and social justice are often at odds with one another in American civil life and that mercy must always trump man's justice in the case of capital punishment. He forces students to this conclusion through a series of leading questions:

There are cells in this city, where are those who have robbed, and murdered; such as think they ought to be loved, hold up their hands. *None*. Such as think Jesus would have said, take the life of these criminals; there is no good in them; hold up their hands. *None*. Such as think the reverse. *All*. How many think they should be content to die, had they committed murder? *Several*. How many think that if a pardon came, and he was freed though he deserved to die, he would sin no more, but love men more? *Several*. How many think that the law of love is more beautiful, more powerful, than the law of strict justice? *Some*; and the little girl analysed said she preferred the mercy which saves, to justice which kills.<sup>31</sup>

In the course of this dialogue, Alcott masterfully sets up a kind of dichotomy (one that we can now discern as false) between benevolent mercy and harsh justice, such that students are persuaded—though they believe that they have reasoned it themselves—to reach their

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 157.

teacher's "correct" conclusion. The students rapidly disregard their initial instincts (ones that Alcott would have theoretically claimed contained the ultimate truth) in favor of their instructor's opinion. Likewise, Alcott disregards reflective experience here, claiming instead that students can employ "spontaneous reason" to decide the fate of all.

This readily apparent and aggressive orchestration of student opinion prompted the normally silent transcriber, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, to step from behind the curtain and comment in her text: "I am inclined to think that he unconsciously led them into his own views; by contradistinguishing mercy and justice...the children did not seem to think it wrong that capital punishment should be inflicted, until Mr. Alcott led them to feel that he thought so." Instead of offering her perspective to the conversation (which presumably would have demonstrated to the student the productive possibilities of authentic intellectual exchange), Peabody tellingly remains silent. She claims only that "this is no place...to bring forward the arguments on this subject," even though she believed strongly that "the opposing of mercy and justice is false philosophy, and false religion."<sup>32</sup> This, then, reveals the Temple School as a place that proclaims the necessity and value of free student expression but then denounces any behavior or thinking that does not align with Alcott's own. His transcendentalism, it seems, led him away from religious dogma as a means of education but he failed to recognize that his own ideology could be equally dogmatic.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 157-158.

<sup>33</sup> In his new joint biography of Bronson and Louisa May Alcott, John Matteson argues (though without a documented source) that Bronson's desire to control student dialogues extended beyond the classroom itself. According to Matteson, when Elizabeth Palmer Peabody was preparing the second volume of his teachings, *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, Alcott "subvert[ed] the premise of his own project, Bronson preferred for the children to express *his* formulations, rather than their own. Thus, as Peabody transcribed her notes, Bronson sometimes hovered nearby, ready

In order to highlight Alcott's problematic implementation of decentered pedagogy, I have thus far concentrated on the disparity between Alcott's desire to locate true understanding in the child's soul and his need ensure that his own beliefs ultimately reign supreme. These methodological tensions, however, do not seem to have troubled Alcott's contemporary critics per se. Instead, they objected to the content of the Temple School's lessons. In 1835, when *Record of a School* circulated Alcott's pedagogy, it originally garnered some praise for its support of the child's natural benevolence. Yet when the second volume of his transcribed lessons appeared (he published *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* without Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's support), Alcott's inclusion of discussions about sex, religion, and the combination of sex and religion proved far too incendiary, and in fact, heretical for readers to condone.<sup>34</sup> The second text proved most problematic, as it included his intimation to students that their births were no different than Jesus', and one student's pronouncement that infants arise from "the naughtiness...of other people" to "put together the body of the child" caused readers grave consternation. In short, Alcott committed the transcendentalist sin of questioning the very divinity of the Son of God and the miracle of divine birth. He had, moreover, exposed children to the indecencies or "the naughtinesses"

---

to reword passages that did not suit his vision." And yet Alcott also attempted to maintain the guise of student autonomy and centrality by demanding that children's names be included alongside their contributions. *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father* (New York: Norton, 2007), 76.

<sup>34</sup> Even Peabody distanced herself from the school once she began to hear the "whispering campaign" amongst incensed Boston parents and clergymen. Ultimately, she decided to save her own reputation as fine educator and terminate her affiliation with both the school and the second book project. Her retreat meant that when first portion of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* appeared December 1836 and the second portion in February 1837, Bronson Alcott was left to stand alone and accept total responsibility for the Temple School.

of sex. This charge, of course, bespeaks a cultural anxiety about the dangers of the child's porous and innocent mind that could be easily corrupted by a radical educator.

Beyond this type of content critique, a smaller but vocal group of critics complained that Alcott dangerously over-cultivated the imagination of his scholars to the exclusion of traditional methods of teaching. Registered by the novelist Catharine Marie Sedgwick, the journalist Harriet Martineau, and Alcott's own cousin and fellow educator, William Alcott, this critique is remarkable in its absolute adherence to an inflexible classroom as a balance to children's too active imaginations. These writers insisted that certain historically codified practices—the lecture, the lash, the examination—should dictate all instruction. They also make clear that imagination, creativity, and alternative methodologies did not have an acceptable place in the antebellum schoolhouse.<sup>35</sup> Each of these traits did, however, have a celebrated place in the novel, a different kind of educative space that did not have to face such unrelenting recrimination. In any case, within months of the appearance of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* and its attendant published criticism, many parents removed their students from the school, and yet somehow Alcott continued to teach several students in a more modest room until 1839, when he admitted a mixed-race child, and his few remaining parents withdrew their support.

As Alcott prepared to close his school permanently, he still hoped that his educational philosophy could reach American audiences through other channels. Emerson

---

<sup>35</sup> Catharine Marie Sedgwick's complaint is particularly intriguing as contemporaneous to her criticizing Alcott, she was publishing fictional representations of experimental pedagogically in her own short fiction. While she seems uneasy about the cultivation of the child's imagination under Alcott's guidance, her own children's stories call for this kind of engagement. See *Facts and Fancies for School-Day Reading, a sequel to 'Morals and Manners'* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1848).

urged him on. “He thinks that my medium of success to the public must be made through the pen rather than by practical action,” Alcott writes.<sup>36</sup> Indeed when optimistic, Alcott himself believed that though the public may not have been ready for his pedagogical innovations in practice, they would surely embrace them in theory. What Alcott failed to acknowledge in this moment of hopeful musing, is that his poor prose had become infamous and would do little to redeem his reputation as an educator.<sup>37</sup> In lacking both a classroom and skill as a writer, Bronson Alcott had no viable genre in which he could circulate his theories. Indeed, the problems that haunted Alcott's prose pose the same problems for scholars of his work today: while his educational theories remain compelling, inventive, and timely, they continue to be no less difficult to read or discern.

Bronson Alcott was a problematic figure in his own day and he continues to be one in our own critical moment, pointing us, as he does, to the pitfalls of poorly implemented decentered teaching practices. His contemporary critics disparaged his content, and without an alternative mode, he never garnered the attention for his ideas that he desired.

---

<sup>36</sup> Carlson, 89.

<sup>37</sup> As Alcott boarded a ship bound for England in 1842, hoping to find a more accepting audience for his educational theories on the other side of the Atlantic, the remaining copies of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* were sold to trunk makers by the pound. With 750 copies—or 900 pounds—remaining, they purchased Alcott's book for five cents a pound. Emerson recorded this sale in his journal and noted that, “when he attempts to write he loses, in my judgment, all his power, & I derive more pain than pleasure from the perusal.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), vol. 7, 1838-1842, 211. Indeed, when Alcott was most honest with himself, he accepted that, “My ideas, at present, are better than my style, and for many ideas, distinct and vivid in my own mind, I have no signs. This, more than anything else, is, I believe, the cause of my failure.” Without necessary logical links or connective tissue between his ideas—“no signs”—his written prose is often disjointed and overwrought. The bulk of it reveals his inability to communicate his philosophical intricacies effectively. For an instructor deeply committed to the power of the word and the need to “word” one's thoughts exactly, his own inability must have haunted him. Sheppard, *Journals*, 40.

Louisa May Alcott, Bronson's second daughter, watched her father fail to improve education in two venues: the classroom and the essay. Nearly forty years later and with her own desire to improve American education, Louisa published her pedagogical and episodic novel *Little Men*. Though Louisa had been a Boston schoolteacher for many years prior to writing this novel, there is no extant record or even hint of her having been a subversive pedagogue in the least, and surely with last name Alcott she had little latitude in this regard. But in her novel's pages, she had unprecedented freedom to teach in any way she saw fit. Hence, she uses *Little Men* not only to correct her father's loathed content, but more importantly, to show the fundamental limitations of the nineteenth-century classroom in contradistinction to the novel, a space that made student-centered learning and progressive reform a possibility. Alcott, then, wielded the novel to teach readers in ways that her father had hoped to but ultimately could not.

## II. Intermezzo: A Dream

In "Recollections of My Childhood," Louisa May Alcott recounts her earliest memory. Stacking the books of her father's library into "castles and bridges," Alcott recalls playing with words and stories long before she became literate. She muses about pretending to write from her father's desk, using the invisible ink of her imagination to compose stories and lessons for her sisters to consume.<sup>38</sup> This childhood game of inhabiting her father's educational persona—she sits at his desk, she writes his lessons, she

---

<sup>38</sup> Louisa May Alcott, "Recollections of My Childhood," in *Little Women, Or Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy*, ed. Anne K. Phillips and Gregory Eiselein (1888; reprint, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 428.

builds walls out of ideas in his library—returned many years later in a dream that she reported to her mother Abigail May in 1870, the year she was writing *Little Men* and thinking deeply about the need to reform American education.<sup>39</sup> Its rich and multivalent images suggest Louisa’s ambivalence about her relationship to her father’s educational work.<sup>40</sup> The dream opens with Louisa returning to Concord after a trip to Europe. Upon arriving in town, she finds her family’s home no longer standing. In its place she finds a “great grey stone castle with towers and arches and lawns and bridges.” When she spots the family’s landlord, he does not recognize her, but nonetheless, she asks where her home has gone. He replies that the house was sold to Mr. Alcott for “his school.” The dream continues with Alcott questioning the landlord,

“Where did Mr. Alcott get the means to build his great concern?” I asked. “Well, he *gave* his own land and took the great fortune his daughter left him, the one that died some ten years ago.” “So I am dead, am I?” says I to myself, feeling so queerly...I went on wondering at the news and looked into a glass to see how I looked dead. I found myself a fat old lady with grey hair and specs, very like Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. I laughed, and coming to a Gothic window, looked out and saw hundreds of young men and boys in a queer flowing dress roaming about the parks and lawns, among them was Pa, looking as he looked thirty years ago...He looked so plump and placid and young and happy, I was charmed to see him, and nodded, but he didn’t know me, and I was so grieved and troubled at being a Rip Van Winkle, I cried... and in the midst of my woe, I woke up...I can’t help thinking that it may foreshadow of something real. I used to dream of being

---

<sup>39</sup> Louisa includes this memory in *Little Women* as well, but there it is ascribed to Uncle March: “Jo remembered the kind old gentleman who used to let her build railroads and bridges with his big dictionaries, tell her stories about the queer pictures in Latin books.” Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women, or, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy* (1868; reprint, New York: Penguin Book, 1989), 37-38. In a novel that physically evacuates the father from the girls’ education, *Little Women* begins to disseminate Bronson Alcott’s educational practices through characters other than Mr. March.

<sup>40</sup> For Louisa’s ambivalence on her father’s experiments, see Claudia Durst Johnson, “‘Transcendental Wild Oats’ or The Cost of an Idea,” *ATQ* 12 (1998): 45-65; Lynda Zwinger, *Daughter, Fathers and the Novel: The Sentimental Romance of Heterosexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 46-75 *passim*.

famous, and it has partly become true. So why not Pa's college blossom, and he yet young and happy with his disciples?<sup>41</sup>

Like the castles Alcott built from her father's books, she romanticizes his school as another castle with its refined accoutrements: towers, arches, lawns, and a thirty-years-younger father. While the Temple School boasted of a lovely single room, Alcott's vision of this "fine concern" gives the school a face-lift and stages it as bucolic and geographically imposing. It also extends his educational influence beyond the child to the college student (the young men wear "queer flowing dress," or academic robes).<sup>42</sup> Including her inquisition about her father's newfound "means" to build this school seems to reveal the daughter's bewilderment that Bronson was finally been able to translate his genius into an economically viable form. It comes as little surprise to Louisa, however, that she has, in fact, enabled his creation. Her emphasis on "gave," though, rings with a hint of sarcasm, as if her father could not make an appropriate financial transaction. He did not sell his land; he "gave" it away. But her subtle indictment of her father's pecuniary failings is quickly surpassed by her self-inspection, her feeling "queerly." After all, she learns that only in death has she enabled the school's existence with her generous bequeathal. Yet even in that

---

<sup>41</sup> Louisa May Alcott, Vevey, to Abigail May Alcott, Concord, 21 August 1870, in *Select Letters of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987), 146.

<sup>42</sup> Bronson Alcott and Emerson did, at times, conspire about founding a college. Emerson described his vision in a journal entry from 1839: "My College should have Allston, Greenough, Bryant, Irving, Webster, Alcott, summoned for its domestic professors; & if I must send abroad, (& if we send for dancers & singers & actors, why not at the same prices for scholars) Carlyle, Hallam, Campbell should come & read lectures on History, Poetry, Letters; I would bid my men come & for the love of God & man, promising them an open field & a boundless opportunity, & they should make their own terms." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 7, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 198-199. Louisa May Alcott imaginatively "builds" this college in her final novel, *Jo's Boys*.



act and in the knowledge that she's returned her father to happiness and youthful exuberance, the dream effaces Louisa's daughterly self, incarnating her instead as the elderly Elizabeth Peabody. Only by reuniting teacher and assistant, it seems, could she conceive of redeeming her father's reputation entirely. Death, however, is not without its benefits. As Peabody, Louisa clairvoyantly becomes the official assistant to the Temple School, a literalization of what she does, in effect, become in writing *Little Men*. But what a gloomy vision! For Louisa herself has become nothing but a dead financier.

But while awake and in her novels, Louisa May Alcott accorded herself a greater role: the potential to return her father to his beloved school. She did not, of course, physically rebuild the Temple School nor did she enable Bronson to redeem his pedagogical methods firsthand. *Little Men* did, however, fictionally dramatize—and metaphorically remodel—Bronson's innovative pedagogy within a viable genre. Unlike her father, Louisa recognized the inflexible historicity of the classroom that made it a space resistant to radical pedagogy. As such, she understood the necessity of domesticating the learning process by evacuating the school—and the central authority of the instructor in the classroom—in order to set education in experience and meet the individual needs of the child. Raised by her father in the wake of the Temple School controversy, Louisa May Alcott extracted his religiosity, sanitized his sex-ed., and inserted her own pedagogy into an imaginative institution, Plumfield. It was a creative attempt to cure what she called “the problem in our time”: American education.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Louisa May Alcott to Mary Mapes Dodge, 17 September 1879, *Select Letters*, 237.

### III. Experience in the Novel, Experiencing the Novel

In the previous section, Bronson Alcott's teaching illuminated a structural tension in classroom decentering practices that are meant to redistribute the teacher's authority but fail to do so. As he attempted to use dialogue as a means of liberating the child's spirit within, he mistakenly thought that his own authority (as an instructor in a space with a historically-codified power structure) would not interfere with his students' independent process of self-discovery. This is not to suggest that his Temple School lessons were reductive or fundamentally flawed; rather, their intentions were well-founded. In order to produce citizen-scholars instead of "parrots of other men's thinking," the child had to rely on himself and his knowledge. Bronson Alcott, however, failed to take into account the historically and culturally determined expectations of what should happen in the schoolhouse; in turn, he could not have recognized the way in which his very presence in the pedagogic space at the front of classroom would ultimately undermine his attempts to free the child. Likewise, his pedagogy always existed in the arena of rhetoric; his dialogues inevitably featured himself at the center convincing his students how best to read themselves, and often, growing impatient, reading them for them. By under-emphasizing original student experience, he cut short their ability to interpret texts—and themselves—with authority.

Instead of employing her father's dialogic rhetoric, Louisa May Alcott evinced confidence in hermeneutics as an effective method for students to reach their educational goals and therefore taught from the space and function (or, in other words, the content and form) of the novel. The reader's process of personal discovery in the course of reading and interpreting *Little Men* becomes nearly—though not exactly—equivalent to firsthand

experience itself. Determined to empower children, Alcott quit classroom teaching after twelve years and turned her attention to an alternative means of generating “selfhelp, self-knowledge, and self-control” in them.<sup>44</sup> These abilities, in turn, would ideally lead to educated independence. With ample time for retrospection between her father’s failed school and her pedagogic novel *Little Men*, Louisa recognized that the nineteenth-century American school was too circumscribed by traditional authority to work as a space of radical, student-centered, reform. Moreover, Horace Mann’s increasingly standardized common school classrooms in mid-century Massachusetts would simply not allow it. Foreshadowing the “schools without walls” or “open classroom” movements of the 1960s, Alcott’s *Little Men* showed that only in the right surroundings, namely in the unconfined and experience-oriented outdoors, could the child come independently to self-understanding, and in turn, to right action.

For Louisa May Alcott, the child’s learning process begins with unmediated experience in the world. Broadly speaking, “experience” here denotes the personal encounter, observation, or action in contradistinction to another’s report of such an event. In this way, her work looks back to Pestalozzi and Rousseau, both of whom mandated that the child have experiences that would become the raw material of their education. Her emphasis on direct experience equally looks ahead to John Dewey’s attempted integration of students’ inherited knowledge and these everyday experiences. He argued—and Alcott’s novel demonstrates that—“schooling must provide genuine situations in which personal participation brings home the import of the material and the problems which it conveys,”

---

<sup>44</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *Little Men* (1871; reprint, New York: Signet, 1986), 30. Further references to *Little Men* are included in the text as parentheses.

such that students have some means to “connect readily and fruitfully with the symbolic material of instruction.”<sup>45</sup> For Alcott, as it would be for Dewey in the twentieth century, the child’s experience attains a critical level of authority only when the instructor, after providing occasion for individual processing, removes herself from the child’s event and he alone is left to read or interpret his experience back to himself in order to locate its significance and usefulness.<sup>46</sup>

This scholastic process of creating, comprehending, and mobilizing experience toward an educational end mirrors the very act of novel reading in which a solitary individual encounters a new text outside the prescriptive domain of the classroom and then actively, and often idiosyncratically, integrates its method and content into her larger field of understanding. Without an immediate experience with which to comprehend intangible material, in the world or within the pages of a novel, students risk descending into “mere bookishness,” unable to integrate their school lessons with their lives.<sup>47</sup> While Bronson Alcott committed himself to direct student experience in theory, he failed to fit it into his curriculum in practice, favoring dialogue *about* experience instead.

Alcott’s experiential learning in *Little Men* grants both Plumfield’s students and the novel’s readers the authority to define their own means of learning. This is distinct from Richard Brodhead’s formulation of “disciplinary intimacy,” the process through which

---

<sup>45</sup> Dewey, *Democracy*, 232-233.

<sup>46</sup> In Dewey’s final formulations of progressive education, he felt that the teacher should not, after creating the occasions for experience, “withdraw entirely” from the situation. Instead, education should be a “co-operative enterprise, not a dictation.” John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938; reprint, New York: Touchstone, 1997), 72.

<sup>47</sup> Dewey, *Democracy*, 232.

adult authorities define and instill proper behavior in children. For in comprehending his experience in its full range of meaning, the child assumes an ontological and epistemological authority for himself without laboring under another's intellectual regime. For Alcott, the child's newfound power makes him eager to transmit his experience (which is now in the form of knowledge) to another child in a kind of fair-market educational economy in which children exchange their knowledge to enrich themselves (in the process of teaching) and others (in the process of learning).<sup>48</sup> The receiving student ultimately integrates the newly transmitted knowledge into his larger field of comprehension, but more importantly, he is then also compelled to share his experience and thereby solidify his own understanding. In this process, affective bonds—born of democratic exchange—are established between the children, whereby they ideally incline toward right feelings and right actions within their community.

Alcott's heuristic pedagogy of cultivating direct experience that moves the student in new directions and fosters new knowledge and new authority lies at center of Plumfield and is demonstrated most forcefully by the triumphant narrative of Dan, a bawdy and recalcitrant street child. His first stay at Jo Bhaer's (née March) bucolic school Plumfield ends in disgrace when he nearly sets the house on fire. Jo and her husband Fritz Bhaer soon realize that he has the power to corrupt the young students and destroy their school.

---

<sup>48</sup> Though with entirely different stakes, Frederick Douglass's process of learning to read in Baltimore's streets literalizes this kind of exchange. Once Hugh Auld prohibits his wife's teaching of Douglass, he uses his time running errands to convert the impoverished—but literate—neighborhood children into teachers. Douglass rightfully recognizes that they will not altruistically teach him, so bribes them with scraps of bread, exchanging reading lessons for rye. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845; reprint, New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 48-49.

In their decision to dismiss Dan, they recognize their own failure to guide him to right feelings and right actions, but hope another teacher may be able to instruct him. Consequently, they send him off to Mr. Page's farm where they hope his resistance will be broken under this instructor's more physically demanding "curriculum." Dan soon escapes from Mr. Page, though, and wanders in the woods with the Thoreauvian autodidact Mr. Hyde who encourages the boy's inclination toward natural history and subtly directs him back to Plumfield to ask for forgiveness. In rejecting Mr. Page—whose very name is synecdoche for traditional text and authority-based schooling—Dan organically discovers his academic authority in the world's natural "leaves" instead. With a new appreciation for learning founded on his tangible experience in the woods, Dan returns repentant. Jo Bhaer realizes both her own limitations as his teacher and Dan's native intelligence outdoors. With this new awareness, she recognizes that she must position him strategically with children naturally able to teach him that which he cannot learn inside the school space or through traditional teacher-centered instruction. This new process of instruction, Jo Bhaer knows, must originate in his apprehension of, and appreciation for, his own knowledge. Eventually, Dan and the young Demi, who function as scholarly foils for one another, strike up an unusual friendship that routinely finds them perched together in an old willow, a productive tree of knowledge whose botanical offerings serve as the boys' curriculum.

Surrounded by his natural knowledge in the willow's arms, Dan spontaneously begins to instruct Demi "who was always sure of an answer from Dan" on the structure of leaves (231). Finding new confidence in his experience, Dan conducts his lessons with

clarity and enthusiasm, specifying why some leaves “shake so much” and others hang stationary. Moreover, he instructs his friend empirically: “Draw your finger down the middle of the stem, and see if the leaves don’t curl up” (231). Demi responds immediately to Dan’s teaching, awed by his experiential knowledge (“you have known a great many interesting things”) and happy to exchange his mythical beliefs—say, about fairies living in mullein leaves—for biological answers (233). Dan eventually shows Demi how to use a microscope to “read” nature accurately, further refining Demi’s blossoming interpretive skills.

Dan, too, is learning by translating his experience into terms Demi can understand. Dewey later termed this mode of translation the “formulation” of original experience: “To formulate requires getting outside of [the experience], seeing it as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form that he can appreciate its meaning.”<sup>49</sup> When Dan formulates his experiences for Demi, he, in fact, distills their meaning for himself. Demi’s questions, therefore, help Dan both recognize the scope of his own knowledge and capacity for learning from Demi. The consummate good citizen, Demi provides Dan a methodology for “keeping [his] soul in order” (234). Explaining to Dan the way in which he visualizes his soul as a room in which “the bads” can be “locked tight” and “the goods” kept “where I can see them,” Demi translates Dan’s ability to classify leaves through their specific qualities into an ability to read qualities in himself (234). Alcott suggests that with this new self-understanding, Dan will be increasingly able to make the correct moral decisions and guide his classmates to do

---

<sup>49</sup> Dewey, *Democracy*, 5.

the same. Simultaneous to the boys' process, readers of *Little Men* find in the text itself a similar generative space for personal inquiry. Dan's "formulation" of his experience for Demi, parallels Alcott's act of composing this pedagogic novel with meaningful "points of contact" with her young readers.

Jo Bhaer comes to put her complete faith in the renovated Dan, "I'm going to trust not only Demi, but my own boy, to you, because you can teach them some things better than any of us," much as Alcott implicitly puts her faith in her readers (236-237). In learning of Demi and Dan's exchange, she recognizes the ability of the student who is liberated from the classroom to instruct his peers without the liability of lapsing into traditional Lockean indoctrination. Jo encourages Dan, "I'm so glad you told Demi about 'leaves and things'; it is just what he needs...Don't you see how much you can help him, and why I like to have him with you?" (236). With Jo's acknowledgement of his pedagogic power, Dan recognizes in himself the ability and desire to release himself from his previously toxic solipsism and to enter into a process of benevolent—and generative—intersubjective exchange with his classmates. In other words, he transforms his conception of himself by sharing his learning in Plumfield's affective network. In his relationship with Demi, Dan earnestly comes to apprehend what Bronson Alcott would consider right action. But this is Louisa's schoolhouse. Unlike her father's structured dialogues with his students, Louisa founds the child's moral reckoning in his independent experience of the world and his formulation of that experience for others.

In locating methods of learning, such as Dan's, inside *Little Men*, Alcott makes her novel into an alternative nineteenth-century curriculum. Readers of the novel inhabit the



narrative, and collectively, their reading is an alternative educational institution. This process, however, has not been immediately accessible to readers of *Little Men* because the novel has been read exclusively as a sentimental and didactic text. It is, after all, set at Plumfield, the equally domestic and pastoral retreat that functions as both home and school for a range of struggling, sensitive, and, in many cases, orphaned students. Their teacher, Jo Bhaer, more often treats her pupils as her own children; they, in turn, call her “Mother Bhaer.” Plumfield’s classrooms can be found both inside its walls and outside in gardens and fields where, in transcendentalist fashion, children find “sermons in stones and books in running brooks.” Such idealism insists on the child’s innate wisdom and the corresponding mother/teacher’s task to draw forth this raw material in a loving way (35). It is no wonder, then, that when (mis)read as an exclusively sentimentalist text, *Little Men* appears to be a novel of content-heavy didacticism. Read this way, the novel’s representations of learning become little more than individual lessons with aphoristic conclusions that the child reader should mimetically apply to his own life.<sup>50</sup>

But concentrating exclusively on the text’s content obscures the reader’s use, or mechanism by which the text works on its readers. After all, content is the *sine qua non* of the didactic novel. Its lessons are explicit and the reader bears little responsibility for uncovering them. As a result, methods of inductive instruction remain comparatively ignored. When the content of lessons are at the center of the text, the reader’s process of personal discovery is generally unremarkable and everything the reader needs to apprehend

---

<sup>50</sup> After all, sentimental didacticism, as a generic mode, is of a piece with the lecture itself. Samuel Johnson’s eighteenth-century definition reminds us that that “didactick” works are “preceptive”; they give “precepts.” Samuel Johnson, “didactick,” in *Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1764).

the specific lesson is contained in the novel itself. It provides “answers,” but those answers are generally circumscribed by the text’s plot or theme. This is not to undermine the force of the sentimental novel; indeed, the lessons contained and the feelings elicited can themselves be radical. Certainly the critical recovery of and attention to nineteenth-century sentimental texts in the last twenty years attests to the sociopolitical importance of this genre in American culture.<sup>51</sup> I would argue, however, that because the pedagogic process of training the reader is less important than the lesson’s content itself, those lessons are less transferable to the reader’s larger self-educating project. The sentimental or conventionally didactic reading of *Little Men*’s representations of learning, then, ignores the possibility of the novel acting on us, as readers, in far more complex ways.

But if we reorient our reading of *Little Men* from content to methodology, we begin to see the novel’s pedagogic possibilities. When we read against the sentimental grain and view the novel, as Janie Vanpée has done with Rousseau’s *Emile*, as a “performative discourse enacting the very process it describes,” we begin to attune ourselves to how the text functions on us as readers.<sup>52</sup> In resisting an interpretation of the novel’s lessons alone, we find ourselves the objects of the novel’s instructional methodology. Instead of giving the reader “answers” in the form of a lecture, the methodologically-oriented pedagogic novel, in contradistinction to the content-based didactic one, provides the reader with productive methods of discovery, enabling her to locate right answers or actions transferable to any

---

<sup>51</sup> See Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1977); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1869* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>52</sup> Janie Vanpée, “Rousseau’s *Emile* ou de l’éducation: A Resistance to Reading,” *Yale French Studies* 77 (1990): 157.

individual experience. However slight and slippery this distinction may at first appear, it is essential to distinguish content and method in order to apprehend Alcott as an educator instead of a mere illustrator. In the context of postbellum American schoolroom poetry, Angela Sorby contends that it is necessary to read the nation's "'best-loved' poems not as sentimental texts but as pedagogic texts," even as the "contrast between the sentimental and the pedagogical modes is one of relative, not absolute, difference."<sup>53</sup> Looking from the poem to the novel, we see that in Alcott's unique formulation, she mobilizes some attributes of the sentimental novel—the setting, the domestic space, the emotion—toward her pedagogical ends, but she departs from the genre in significant ways.

Beyond the sentimental, readers would be equally remiss to read *Little Men*, an example par excellence of the pedagogic novel, mimetically. As early as 1871, at least one contemporary critic recognized that the novel called for a different reading strategy; as Alcott "perfects her lessons...so subtly that nobody suspects he is being instructed. Didactic would be the last adjective ever applied to her stories."<sup>54</sup> *Little Men* resists a literal reading or application; its answers cannot be lifted piecemeal and applied seamlessly to our lives. Instead, Alcott calls on her "students" to read the novel methodologically, to uncover experientially its pedagogy instead of seeking self-contained—and useless—axioms. Only when readers identify the novel's methods and feel motivated by the narrative itself, do they take responsibility for their own course of learning, both inside the novel proper and

---

<sup>53</sup> Angela Sorby, *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865-1917* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), xxiii.

<sup>54</sup> "Little Men," review of *Little Men*, by Louisa May Alcott, *Scribner's Monthly* 2 (August 1871): 446-47, quoted in Beverly Lyon Clark, *Louisa May Alcott: The Contemporary Reviews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 148-149.

outside in the field of life. These commitments to books, on the one hand, and to experience, on the other, work cooperatively for Alcott, as they had for Emerson. In his educational declaration, the “The American Scholar,” Emerson foreshadows both Alcott and Dewey in his insistence that “action” is the “raw material” of the intellectual’s project. Alcott realized that the “strange process...by which experience is converted to thought,” begins in childhood.<sup>55</sup>

Experiencing *Little Men* pedagogically, then, is predicated on Alcott’s deliberate positioning of her reader as a student. We are made pupils to the text through her novel’s episodic structure, a trope of reader-engaging malapropisms, and instruction in allegorical interpretation that I consider in detail below. Unlike a novel with a sturdy narrative arch that provides a ready framework for understanding, *Little Men* is relatively modern, more educational bricolage than novel proper. Individual chapters feature loosely united scenes of student learning in action. Alcott herself emerges from behind the curtain early in the text to alert the reader that “there is no particular plan to this story, except to describe a few scenes in the life of Plumfield” (112). Without a “particular plan”—metonymy, it seems, for a narrative arch—Alcott calls on her readers to actively forge connections and meaning between and among her “scenes” and then to use the text, with its imbedded strategies, functionally in their learning process. This necessarily calls for the reader’s active and personally productive engagement between the text’s episodes. In his *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Wolfgang Iser argues that narrative gaps—or seemingly missing material—spur the reader to fill in the blanks and effectively participate

---

<sup>55</sup> Emerson, “The American Scholar,” 1140.

individually in the text they read. *Little Men* has such gaps in abundance, and they become an implicit but no less insistent invitation to the reader to unlock the text's method and meaning through his or her own prior experience, forging personal connections with the text throughout.<sup>56</sup> The structure itself, then, elicits and encourages individual meaning-making in a literary equivalent to the decentered classroom in which students are responsible for their own cognitive productions. Readers' integration of Alcott's episodes reveals their facility as students to the text's teachings.

Not only does Alcott compel her readers to produce meaning between the text's episodes, but she also repeats this process on the micro—or single word—level with her pedagogic use of misspellings and malapropisms. In both a parody and an interactive version of her father's vocabulary instruction at the Temple School, Louisa May Alcott encourages her reader to assume the role of student, to improve her vocabulary, and to appreciate the stakes of proper language use. She begins the pedagogic use of misspellings and malapropisms in *Hospital Sketches* (1863), and continues it into *Little Women* (1868-69) and *Little Men*. In *Little Women*, the young Amy—who leaves school with Marmee's blessing because of her instructor's hasty corporeal punishment—continually misuses words. These language errors not only comically recall Bronson's meandering method of instruction, but they call on the reader for a correction. When she describes her classmates' shameless taunting, Amy hysterically bemoans her schooling (and Alcott sharply critiques

---

<sup>56</sup> Readers fill "gaps" with their own particular experiences in life. Iser claims elsewhere that "For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decisions as to how the gap is to be filled." Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 279.

conventional classrooms that have produced such misunderstanding): “I don’t believe any of you suffer as I do...for you don’t have to go to school with impertinent girls, who plague you if you don’t know your lessons, and laugh at your dresses, and label your father if he isn’t rich.” Sensing her sister’s language error, the bookish Jo responds: “If you mean *libel* I’d say so, and not talk about *labels*, as if pa was a pickle-bottle.”<sup>57</sup> Noting Amy’s error, in Jo’s correction or before, readers incline toward fixing her mistake—erasing “label” writing in “libel”—even before Jo intervenes. Alcott often italicizes the proper word, syntactically instructing her readers to visually mark the correction, even if they did overlook Amy’s original error. Such mistakes function as a kind of dramatic irony in the pedagogic novel, enabling the reader to claim language competence for herself above that of the novel’s characters. Alcott also italicizes her fictional students’ misspellings and apparent mispronunciations, again visually insisting that young readers record and correct those mistakes as well. Continuing this trope in *Little Men*, Alcott uses the young Demi to suggest that proper language use in conversation is essential to clear communication. His misspellings and apparent mispronunciations prompt readers to replace his faulty words

---

<sup>57</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, 2. None of the March girls have a sustained relationship to conventional education. Beth, who is pure in motive and deed, is “too bashful to go” (38). Both Jo and Meg’s schooling has been cut short because they must work outside the home in order to help support the family. Amy leaves school suffering the humiliation and sting of corporeal punishment after bringing forbidden limes to class. The conventional classroom, Alcott suggests, effectively meets the needs of a narrow group of students only. Alcott had no more tolerance for elite female seminaries that she critiques in her 1875 novel *Rose in Bloom*. The eponymous Rose returns from her school “almost dead with lessons. The more I got, the more Miss Power gave me, and I was so miserable I ‘most cried my eyes out.” Alternatively, the home is where Rose’s most meaningful lessons arise: “Papa never gave me hard things to do, and he always taught me so pleasantly I loved to study.” Louisa May Alcott, *Rose in Bloom* (1875; reprint, New York: Puffin Classics, 1995), 19.

with proper ones. In doing so, readers come to participate as extra-diegetic classmates to Amy and Demi.

Beyond episodic gaps and language play, Alcott urges her readers to a pedagogic interpretation of the novel through her self-conscious inclusion of the trope of reading lessons. Within these depictions, she problematizes the very act of reading her novel for content alone. In doing so, Alcott uses *Little Men* to formulate an alternative to the dominant teacher and text-centered method of reading and learning in American classrooms. Reading comes to mean more than the act of banking content in one's head for later regurgitation. From a young age, Alcott suggests, one should beware of Emerson's bookworm. To protect against this fate, she configures reading as an active process of experience and then the integration of that experience into the reader's conception of herself. There remains a place for "useful" reading (say, in the form of science books that provide ready information), but readers come to see that *Little Men* itself functions in another way. Both in its representations of learning and in its process of extra-diegetic teaching, the child must learn to discern the difference between the text and the self and concentrate on the reading experience proper. Not only does she revise the act itself, but Alcott also expands our notion of what constitutes a text worthy of study. The novel invites the discovery that lived experience—which comes to replace the instructor as the primary source of student knowledge—must be "read" in order to be understood properly and subsequently integrated into one's configuration of self and, most importantly, to lead to one's ability to make the right decisions about feelings and actions. Such integration, in turn, comes from transmitting or teaching one's experience to another in a student-

centered exchange. In this final step, the reader takes full responsibility for her knowledge and becomes, in effect, an animator of Alcott's pedagogy.

From a young age, Louisa May Alcott recognized the liabilities associated with flawed reading instruction. Recalling the techniques her father used to teach her and her sisters, she noted that his lessons were "somewhat peculiar," but they were "very happy hours...to us, for my father taught in the wise way which unfolds what lies in the child's nature as a flower blooms, rather than crammed it, like a Strasburg goose, with more than it could digest."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Bronson publicly claimed that, "Next to thinking for themselves, the best service any teacher can render his scholars is to show them how to use books."<sup>59</sup> Though Bronson Alcott seemed to bifurcate independent thinking and the proper use of books, his daughter recognized the intimate connection between these two tasks. Taking process cues from her own experience as a student of her father and rising to his pedagogical imperative, Louisa uses the character Billy in *Little Men* to delineate the stakes of proper reading and to formulate an alternative to the established classroom pedagogy of the period. Unlike the novel's other rugged and energetic students, Billy "had been an unusually intelligent boy, and his father had hurried him on too fast, giving him all sorts of hard lessons, keeping him at his books six hours a day, and expecting him to absorb knowledge as a Strasburg goose does the food crammed down its throat" (27). The aggressive banking style of education used on Billy meant that his "overtasked brain gave

---

<sup>58</sup> Louisa May Alcott, "Recollections of My Childhood," in *Little Women*, eds. Anne k. Phillips and Gregory Eiselein (1888; reprint, New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 428.

<sup>59</sup> Bronson Alcott, *Superintendent's Report of the Concord Schools to the School Committee, for the Year 1860-1861* in Bronson Alcott, *Essays on Education (1830-1862)*, ed. Walter Harding (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1960), 158.



out and [his] mind was like a slate over which a sponge has passed, leaving it blank” (27).

Satirically inverting the institutionally prevailing Lockean conception of the child’s mind as *tabula rasa*, Alcott avers that the instructor’s overzealous efforts effectively erase, instead of inscribe, knowledge on the student’s brain, crippling his ability to understand himself and his world. The fragile organ cannot—and should not—bear the weight of excessive and arbitrarily chosen material unconnected to the child’s needs and interests.

In the case of Billy, Louisa May Alcott critiques his father’s inclination toward aggressively imposing too much material on the child, but later in the novel, she suggests that the instructor may not be the only one inclined toward material overdose. In the case of Demi Brooke (son of Meg, the eldest March sister in *Little Women*), the student himself is unable to regulate his consumption of books. This means that instructors Jo and Fritz Bhaer must put him on a strict reading diet in order to ensure an intellectually ameliorative combination of (and clear distinction between) literature and lived experience: “You are greedy...my son, and you like to stuff your little mind full of fairy tales and fancies” (45). Without regulation, Demi is naturally apt to become “one of those pale precocious children who amaze and delight a family sometimes, and fade away like hothouse flowers” (23). In order to ensure that Demi not fall into such a ruined state, the Bhaers teach him to balance reading with experience. Readers, Alcott suggests, must also be wary of wholly replacing their own experience with vicarious accounts of it.

Performing such a balancing act is to understand the world in all of its complexities. In his formulation of “rhetorical hermeneutics,” Steven Mailloux asserts that the reader’s “prior web of beliefs, desires, [and] practices,” enable, rather than prejudice, the

interpretive process.<sup>60</sup> For Alcott's young students and readers, the webs of experiences they bring to a story enable them to use texts fruitfully, to understand their meaning and purpose. Fritz Bhaer mandates this balance with surprising pragmatism. He allows Demi "but one story book a week" and in return, Demi "promise[s] to play" in a new cricket field Fritz builds for the boys. In the instructor's trade-off, Demi must balance otherworldly fantasy with physical experience so that neither dominates his development (46). Alcott intimates that only by forcing the child outside of the text through a kind of benevolent censorship and giving him opportunities for physical action, does the instructor ward off perils of both indoctrination and the literalization of reading.

In *Little Men*, Alcott is particularly attuned to the dangers of pathological mimesis for the child given too much autonomy and developmentally unable to regulate his own reading. Though by the 1870s most Americans had grown less anxious about the child's capacity for invention, as this no longer seemed to evidence a corrupted soul, Alcott nevertheless remained invested in easing the child's process of differentiating imagination from materialism. Without a modicum of guidance (from instructor or fellow student) in reading instruction, the child would seem to naturally elide the difference between literature and the empirical world.<sup>61</sup> This becomes problematic when the child must independently discern right action in an ethically difficult situation, as an over-reliance on imaginative fiction would lead the child to mistake her responsibility for the sake of

---

<sup>60</sup> Steven Mailloux, *Reception Histories: Rhetoric, Pragmatism, and American Cultural Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>61</sup> When taken to logical extreme of pathologically reading too literally, the child is liable to become one of Emerson's detested bookworms, who cannot generate original thought, inundated as he is in other men's thinking.

pleasure or adventure, both inside and outside of the text.<sup>62</sup> Instead of articulating this lesson with explicit precepts in *Little Men*, Alcott sets it in the comedic episode of the mythical “The Naughty Kitty-Mouse” who demands the Plumfield children’s sacrifice. Seduced by the “older boys” reading of Greek customs, Demi decides that a “sackerryfice” is in order to appease the wrathful Kitty-Mouse (113). His misspelling here calls the reader’s attention to the child’s inability, represented visually, to comprehend the full meaning of the term. Without a thorough understanding of the historical context of the ancient ceremony, Demi tells the youngest Plumfield children that: “A sackerryfice means to give up what you are fond of so we *must*” (113). Swayed by Demi’s apparent intellectual authority, the children toss their most beloved toys—paper dolls, a wooden toy village, a squeaking lamb—into a raging fire to feel excitement only momentarily and then to cry out in regret. They all quickly realize that their sacrifice, though resonant as a fanciful idea, has no real meaning in their own context. Jo eventually appears on the scene, bemused but aware that she must intervene somehow. She does not, however, lecture the children about their foolishness; instead, she tells them a story about the dangers of abiding texts too literally and the need for children to maintain some defense against suggestion.

What makes the entire episode funny, and ultimately pedagogically effective, is the unflagging earnestness of Demi in enacting that which he should have realized has no place in his historical moment. His misunderstanding of how to use books properly leads to his

---

<sup>62</sup> In a period of popular fiction’s proliferation in America, Alcott also suggests that an over-consumption of stories can lead the child to ignore her ethical responsibilities outside of the text. Jo March’s greedy intake and production of best-sellers in *Little Women* serves as a cautionary tale. Her unregulated habit leads her to ignore her neighborly responsibility to the poverty-stricken Hummel family. In turn, the Hummel baby dies and Beth March contracts the fever that ultimately leads to her death.

inclination to destructively fuse text and life. Though cloaked in humor—a strategy that suggests Alcott’s keen understanding of her reader’s desires—she inventively reveals the dangers of reading any text too mimetically, not to mention too authoritatively. Demi’s absurdly literalistic interpretation—emblemized in his initial misspelling—prompts readers to interpret and use historical texts differently. An alternative to perilous mimesis, or the child’s literal translation of text to the empirical world, is student-generated interpretation.

Alcott exhibits—and then elicits—this type of interpretation as a renovated hermeneutics in which the students are encouraged to seek metaphorical meaning in the stories and parables Fritz Bhaer shares with them. Simultaneously, the reader is led to interpret the children’s interpretations, doubly refining her own skills in a kind of meta-reading lesson. One such Sunday evening, Fritz narrates a story about “a great and wise gardener” who “raised all manner of excellent and useful things...for thousands and thousands of years” (42). As Fritz finishes his initial description of the gardener, Demi butts in: “He must have been pretty old” (42). Always the literalist, Demi’s response exemplifies the child’s inclination to read—or in this case, listen—without figurative interpretation. Instead of appreciating that the gardener symbolically stands for someone or something else, Demi fixates on the gardener’s impossible age. Fritz remains silent, but Demi’s sister Daisy whispers, “Hush, Demi, it’s a fairy story” (42). Daisy’s redirection of Demi’s mimetic reading method takes effect immediately, and Demi realizes, “I think it’s an arrygorry” (42). The misspelling of allegory, which comes at a critical moment of pedagogical instruction, alerts readers to their own need to correct Demi’s mistake, to resist a literal reading and to formulate a thorough understanding of how to enact an allegorical

interpretation of both the garden story and *Little Men* at large. Alcott seems particularly keen on ensuring that her readers follow Demi's revised interpretative strategy, and as such, he delivers a definition explicitly: "grandpa told me! A fable is a arrygory; it's a story that means something" (42). Jo Bhaer affirms Demi's understanding and reminds the students, just as Alcott reminds her readers, to "listen and see what it means" (42). That Demi locates his understanding of allegory in his "grandpa" (the thinly-veiled figure of Bronson Alcott) is particularly poignant at this moment of successful student inquiry. Bronson Alcott's pedagogy has at last found a suitable home: the novel.

As Fritz goes on to recount what "crops" his fictive gardener grows, his students slowly begin to discern themselves in his descriptions. But instead of recognizing themselves literally, they apprehend themselves in the story's fertile soil ("...every time the crop failed, all the bed said was 'I forgot'"(42)). Demi, in turn, ultimately divines the story's function: "I knew he meant us!...You are the man, and we are the little gardens" (43). In this articulation of its function, the children begin to use the story to understand themselves better. They then share openly their desires for their own "crops," or that which they aspire to cultivate in themselves. Bunyanesque virtues like perseverance, steadiness, industry, and wisdom are the students' intended harvest. Though Fritz had started this lesson, the students complete it. Like Bronson Alcott in those first Temple School lessons, Fitz steps back so as to encourage the students to define their own needs.

This gardening story, with its meta-instruction for readers learning how to interpret *Little Men*, encapsulates Louisa May Alcott's pedagogical program. It is a program in which morality remains the endgame. She begins with a story opaque and amusing enough to

sustain the child's interest. Then aware that the young reader will incline, like Demi, toward a literalist's reading, Alcott embeds interpretive instructions that the solitary reader is compelled to follow as an extra-diegetic student. In the reader's own allegorical engagement with these twin stories—the story of the ancient gardener on the one hand and the story of Demi's initial misreading on the other—he, like Demi, discovers his own deficiencies and comes to an improved self-understanding. For Alcott, this self-understanding, with its origins in the child's inherent goodness, leads to virtuous action.

Alcott, however, is careful to point out that the student's new awareness must be solidified in the student-centered exchange. When Fritz's garden story ends and each student has established what crop he would like to grow, the children depart for bed, leaving the space of instruction and their teacher behind, much as the reader drops her book and moves from the novel's world back into her own. Getting ready to sleep, Nat, a new and orphaned student, notices a picture in Demi's room of an unknown man blessing children. Demi returns to his room to find Nat admiring the image, which quickly gives way to Demi's teaching him about Jesus. In this case, Nat feels comfortable asking Demi a series of prosaic questions about Jesus that, in turn, lead to his "love [for] the Good Man who loved little children" and a corresponding desire to align his actions with Jesus' (49). When Jo Bhaer secretly observes the scene, she recognizes that "Demi is unconsciously helping the poor boy better than I can; I will not spoil it with a single word" (49). Jo's recognition of her power, even in a "single word," bespeaks of Alcott's own recognition of the teacher's inescapable authority and the ways in which that authority corrupts pure and productive student exchange. Plumfield's pedagogic effectiveness, then, arises without

heavy-handed lecturing but instead by diminishing the instructor's authoritative control, and consequentially empowering the student to develop his own knowledge and understanding. While at Plumfield the instructor's control is restrained, Alcott herself is more heavy-handed; she wrote the book, and she brought these characters, as it were, into heuristic being. Finally, in light of the critiques that Bronson Alcott garnered for his teachings on Jesus, Louisa May Alcott's repositioning of overt religious education to an exclusively student-centered context defuses potential charges of radical indoctrination.<sup>63</sup> More importantly, however, shifting this learning outside the instructor's purview enables the children the freedom of pure inquiry, unadulterated by the instructor's inevitable influence.

#### IV. Circulating Alcott: Lessons for the Classroom

I began my discussion of Louisa May Alcott's instruction by claiming the she structures *Little Men* such that her reader's experience of the novel is "nearly equivalent" to her represented pedagogic program. "Nearly" is a necessary modifier to this educative

---

<sup>63</sup> *The Boston Courier* ran an article signed by "A Parent" that attacked the Temple School as toxic to children's minds in its indecency and heresy. The "parent" avers: "We cannot repress our indignation at the love of notoriety, for it can be nothing else, which will lead a man to scorn the truth & the best interests of society...It were a venial error in Mr. Alcott had he simply published the crude remarks of his pupils, but he has gone further. He seemed to delight in his own person in directing their attention to the more improper subjects...Mr. Alcott should hide his head in shame." Likewise, the *Courier's* editor, Joseph Buckingham calls Peabody's *Record* "a more indecent and obscene book...than any other we ever saw exposed for sale." Shepard, *Pedlar's*, 193-194. Both of these critiques are representative of the reviews of Peabody's book. Buckingham goes on to encourage local clergymen to read from the *Record* and from the next transcription of the school, *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, in order that they might correct Alcott's indecent errors for their youthful congregants. The byline of "A Parent" or the editor himself is noteworthy here because it illuminates the identity of those concerned with this project, namely parents—not students—whose children either attend the Temple School or those who have a personal investment in controlling American educational innovation.

process because there are, of course, functional differences between the act of solitary reading and that of fictional children engaging in generative experience-based exchange. Indeed, *Little Men*'s very textuality ultimately points to its insufficiency as a complete educational experience. As we saw, in the novel's effective resistance to mimetic interpretation, Alcott directs her reader through a process founded on allegorical reading that, in turn, mandates some form of kinetic or cognitive experience outside the novel to solidify total understanding. While Demi's centrality in the text as the student perpetually in need of further reading instruction trains our attention on the benefits of rigorous interpretation, it also reminds us that in order to fully realize his knowledge, he must transmit it to another in an interaction that clarifies his own thinking for himself. For Demi, this final move is a step away from the text and the institution proper.

As readers, then, we come to realize that *Little Men* paradoxically announces its own limitations. After all, only in closing the text do readers become animators of Alcott's pedagogy, well prepared to formulate their own reading experience for another. The narrative itself retrospectively functions much like a Deweyian educative "map," a convenient and useful formulation of another's experiences and a tool that "orders" and "connect[s] them with one another irrespective of the local and temporal circumstances." Maps are imperfect guides, always incommensurate with the worlds they purport to chart. Yet a good map in Dewey's sense still usefully "serves as a guide to future experience; it gives direction; it facilitates control; it economizes effort, preventing useless wandering, and pointing out the paths which lead most quickly and most certainly to a desired result."<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> John Dewey, *The School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum*, ed. Philip W. Jackson (1902; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 198. For Dewey, the map is a metaphor for



*Little Men* is this kind of map. It alerts young readers to the roadblocks they should avoid during their peregrinations and teaches them how to organize their own routes through life. Alcott's novel is, as Dewey would have it, "fecund for future experience," but it cannot be a replacement for that experience altogether.<sup>65</sup>

What Alcott could not achieve in the novel proper, however, she did achieve in her novels' circulation amongst communities of students. Their widespread use in the school space functions as the indispensable partner to the representations of learning inside the text. Sales figures, fan mail, and contemporary survey data reveal readers' active engagement with—and enactment of—Alcott's educational thematics in a shared reading experience that constitutes progressive learning. The popularity and circulation of Alcott's novels in general, and the *Little Women* series specifically, has been widely documented by Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, Beverly Clark, Catharine Stimpson, and others.<sup>66</sup> Stimpson illustrates Alcott's tremendous reach: in 1871, *Little Women* and *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870) were the two most popular books in the New York Mercantile Library, which, at the time, was America's largest lending library; in 1912, New York City branch libraries circulated 1,000 copies of *Little Women*; and in 1994, those same branch libraries still held

---

the "logical"—as opposed to the "psychological"—aspect of experience. The latter is the organic development of knowledge from personal growth and the former is the final, cumulative outcome of experience. These two aspects are "mutually dependent" (197).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>66</sup> Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy, "The Sales of Louisa May Alcott's Books," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 1 (1990): 47-65; Beverly Clark, *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003); Catharine Stimpson, "Reading for Love: Canons, Paracanons, and Whistling Jo March," *New Literary History* 21 (1990): 957-976; Janet S. Zehr, "The Response of Nineteenth-Century Audiences to Louisa May Alcott's Fiction," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 1 (1987): 323-342.

400 copies of it. In 1927, a *New York Times* poll asked American high school students “what book has interested you the most.”<sup>67</sup> Students proclaimed *Little Women* superior to the Bible—and any other text—in this category. By 1968 that novel had sold 6,000,000 copies in the United States alone.<sup>68</sup> *Little Men* never boasted such numbers, but its reach was nevertheless extensive. In the early decades of the twentieth century, to cite but one example, *Little Men* could be found in the deepest reaches of Appalachia, arriving there on the wheels of a mobile library for mountain children whose schools often did not have sufficient books.<sup>69</sup> And American students were not the only ones enamored with Alcott’s fictions. During a visit to a Japanese school in the 1930s, the American critic Alexander Woollcott began to offer a comparison between it and Jo Bhaer’s school. Woollcott, however, fumbled about for the name of Bhaer’s school until he was approached by “a round, dusky little Japanese girl” who “helped me out by supplying ‘Plumfield’ in a stage whisper.”<sup>70</sup> This Japanese child’s easy familiarity with *Little Men* and her willingness to

---

<sup>67</sup> “*Little Women* Leads Poll: Novel Rated Ahead of Bible for Influence on High School Pupils,” *New York Times* 22 March 1927; reprinted in Madeleine B. Stern, ed., *Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1984): 84.

<sup>68</sup> Stimpson argues for the cultural importance of *Little Women*. She situates the novel in an alternative canon (a “paracanon”), and by extension, in an alternative curricular space that recognizes texts that are loved by specific communities; in turn, these “text[s] sustain the group’s identity.” Under her rubric, *Little Women* becomes a kind of educational touchstone for millions of American children.

<sup>69</sup> *Little Men* traveled in a wooden crate of books along with, among other titles, Charles Dickens’s *Little Nell*, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Dred*, and Endicott Myles’ *Stories of the Bible* to rural schools in Appalachia through a program founded in 1890 at Berea College. I learned this information by seeing an actual list from the mobile library program in an exhibit on the college’s early outreach programs in the Frost Building on the Berea College Campus during a visit in December 2008.

<sup>70</sup> David A. Randall and John T. Winterich, “One Hundred Good Novels,” *Publishers’ Weekly* 17 June 1939; reprinted in Stern, *Critical Essays*, 87.

engage with this text in the school space demonstrates Alcott's pervasive, if informal, circulation amongst pupils globally.

Such circulation has its roots in the postbellum American classroom. As early as 1869, the popular press had begun to broadly codify Alcott as an educational author. By 1870 *Godey's Ladies Book* announced that, "Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy are friends in every nursery and school-room."<sup>71</sup> This proclamation of Alcott's popularity placed her novels in the context of the classroom, both the one in the home (the nursery) and the one outside the home (the school-room), suggesting the permeation of her work into multiple levels and types of learning. Through the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century textbook market, Alcott's fiction entered American classrooms most directly. The year *Little Men* was published, Princeton Professor John Seely Hart sought Alcott's approval for her inclusion, alongside Hawthorne, Longfellow, Bryant, and Stowe, in his anthology, *Manual of American Literature* (1873). With his anthology, Hart declared Alcott an author worthy of study in America's classrooms and in the nascent field of "American Literature." Following Hart's request for autobiographical information, Alcott replied with a brief note, including recent sales figures.<sup>72</sup> She additionally confessed to feeling stunned by "over a hundred letters from boys & girls, & many from teachers & parents."<sup>73</sup> Other educators took Hart's cue, and in 1907 Little, Brown, and Company released sixty-seven cent "school editions" of

---

<sup>71</sup> "Books for Home Reading," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* (Nov. 1870): 471.

<sup>72</sup> By September 1871, *Little Men* had sold 87,000 copies.

<sup>73</sup> Louisa May Alcott to John Seely Hart, 13 Sept. 1871, *Select Letters*, 161. Though few such letters are extant, they index reader's spirited engagement with Alcott's novels.

*Little Women* and *Little Men* to be sold in “lots of not less than 500 copies.” The Buffalo, New York school district immediately ordered 500 copies, and standardized Alcott in their curriculum.<sup>74</sup> Finally, in 1908 Little, Brown, and Company also published *The Louisa Alcott Reader: A Supplemental Reader for the Fourth Year of School*.

When Alcott formulated her progressive pedagogy in *Little Men*, she was already aware of her fiction’s growing inclusion in American schools, both in their formal and informal curriculums. In October 1886, just one month after *Jo’s Boys* hit bookstore shelves, Alcott received a set of letters from students in Centerville, Indiana. The children each explain that having earlier read *Little Women* and *Little Men*, they write now to inform Alcott that they are reading *Jo’s Boys* in their school. Though prosaic, the Centerville students’ letters reveal the inclusion of Alcott’s novels on their public school reading list. They also demonstrate that students who encountered Alcott in their schools did not read her novels in a solitary context, but rather, in a social and interactive fashion that included addressing the author directly.<sup>75</sup> Five out of six of the extant correspondents elide the difference between Jo and Alcott herself:

---

<sup>74</sup> James R. McDonald (Little, Brown, & Company) to James Sewell Pratt Alcott, 15 Aug. 1907, Louisa May Alcott Papers, bMS Am800.23, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>75</sup> The relative scarcity of extant student letters may well be explained by Jo March’s diatribe against fandom in Alcott’s oddly confessional chapter “Jo’s Last Scrape” in *Jo’s Boys*. Herein Jo March bemoans students who “ravag[e] her grounds for trophies” and pester her with autograph requests. She complains that they: “All begin by saying they know they intrude, and that I am of course annoyed by these requests; but they venture to ask them because I like boys, or they like the books...Emerson and Whittier put these things in the waste-paper-basket; and though a literary nurse-maid who provides moral pap for the young, I will follow their illustrious example...Jo swept away the entire batch with a sigh of relief.” Louisa May Alcott, *Jo’s Boys* (1886; reprint New York: Bantam Classics, 1995), 39-40.

Dear Jo;

I have read three of your books, and I like them real well. One was Little Men, another Little Women, and the last one is about Jo's Boys And How They Turned Out. I like Nan and Dan the best. We read two of your books in school last winter, and we are reading the last one this winter. I like you better than any of the rest.

- Minnie Darwell<sup>76</sup>

This student's apparent confusion between Alcott and Jo illustrates the dynamic way that young readers used Alcott's novels. It also suggests the way into which Jo herself "lived" as an actual instructor for her young readers. Darwell does not conceptualize them as dusty textbooks cataloging knowledge created by others, but rather as the foundation for a conversation with the author. In penning her letters, students translated their reading into active, personalized experiences. With her valediction—"I like you better than any of the rest"—Darwell invites us to recognize that students may have experienced Alcott's novels in schools in a way they did not other texts ("the rest"), and that Jo herself trumped everyone else. Though on the surface trite, Darwell's—and her fellow pupils'—assertions of personal preference constitute more than mere recitation; they indicate deliberate reflection and judgment.

Alcott personally encouraged readers like Minnie Darwell to experience her novels this way, and by extension, to use them to remake themselves. She also visited institutions of learning to personally circulate her message amongst students. At Vassar College alone, Alcott "talk[ed] with four hundred girls, [wrote] in stacks of albums and schoolbooks, and

---

<sup>76</sup> Minnie Darwell to Louisa May Alcott, 15 Oct. 1886, Louisa May Alcott Papers, bMS Am800.23 (46), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

kiss[ed] every one who asked me.”<sup>77</sup> She did not, however, limit herself to elite colleges, but entered reformatories where, as Steven Mailloux has documented, administrators attempted “to use fiction as one of many strategies for instilling self-discipline in adolescent and older inmates.”<sup>78</sup> During these visits, Alcott explicitly invited male and female inmate-students to use her novels as the means of constituting reformed selves by way emulating her fictionalized pupils’ progress. There was reciprocity in the exchange as well; Alcott integrated her experiences in these institutions into a brief episode in *Jo’s Boys*. When in this final novel the now-older Dan kills a man in self-defense, he contemplates escape from jail until a “middle-aged woman in black, with a sympathetic face” comes and shares a story with the prisoners. Upon listening to—and learning from—the kind woman’s tale, Dan decides to do the right thing, to serve out his sentence.<sup>79</sup> Alcott’s integration of her reformatory influence back into the novel demonstrates her understanding of the way in which her texts could be used pedagogically and the way in which she could intervene in readers’ active process of personal development. Just as she makes her readers into her students, they make her into their teacher. She sanctions this reciprocity in person and then solidifies it in print, expanding her sphere of influence and enabling future readers the possibility of employing the novels this way.

But students were not the only ones to use Alcott’s texts pedagogically. In 1884, the *Boston Evening Transcript* printed a letter in its columns to Alcott from a “school-teacher in a

---

<sup>77</sup> Sarah Elbert, *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott and Little Women* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 208.

<sup>78</sup> Mailloux, 141.

<sup>79</sup> Alcott, *Jo’s Boys*, 188.

village school in a far distant western state.” “Oh your books have done so much good in this school!” the teacher writes. She continues, “The children are better and happier for hearing them.” By way of proclaiming the value of Alcott’s novels, this instructor lets slip a clue to their pedagogic classroom use, namely they are “heard”—not read—suggesting a kind of communal and oral consumption. But the most remarkable aspect of the letter is the instructor’s description of how the novels have influenced her: “[T]hey have been such a help to me. I think I can understand boys and girls better now. I hope that I may be a true Mother Bhaer to my pupils.”<sup>80</sup> That last wish is pregnant with the possibilities of bringing Alcott’s progressive pedagogy into the American classroom. In playing the part, this instructor demonstrates how fictional representations of progressive pedagogy can penetrate the classroom walls, translating the novel into the foundation of live, embodied teaching.

---

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Clark, *Reviews*, 158.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “The Little Seed Which You Planted is Now a Wide-spreading Oak”: Women’s Epistolary Education in the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, 1873-1897

Study! Has our language  
Any mightier word?  
Bearing in its letters five  
Power to labor, strength to strive  
With a peaceful sword.

Safe from Harm, nor needing  
Restless to roam,  
I will lead you to the nook  
Where I linger with my book,  
Studying at Home.<sup>1</sup>

After Anna Ticknor’s opened her experimental education society in 1873, she enrolled students from places near and far like the Pawnee village in “Indian Territory,” rural Maine, the Sandwich Islands, North Carolina, Cincinnati, the Dakota Territory, Louisiana, and the outskirts of Boston. Some were quite old when they joined and others were just ending their teenage years. Many were white, but some were black. Most could

---

<sup>1</sup> “S.H.: ‘The Magic Letters S.H.’ Elizabeth Agassiz et al., *Society to Encourage Studies at Home: Founded in 1873 by Anna Eliot Ticknor* (Cambridge, M.A.: Riverside Press, 1897), 24. From a seven stanza anonymous encomium to Anna Ticknor’s Society. This chapter’s title phrase comes from “Mrs. E.A.R.” to Anna Ticknor, Chicago, 16 October 1893, reprinted in Agassiz et al., 141.



hear, but several were deaf. Many were recent high school graduates, and others had barely attended school at all. A number hailed from the country's wealthiest families and others from the working set, though the largest portion came from the expanding middle class. All of them were women. They joined in their shared desire to "devote some part of every day to study of a systematic and thorough kind," and their unification was the product of unseen epistolary bonds.<sup>2</sup> As the first iteration of distance learning in America, the Society to Encourage Studies at Home (1873-1897) harnessed the previously unexplored pedagogical possibilities of the personal letter to educate 7,086 "invisible pupils in an unchartered university," or the student body of one of America's most inclusive schools.<sup>3</sup>

The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 created an unobstructed path for geographically-separated women to connect through the mail. Anywhere the letter could travel, Bostonian Anna Ticknor realized, so too could a volume of Shakespeare or an igneous rock sample. In turn, she recognized the feasibility of using written communication as an educational tool, a schoolhouse folded inside an envelope. For the first time in America geographical boundaries did not determine educational access. Under Ticknor's guidance, asynchronous correspondence in the form of disembodied letters became a space of pedagogical and personal innovation unlike any other in America. The letter at once contracted learning into an intimate single relationship between two women and expanded it outward to incorporate thousands of texts made available to women far removed from libraries, schools, and even booksellers.

---

<sup>2</sup> "Society to Encourage Studies at Home: Rules," 1873, Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>3</sup> "An Invisible University for Women," *The New York Times*, 11 June 1877, p. 4.

In the last twenty years, historians and literary scholars have attended to the discursive origins of American nation-building. Concentrating on the foundational texts of this country—both the spoken (Jay Fliegelman, Christopher Looby, and Sandra Gustafson) and the written (Michael Warner)—they have documented the linguistic construction of civil society and the means by which shared texts enable readers and listeners access to the “arena of the national people.”<sup>4</sup> For Warner, early national era advances in printing and transportation revolutionized the way in which citizens conceptualized texts as “normally impersonal,” such that “he or she now also incorporates into the meaning of the printed object an awareness of the potentially limitless others who may also be reading.”<sup>5</sup> This depersonalizing nature of language and literature becomes for Warner the means by which “limitless others” constituted themselves into a unified whole.

Such unification based on textual objects plays an essential role in the Society to Encourage Studies at Home. Its particular mode of social cohesion, however, was formed in a later cultural moment, one saturated with the familiar and structuring bonds of sympathetic intimacy between individuals. For Society women, then, the construction of a micro-nation—an Andersonian “imagined community”—arises not out their “mediat[ed]

---

<sup>4</sup> Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, National Language & The Culture Of Performance* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); Christopher Looby, *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Sandra Gustafson, *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1990), xiii. Mary Kelley has more recently explored rigorous antebellum education in locations such as female academies, reading circles, and salons as proof of women’s similar desire—and the means by which they could—participate in civil society. See Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

imagining” of their participation in depersonalized texts, but from just the opposite: their singular engagement in deeply personal epistles. These intimate texts, ones void of references to the bodies that created them but with explicit requests for sympathy and allegiance, come to mediate—and enable—the students’ participation in the larger project of community building. Like Warner’s Republic, Ticknor’s Society comprised a textual community. In their study of published texts, students and teachers joined “limitless others” in an expansive reading project that was both intellectually *and* emotionally engaged. They gained access to this community through their work in close personal relationships with single individuals that affectively unified them in a larger democratic learning program. Lauren Berlant’s recent formulation of a “textually mediated” “intimate public” that “foregrounds affective and emotional attachments located in fantasies of the common, the everyday, and a sense of ordinariness” provides a useful name for the particular combination of this local and more global work of Society women forging personal investments in the normatively impersonal field of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Just as the Society library made thousands of texts accessible to women across the nation, correspondents made them immediately accessible through sympathy and encouragement.

---

<sup>6</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), 10. In Berlant’s “intimate public” the “‘women’s culture’ concept...sees collective sociality routed in revelations of what is personal, regardless of how what is personal has itself been threaded through mediating institutions and social hierarchy” (10). This formulation describes how differences in class, race, and physical and intellectual ability did not bar anything less than total participation in the Society to Encourage Studies at Home community. Peter Coviello’s *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) also helpfully explores how affective attachments between strangers create feelings of national belonging (in Coviello’s case, this is a unification broadly found along racial lines).

For the members of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, their academic acquisitions were often not ends in themselves. In fact, while teaching just over seven thousand women in twenty-four years may initially appear a modest accomplishment in the annals of American educational history, each of these students represented the potential diffusion of learning on a much larger scale. When in its twelfth year the Society took stock of its progress, it noted that the then 4,597 students “represent widening circles, even spheres of vibration, making the soundless impulses which go out from here reach the heart of many secluded spots.”<sup>7</sup> Both parents and children of Society students felt these vibrations as their daughters and mothers shared their newly-learned lessons around the fire or in the parlor. Schoolchildren in America’s rural classrooms felt these vibrations as Society students translated their Ancient history or British literature acquisitions into lessons for the young. Readers of poetry and short fiction felt these vibrations as Society students published their learning in *The Christian Union* or *The Atlantic Monthly*. Such “widening circles” of influence attest to the way in which small, alternative educational initiatives can have substantial—and national—results.

Very few scholars have examined Ticknor’s Society in the last hundred years. There exists a single published article on it, Harriet Bergmann’s “‘The Silent University’: The Society to Encourage Studies at Home, 1873-1897,” which is based largely on Sally Schwager’s original research in her unpublished dissertation chapter, “The Silent

---

<sup>7</sup> “Society to Encourage Studies at Home” *Twelfth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1885), 4.

University.”<sup>8</sup> Predominantly descriptive, these histories concentrate on the network of female intellectuals who helped found and nurture the Society. In both of their efforts to contextualize the Society in an era eager for improved female education but nonetheless anxious about the potential radicalism of learned women, neither Bergmann nor Schwager attend significantly to the compelling—and complex—use of the epistolary genre as the Society’s chosen *modus operandi*. Their work opened up the Society for further research and has enabled my concentration on the generic possibilities of learning through the mail and on the educational outcomes of Society students.

## I. The Work of Benevolence

Reared in a family of Boston intellectuals, Anna Eliot Ticknor (1823-1896) was well-suited to take on the cause of women’s education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. She had been educated in her family’s cavernous library, in the parlors of Boston’s women’s clubs, along the banks of the Seine, and amidst Roman relics during her family’s Grand Tours.<sup>9</sup> Her father, George Ticknor, committed himself early to the cause of American educational reform and eventually became the Abiel Smith Professor of French and Spanish Languages and Literatures and Professor of Belles Lettres at Harvard.<sup>10</sup> He

---

<sup>8</sup> Harriet F. Bergmann, “The Silent University: The Society to Encourage Studies at Home, 1873-1897,” *The New England Quarterly* 74 (2001): 447-477; Sally Schwager, “Harvard Women’: A History of the Founding of Radcliffe College (Boston, Massachusetts)” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Ticknor translated these experiences into lessons for children in her book *An American Family in Paris* (New York, Hurd and Houghton; Cambridge, Riverside Press, 1869).

<sup>10</sup> David B Tyack, *George Ticknor and the Boston Brahmins* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 87.

also served on the Boston Primary School Board, spearheaded the establishment of the Boston Public Library, and worked toward the expansion of the Boston Athenæum during his tenure as its Vice President. Her mother, Anna Eliot, also enjoyed a scholarly pedigree. Her cousin, Charles William Eliot, was the President of Harvard. Samuel Eliot, a cousin as well, taught at and presided over Trinity College (and later became the Chairman of the younger Anna's Society). Together the couple "held court" in a salon for Boston's elite in their Park Street house library.<sup>11</sup>

It was in this same fine room that with her mother Anna Eliot Ticknor began to compile her father's personal papers after his death in 1871, and it was also here that she assembled nearly two hundred women to work on an American version of an elite British educational organization. Using the title of the English "Society for Encouragement of Home Study" as an inspiration, Ticknor conceived of an epistolary organization that would suit women on this side of the Atlantic, appealing not only to the nation's most privileged daughters, but also to the working and middle classes.<sup>12</sup> By connecting her Brahmin friends with women scattered across the nation, she offered her set a worthy cause and intellectually-fulfilling labor while simultaneously providing scores of unseen women with an affordable academic experience. Like other correspondents (Ticknor's preferred moniker for her teachers), Alice James conceived of and described her volunteer teaching

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>12</sup> The British "Society for Encouragement of Home Study" was not a reciprocal correspondence program. Students studied independently from materials designed for a one-year course. At the end of this time, they took examinations to test their mastery of the material. Lillian Munger, "Society to Encourage Studies at Home," May 1884, *Report*, in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library.

as the work of benevolence, not wholly unlike other charitable causes to which elite women gave their time:

We who have had all our lives more books than we know what to do with can't conceive of the feeling that people have for them who have been shut out from them always. They look upon them as something sacred apparently, & some of the letters I get are most touching, girls who write to say that they have longed always for just such help & never hoped to get it, & the difficulties that they will overcome to join the society are incredible.<sup>13</sup>

Though falling into class condescension, James readily acknowledged that she too learned from her students. Their needs forced her to reevaluate her own educational opportunities, as well as reappraise her ability: "I in attempting to teach history am not half the fool that I look."<sup>14</sup> In James's giving academic advice to others (outwardly directed) and improving her self-understanding (inwardly directed), she came to recognize that Society teaching did her—and her set—"lots of good."<sup>15</sup> Such reciprocity meant that the benevolent blueprint for the Society was revised in practice to include the benefits gleaned by the correspondents.

Anna Ticknor was not, of course, alone in her desire to expand educational opportunities for women in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. New England's female academies had been thriving since the antebellum period, and in the 1870s, women's colleges "[sprung] up" across New England and New York (Vassar was opened in 1865; Smith and Wellesley in 1875).<sup>16</sup> Though Ticknor was well aware of these

---

<sup>13</sup> Rayburn S. Moore, "The Letters of Alice James to Anne Ashburner, 1873-78: The Joy of Engagement (Part 2)," *Resources for American Literary Study* 27 (2001): 219. James worked closely in the history division with Katharine Peabody Loring.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>16</sup> Agassiz, et. al., 4. According to Helen Horowitz, in 1870 there 3000 women enrolled in American colleges (56). The coeducational Oberlin had begun admitting women early on, in 1833.

developments, she recognized that relatively few women lived near these “centres of learning and instruction,” and even fewer could afford college tuitions.<sup>17</sup> Hoping to bridge these class and geography barriers, she gathered eight other Brahmin women to help formulate her plan. Many of them were “intimately” and “unconditionally” connected to Harvard by birth or by marriage (including, Elizabeth Agassiz, Ellen Gurney, Katharine Loring, Ellen Mason, Mrs. Anna (Eliot) Ticknor, and Anna Ticknor herself) and others had helped found the Women’s Educational Association (Lucretia Crocker); the remaining original committee member, Elizabeth Cleveland, headed the art department after her own education under the guidance of her uncle, Charles Perkins, a prominent art historian.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond their familiarity with Harvard and its pedagogical structure (including Charles Eliot’s new elective system), the women of Ticknor’s original committee were surrounded by another educational model for women’s instruction. Even as very few women could attend post-secondary schooling, by the close of the century, more than two million women participated nationally in the club movement that began in the late 1860’s.

---

For the best history of antebellum female academies, see Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak*; and for the history of the America’s women’s colleges, see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Agassiz et al., *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*, 4. In the late 1870s through the early 1890s American women could attend private colleges for \$250-500. The tuition at Wellesley College, for example, was relatively low at \$250. There students could take English courses with Professor Vida Scudder (an instructor from 1887-1892 and a professor thereafter). At the same time, women could become students in the Society to Encourage Studies at Home for \$2-3 and take an English course through an epistolary exchange with correspondent Vida Scudder. Scudder’s name is included in a list of “Correspondents who Served Two Years or More,” (Appendix A in Agassiz, et. al.) but any Society correspondence is not extant.

<sup>18</sup> Schwager, 39. Schwager’s unpublished dissertation details the history of the founding—and the founders—of Radcliff College. She also examines at great length each of Ticknor’s committee and their relationships with one another. See her “‘Harvard Women’: A History of the Founding of Radcliff College (Boston, Massachusetts)” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982).



Collectively, clubs were a more informal, though often as intellectually-stimulating, alternative to Wellesley or Vassar.<sup>19</sup> In her appraisal of American clubs' literary work, Anne Ruggles Gere argues that while wide-ranging in mission and activity, women's clubs existed as "alternative publics," places of cultural production and reorganization thriving at a time when women had few possibilities for participation in the male-dominated public sphere. Members gathered in homes and libraries to read (often aloud) and discuss texts (both those that were soon deemed canonical in the inchoate college English departments and alternative texts written by, for, and about women). They gathered to hear the book reviews or essays one another composed about the stories and essays they enjoyed.<sup>20</sup> These literary gatherings and conversations constituted, according to Gere, alternative pedagogies. In as much as their writings resembled college themes, they participated in literary discourse of a more social sort. Members often brought their sewing and enacted novel scenes in tableaux and performed their dramas' favorite acts. These academic sisterhoods cohered through social intimacy, formed from the conversations clubwomen shared about their lives and the texts that resonated with their particular trials and triumphs.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 5, 35. For further information on women's clubs, see Jane Cunningham Croly, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* (New York: H. G. Allen & Co, 1898); Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987) and Karen J Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980).

<sup>20</sup> National organizations of clubs (such as the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National League of Women's Workers, the National Association of Colored Women, and the National Council of Jewish Women) had large lending libraries that could distribute nationally texts among clubs and individual members. Gere, 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

Part women's club and part women's college, Anna Ticknor's Society was a hybrid of the available structures for female education in the period. The Society married the intimacy of a woman's club to the curricular breadth of a woman's college. Ticknor served as its *alma mater* and it would, the committee hoped, "induce young ladies to form the habit of devoting some part of everyday to study of a systematic kind."<sup>22</sup> In its initial formation, Ticknor's committee agreed on just two central tenets that would structure the organization. Learning would occur through "regular" correspondence and there would be no competitive examinations.<sup>23</sup> The former ensured the students' continued diligence and the latter differentiated the Society from traditional forms of classroom-based rote learning that placed a premium on quantity instead of quality in knowledge acquisition. A September 1877 instructional guide for Society students reminded them: "It is more desirable to remember what you read than to read too much."<sup>24</sup> Such deliberateness and regularity of Society study was, for Anna Ticknor and her contemporaries, fundamentally tied to women's health, as a lack of daily study "impairs the brain" and hence, "general health becomes deranged."<sup>25</sup> Young women who had completed their formal schooling

---

<sup>22</sup> "Society to Encourage Studies at Home: Rules," in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>23</sup> Agassiz et al., 10. Students did write exams on their own schedules; like other writings, they returned these by mail to their correspondents. In turn, Ticknor kept a close record of student performance but there is no evidence to suggest that punitive actions were ever taken against a struggling student, though a number of students dropped out each term.

<sup>24</sup> "Directions for Course IV, Part I: English Literature," 22 September 1877, in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>25</sup> Anna Ticknor, "Health" (1878), reprinted in Agassiz et al., *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*, 199. Anna Ticknor developed her views on women's health during her engagement with the work of S. Weir Mitchell.

were particularly vulnerable because they seldom appreciated any “natural connection between their school life and their new one.”<sup>26</sup> Ticknor believed that daily Society study would provide such women necessary mental and physiological “balance” to ensure their—and their families’—health.

The Society offered a broad curriculum with six main fields of study: English, History, Science, Art, French, and German.<sup>27</sup> Each of these disciplines was subdivided into specific courses (e.g. botany, American history, Shakespeare). In the humanities, similar writers were grouped “so that the student might gain a sense of proportion and perspective, and not think, as was too often the case, that each author stood alone, like a tower on a plain.”<sup>28</sup> Once students elected a particular course and paid the yearly tuition (of two dollars from 1873-1882 and of three dollars from 1883-1897), Ticknor assigned them a correspondent in their chosen discipline with whom to exchange personal letters and academic work. Together correspondent and student mapped out a term of study (October-June), with a personalized schedule depending on the latter’s available time and interest in

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>27</sup> Additionally, organizers added a pedagogy field in 1890. The Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home in the Boston Public Library includes thousands of manuscript and printed documents pertaining to all aspects of the Society. The Society’s teaching “Handbook,” however, is not extant in this collection. Assiduously guarded by instructors, this manual likely detailed more specifically the instructors’ pedagogy. Though Ticknor agreed to hand over all of the Society records to the Boston Public Library, she refused to leave the “Handbook,” ensuring that it would not be part of the Society’s history: “It was agreed to send to the Boston Public Library (on request) all the papers which would show the workings and history of the Society with the one exception of the Handbook.”

<sup>28</sup> The same personal engagement that structured the correspondent-student relationship manifested itself in the literature curriculum. Correspondents encouraged their students to concentrate their reading on primary works instead of related criticism, such that they developed a “sense of personal friendship with the poet” that “can never be attained through criticism alone.”

a given subject. The majority of students corresponded with their teachers at least once a month, most often sending along “Memory Notes.” These writings comprised the daily work of each student, and while each division advised a slightly different format, there were shared features of all such notes. Universally they were informal writings about each assignment that students composed the day after each reading. Often summaries, outlines, abstracts, and what we would now call “free writing,” appeared in these notes. And while they may initially appear little more than the paper version of schoolhouse recitations, they allowed for considerably more invention (in the form of individual selection of ideas) than their oral counterpart. In the English division, such prescribed notes often did not suit reading assignments in poetry and “lighter prose,” and so correspondents “encourage[d] the students to write abstracts or essays.” As these requirements could sound daunting to students with limited time and little prior schooling, “they may be told simply to give an account of what they have read in their own words.”<sup>29</sup> This compositional flexibility allowed students to engage their reading at a wide range of levels. When she was a Society student, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote fifteen-page essays on the Ancient History and Ohioan Lucy Keeler wrote the “best analysis I ever received” on Coriolanus, while other students wrote basic plot summaries and simple abstracts.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Mary Morison to “My Fellow-Teachers in the English Literature Course,” memorandum, December 1890, Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>30</sup> Several of Gilman’s memory notes and essays from her time as a student in the society are available in the Charlotte Perkins Gilman Collection, folder 160, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Harriet Bergman speculates that Gilman’s experience in the Society inspired her educational thematics in *Herland*. Mary Porter to Lucy Keeler, Medford, M.A., 2 January 1888, Lucy Keeler Collection, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio.



Remarks - Miss Perkins  
Report - Lesson 14 -  
Judah

- 1 Here the semi-colon seems to divide the clauses too much, yet a comma hardly enough how would — answer. It is a capital description.
- 2 Here comma needed.
- 3 Only on the coast, I think. The Canaanites — the aborigines — were probably a mixed race largely Hamitic — but all this is obscure. The Hebrews looked upon them as entirely another race.
- 4 Might mention that the Hyksos were probably then in power.
- 5 "force of character" better.
- 6 "superstitions" better here, partly to avoid repetitions.
- 7 "religious belief" or "faith" better.
- 8 "marked" or "remarkable".
- 9 Very good sketch of Saul; I have always felt much compassion for him. I don't

Figure 1: Correspondent's Remarks on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Society Homework

Notwithstanding the variety in these writing assignments, the Society intended them to solidify understanding in the student's solitary classroom: her home. In the process of scanning their memories from the previous day's study, it was hoped, that students would record—and remember—that which subjectively resonated with them. Correspondents requested that students write their "memory notes" in blank books with wide margins so that the correspondents had ample room to provide feedback in the form of corrections, additions, and suggestions. In this way, that which began as a tool of unaccompanied study transformed into a conversation between readers about a shared text. Ticknor and her staff, unfortunately, left relatively few explicit statements about the impetus or rationale for these writing assignments. Student Lucy Keeler, however, published "Wanted—A Memory" in the *Christian Union* shortly after her study of Shakespeare with correspondent Florence Dix. Her article indirectly promotes the Society's methods without mentioning it by name. It also allows us access into a student's conception of such work: "The habit of thinking and the habit of remembering," writes Keeler, "are so closely related that the same prescription applies to both." Women, according to Keeler needed "attention and practice," because memory is "acquired and not hereditary." Academic achievement for Keeler was not the domain of the naturally gifted, but rather, the result of due diligence. This meant that almost anyone could develop herself intellectually with the proper methods of "sifting" knowledge. For Keeler, traditional recitation pedagogy was little more than "an enormous waste of faculty." Instead, "The sifting process is greatly aided by the constant practice of taking notes as you read. However brief and unconnected they may be, they will yet form solid pegs on which



to hang your acquisitions, and serve to dissipate the haziness of your mental atmosphere.” At least for this student, the work of daily recording was to make knowledge “available” because “knowledge without [memory] is as useless as the contents of a safe to which the key is lost.”<sup>31</sup>

The Society established and printed a standard curriculum for each course, but they also encouraged a modicum of individual tailoring—aided by a long list of “Auxiliary Reading”—depending on the students’ needs and desires. The Society’s single personal requirement that each student be at least seventeen years old meant that “students so varied in age, opportunity and purpose,” that they felt “obliged to offer in our lists many kinds of books, from those suitable for a mother studying with young children to those necessary for teachers who were working in earnest to take higher position in schools.”<sup>32</sup> Taking their cues from their individual student’s interests, correspondents were allowed latitude in their assignments at the same time they were implored to encourage—but never demand—student engagement: “the way to get women to study after leaving school or

---

<sup>31</sup> Lucy Keeler, “Wanted—A Memory,” *Christian Union* 29 Oct. 1892, 791-792. Lucy Keeler lived in Fremont, Ohio and was the second cousin of President Rutherford B. Hayes. Her extant diaries reveal Keeler to have been an academically engaged woman who had an active reading life, both on her own and in her connection with Ticknor’s Society. According to Marilyn Ferris Motz, Keeler was known locally for her intellectual acumen, which did not win her easy acceptance in her small Midwestern community: “only by hiding her intellect, acting subservient to men, and displaying her prowess at domestic activities could she be accepted.” Keeler wrote for several nineteenth-century periodicals, including *Youth’s Companion* and *The Atlantic*. When the former offered her an editorial job in Boston, she declined due to her responsibility for caring for her aging parents. Even as she felt local social restrictions on her learnedness, at a distance she could write for publication and enjoy an active intellectual life with her Society correspondents. Motz, “The Private Alibi: Literacy and Community in the Diaries of Two Nineteenth-Century American Women,” in Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia Anne Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 193.

<sup>32</sup> Agassiz et al., 30.

college is to find out, or help them find out, what they will love to study.”<sup>33</sup> In the case of the English Department, head of the division Mary Morrison asked that her correspondents attune themselves to the particularities of each student’s struggle:

If this slow progress is owing to mental inertia or to laziness the text-book had better be at once put aside, and some stimulating author of the chosen period given to the student, who should be spurred on, and not allowed to linger over her work. If, however, her slowness comes from ill-health, or the pressure of more important duties, then we must have patience with her, and try more than ever to adapt the reading to her especial needs.<sup>34</sup>

Institutionally, then, correspondents had to construct their teaching according to the desires and abilities of their students, never assuming that one model would work for all. The means by which correspondents made this assessment was the personal engagement in the lives of their students through the epistolary exchange.

## **II. Women’s Intimacy and National Belonging**

By the time Anna Ticknor opened her society in 1873, Americans had a long and rich history of letter writing. From the seventeenth-century onward, writers relied on the epistle as a “basic mode of social and familial interaction” with friends and relatives across town and across the nation.<sup>35</sup> Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, Americans began importing “familiar” epistolary manuals that, according to Konstantin Dierks, “demystified

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Morrison, “Course 6. To My Fellow-Teachers in the English Literature Course,” n.d. Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>35</sup> David M Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006), 118.



the rules and conventions of letter-writing” for a wide range of writers.<sup>36</sup> These new manuals provided guidance not only for upper-class men, but also for women, children, and the middle class. Though nearly 400 such manuals (including cognate texts that addressed specific issues of composition, spelling, handwriting, and grammar in letters) were printed in America between 1750-1800, nearly all of them relied on the same standard rubric for proper familiar letters. They instructed writers to practice perfect earnestness, forsake ornate prose for conversational ease, and make sure never to overreach one’s class position. By the end of the eighteenth-century, juvenile guides provided letter models (but not overt instruction) for young writers, and by the mid-nineteenth century, textbooks began to include epistolary writing as a means to improve student composition skills.<sup>37</sup>

In Judith Sargent Murray’s *The Story of Margaretta*, the novel included within *The Gleaner* (1798), we see an early iteration of individualized epistolary education in America. Though the letter is housed in the imaginative realm of the novel, Murray moves beyond using it as a method to reinforce social mores or to improve general composition skills. Instead, she conceived of it as a dynamic—and socially-acceptable—space of female learning applicable to many content areas and practiced within the home. Her eponymous protagonist and her adoptive mother exchange letters as a part of the daughter’s education. Murray calls on the reader’s familiarity with the eighteenth-century’s popular and didactic

---

<sup>36</sup> Konstantin Dierks, “The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750-1800,” in *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, David Barton and Nigel Hall, eds. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 31.

<sup>37</sup> From elementary school students exchanging letters with international pen-pals to university students composing mock letters to explore various discursive communities, epistolary learning remains a part of contemporary composition pedagogy in twenty-first century classrooms.

epistolary novels of female virtue and its destruction.<sup>38</sup> Instead of reifying this plotline, however, Murray transforms the genre into a space for discourses on female contributions to history and culture (including an extended discussion on Mary, Queen of Scots) that empower Margareta and the reader simultaneously. Not only do the letters passed between mother and daughter provide an unspoken arena for such serious exchange, but Mrs. Vigillius uses them as a rhetorical space to instruct Margareta on proper epistolary practices, such as those promoted in the letter-writing guides of the period.

Margareta and her mother's early letters traveled no further than the length of the Vigillius home and their cost was confined to the price of ink and a sheet of paper. The ease of their communication belies the reality of the period's postal challenges. Even as letter-writing guides proliferated in eighteenth-century America, as late as the 1820s, few Americans engaged in long-distance correspondence due to its prohibitive cost.<sup>39</sup> By establishing rates based on weight instead of distance, however, the Postage Acts of 1845 and 1851 made sending letters more affordable. In turn, epistolary exchanges were possible for a wider range of writers, and by the 1870s "most" Americans partook in long-distance communication.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the improvement of nineteenth-century transportation technologies associated with the Industrial Revolution meant that letters arrived more quickly and more reliably than ever before.

---

<sup>38</sup> The letter, Jay Fliegelman argues, "allowed one to reflect on his or her experience, to learn from it, and to reach out beyond the prescriptive world of the household and its roles. It enhanced the development of the self, just as the novel built around the letter asserted the claims of that self." *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 29.

<sup>39</sup> Henkin, 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Keenly aware of improving postal speeds after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, Anna Ticknor realized the feasibility of using correspondence as an educational arena. Using advances in one field to remodel another, she harnessed new transportation technologies—the “swiftly-gliding railroad” and the “panting steamer”—for educational ends.<sup>41</sup> In a letter to a British friend in the spring of 1877 and after corresponding with a young woman in Japan, Ticknor details the speed with which a letter could be sent and returned within the United States: “It takes a month for her letters to reach me; but from San Francisco and from Louisiana my letters are a week on their way, so that to get an answer within the United States requires a fortnight, and all by rail.”<sup>42</sup> Even as it took a month to receive correspondence from Asia, Ticknor recognized that improving postal technologies could mean the extension of the Society’s reach well beyond the nation’s boundaries. She could, in turn, effectively compress the distance between female learners.<sup>43</sup> But the Society did more than conquer space. It created its own—one that relied, paradoxically, on the distance between correspondents in order to forge intimate connections. Consequently, it fueled a new kind of epistolary pedagogy.

“I am virtually in a mental prison in these Georgia mountains,” one of Ticknor’s students explained; “The hours devoted to my S.H. work have been like a prisoner’s

---

<sup>41</sup> S. Annie Frost, *Frost's Original Letter-writer: A Complete Collection of Original Letters* (n.p.: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1867), 14.

<sup>42</sup> Agassiz et al., *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*, 88.

<sup>43</sup> Ticknor set up two Society branch offices in 1876, one in Louisiana and one in California, which enabled students from near-by locations to enjoy faster access to their correspondents.

dreams of the world he has left.”<sup>44</sup> This student’s reverie—and her admission of painful loneliness—at once suggests the diagnosis for women cut off from the possibility of learned exchange and the cure. Correspondence with women across the nation would solace the misery of geographical imprisonment. Solitary study that was possible almost anywhere was not enough, but with the attendant promise of regular, sympathetic contact, it would imaginatively transport her to richer climes. The letter is, after all, conversation’s surrogate. Therefore, unlike the monologic lecture that is conducted by a single individual whose very performance relies on her proclamations of superior knowledge, the epistolary exchange is fundamentally dialogic. It arrives in the mailbox with the expectation of reciprocity, requiring the isolated individual to engage personally with another. Hence, instead of the student passively receiving the lecturer’s instruction, the letter-writer participates actively in her learning when she constructs her reply. A nine-term student differentiates the Society’s epistolary pedagogy from the dominate form of classroom-based teaching in the period: “I thought at first that it would be a great disadvantage to study by correspondence instead of recitation, but soon found it a great gain, as it compelled clearness on paper as well as in speech, and was conducive to habits of condensation.”<sup>45</sup> Beyond endorsing this form of learning in contradistinction to recitation (that required little, if any, active processing), this student reports that Society writing improved, instead of merely mimicking, her speech.

---

<sup>44</sup> “Mrs. A.G.D.” to Anna Ticknor, 8 July 1896, reprinted in Agassiz, et. al., 137. Students often referred to their Society studies as “S.H.”: studies at home.

<sup>45</sup> “Miss M.F.S., a nine-term student,” *ibid.*, 175.

Relationships between Society students and their correspondents, including the Georgian student's liberating one and the nine-term student's transformative one, began on paper. The letter recipient, then, had no image of the writer to call upon as she perused her mail. Had student Mabel Metcalf been able to see her instructor when she joined the Society in 1879, she may well have thought twice before enrolling. Without this knowledge, though, the upstate New Yorker began a seven-year correspondence with Vermonter Mary Pease (nee Ripley). After five years spent bridging the two hundred miles between them with dozens of letters, Metcalf's desire to see her beloved teacher ("I have long wished for a sight of your face") was satisfied on Christmas day 1884, when Pease's "likeness" arrived in the morning mail.<sup>46</sup> As the thirty-seven year-old mother opened the envelope, she had only her imagined portraits of Pease to reconcile with the photograph before her, and her initial reaction—recorded in an extant draft of a response—reveals both how powerful and how traumatizing the disparity between the two could feel: "I was disappointed...All of a sudden the Mrs. Pease of my imagination crumbled to pieces and disappeared from mental view never to return again. How am I to reconcile those letters expressive of mature wisdom which I have received with this youthful head."<sup>47</sup> Metcalf, it seems, had long imagined her teacher reverentially, as wizened and bespectacled, with a visage to match her "mature wisdom." The photograph before her, however, exposed Pease

---

<sup>46</sup> Mabel Metcalf to Mary Pease, draft, n.d., Mabel Metcalf Papers, Boston Public Library.

<sup>47</sup> Mabel Metcalf to Mary Pease, draft, Malone, N.Y., 26 December 1884, included in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

as ten years her junior. Such a startling revelation caused her to beg of her teacher: “Can you imagine the revulsion of feeling when I looked at your picture?”<sup>48</sup>

Metcalf’s indignation at the image before her at once suggests the way in which the distance between correspondents can exist as a fertile space of production (in this case, imaginative and educational production) and the liabilities associated with bridging this gap with an actual image of the other. Instead of drawing nearer to Pease in the intimate photographic exchange, Metcalf feels herself pull back in “revulsion,” her “mental view” permanently effaced. Her anxiety upon seeing Pease’s likeness gave rise to a new embarrassment: that her younger instructor was far in advance of her intellectually. This realization—that learnedness did not always correspond to age—threatened to destabilize their previously rich and engaging relationship because it so undermined Metcalf’s conception of the traditional older-teacher- younger-student paradigm. It left Metcalf unsure of what role she was to play in their subsequent correspondence.

The obliteration of Metcalf’s “mental view” of her instructor and her subsequent reaction may initially seem indicative of a destroyed relationship and perhaps even emblematic of problems of communication inherent to distance education. After this revelation, in fact, Metcalf admitted that she sometimes slipped into a “motherly tone” while writing to Pease. She had, after all, come to feel that she must “do something to bolster my self esteem.”<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Mabel Metcalf to Mary Pease, draft, Malone, N.Y., no date, included in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

But in as far as we are tempted to read this moment of revelation as the beginning of the relationship's denouement, I want to suggest that the more salient conclusion to be drawn is that the letter was a highly effective site of education, one in which race, class, and age markers could be overcome to a remarkable degree.<sup>50</sup> Whereas normative personal letters triggered the reader's image of the absent writer, Society members constructed their correspondents imaginatively.<sup>51</sup> The freedom from visual referents meant that letter-writers could invent themselves primarily as intellectually-engaged women irrespective of their backgrounds. In their letters and on the blank page, they could become, like Michael Warner's Benjamin Franklin, "being[s]-in-print."<sup>52</sup> As Society women corresponded at a distance, they used the letter not as a stopgap measure for temporarily separated individuals, but rather as a space of dynamic self-invention and academic acquisition. Though critics of eighteenth and nineteenth-century epistles have historically conceptualized the genre as one structured by a series of rules and cultural expectations that few transgressed (letters should be "simple, natural, and easy" and they should perfectly mimic the writer's social position), I want to suggest that the women of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home actively stretched the generic possibilities of the epistle in their enveloped self-invention.

---

<sup>50</sup> While the Society never disclosed the teacher's age to her students, they did require students to be at least seventeen years old.

<sup>51</sup> In his *The Postal Age*, Henkin argues that letters "bore metonymic traces of the bodies that composed them" in the form of the sender's handwriting. Such penmanship was intimately linked to the image of (and signified) its creator (100). The Society's epistles, conversely, arrived without reference to a known body because student and correspondent did not meet in person prior to beginning their exchange.

<sup>52</sup> Warner, 74.

In his study of American epistles, William Decker has recently argued that letters commonly share “genre-reflexive themes,” including separation and loneliness, along with anxiety that “letter sheet, mail, and language are inadequate to the task of maintaining relations.”<sup>53</sup> Decker also insists that the letter is an object of bodily representation that is able to fill—though often imperfectly—the void between remote individuals. This mimetic and content-driven approach to epistolarity, however, misses the productive possibilities—and the production of possibilities—in that empty space. Fortunately, Elizabeth Hewitt’s work begins to fill in Decker’s gaps. In considering how the foundational documents of the United States nationhood can represent disparate individuals (“Epistolarity allows for a fantasy of immanence that characterizes classical democracy”), she contends that: “The letter is defined not by what is said, but by its performative function.”<sup>54</sup> This formulation allows her to argue for the nation’s imaginative construction through the lens of epistolary sociability. Though Hewitt’s argument is grounded in the representative politics of antebellum literature and culture, we gain great insight into Ticknor’s innovations when we apply her generic “performative quality” to the pedagogical letter.

The asynchronous—though symbiotic—relationship between Pease and Metcalf finds expression in their synonymous articulation of how they orient themselves in their letters. Mabel Metcalf muses to her teacher in 1881, “I never talk as easily as I write,” and

---

<sup>53</sup> William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.



in November 1884, Pease reveals, “Perhaps I appear at my best in my letters.”<sup>55</sup> In both of these admissions, the writers self-consciously disclose a disjuncture between themselves in their everyday lives and the selves they perform inside of their epistolary exchange. Each woman marks a disparity between these selves, but more significantly, each qualifies the epistolary self as superior in some way. These assertions both challenge the equivalence between writing and speaking that contemporaneous letter-writing guides prescribed, affirming the way in which Ticknor and her Society members actively manipulated the rules of the epistle in their academic self-invention. Not only was the very act of educating themselves for their personal edification culturally subversive, but their inventing themselves was equally revolutionary. An 1867 manual encourages readers to: “Remember that letters are written conversations. Write as you would speak, were your correspondent beside you.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in *The Fashionable Letter Writer: or, Art of Polite Correspondence*, the author maintains that, “In letter writing, however, the grand aim should be, to write exactly in the same manner in which we should converse with persons to whom we are writing, were they present; if we do so, we shall seldom fail to write well.”<sup>57</sup> These representative instructions advocate uniformity between the written and spoken self, potentially dissuading writers from carrying on deceptions at a distance. In a period rife with cultural anxiety about false appearances and trickery—and further exaggerated in the relatively

---

<sup>55</sup> Mabel Metcalf to Mary Pease, draft, no date; Mary Pease to Mabel Metcalf, Malone, N.Y., 14 November 1884, included in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>56</sup> Frost, *Frost's Original Letter-writer*, 24.

<sup>57</sup> R. Turner, and W. Limming, *The Fashionable Letter Writer; Or, Art of Polite Correspondence: Consisting of original letters on every occurrence [sic] in life, written in a concise and familiar style, and adapted to both sexes. : To which are added complimentary cards, &c.* (n.p.: W.R. Lucas, 1833), 7.

anonymous urban spaces—these guides caution writers not to attempt to transcend their class or educational standings.<sup>58</sup> In other words, they advise not to use the letter as a space of self-invention, but rather, as a space of self-reification. Accordingly, the Society to Encourage Studies at Home members found a more radical use for the letter.

Mary Pease used the letter as an alternative space in which she was “allowed” to perform the role of instructor. After six months of regular exchange about her study of “Ancient History,” Mabel Metcalf began to shift the tone of her letters to her correspondent, inviting Pease to reveal more of herself. In May 1880, Pease pleasantly complied with her student’s inquiry: “I do not wonder at all that you have a little curiosity to know about me. No, I am not a teacher. I only wish I was. I would like it I am sure, but my friends all object to my trying it.”<sup>59</sup> Just as the Society asked all incoming students whether they were teachers outside of their Society studies, Metcalf seems to have reciprocated with a question of her own. Pease’s response, that her “friends” protestations stifled her teaching aspirations, reveals the way in which Ticknor’s Society allowed Pease an avenue to subvert oppressive gendered expectations. It enabled Pease to be the teacher she wanted to be without her community’s remonstrations. David Henkin contends that, “By the 1870s most Americans recognized the letter as a vehicle for... everyday performances of the individual self.”<sup>60</sup> In Pease’s case, however, she uses the epistle less as a space for

---

<sup>58</sup> See John Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), especially chapter three, “Reading the City: The Semiotics of Everyday Life,” and Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

<sup>59</sup> Mary Ripley to Mabel Metcalf, Rutland, V.T., 6 May 1880, included in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>60</sup> Henkin, *The Postal Age*, 118.

prosaic, or “everyday,” recitals of “self,” but instead, as a safe space for deliberate and defiant performances of her desired self. And yet oddly, she fails to acknowledge this role when she responds to Metcalf that she is not a teacher. This suggests that Pease understood the liminal space of the letter as one in which she could perform the role of instructor without wholly revising her appearance to others. This was, perhaps, possible because of Ticknor’s deliberate naming of her instructors “correspondents” and because Society work was voluntary. Hence, Pease could freely and privately retreat to the epistolary writing—an activity well within the gendered expectations of the period—without hazarding the chastisement of her immediate community.

In the epistolary space Pease constructed an invisible schoolroom with “a class of 14 students, but no two of them are together.” Drawing her students together in her desire for a collective “class,” while acknowledging that they were indeed spatially separated, Pease seems to recognize just how her imagined community resembles a traditional school, but without perfect parity. Moreover, it is this imagined quality that enables Pease to serve as a teacher outside of her friends’ prohibitions. No extant letters reveal whether Pease’s work eventually garnered the support of her immediate community, but she did continually look to her student, Metcalf, to reaffirm her role as teacher in the epistolary arena. In the course of their correspondence, Pease routinely thanks Metcalf for her “encouragement” of her teaching, affirmations that her Vermont community seems to have withheld but that allowed her continued efforts.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Mary Ripley (Pease) to Mabel Metcalf, Rutland, V.T., 13 January 1881, included in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

Just as this space—both as it is created geographically and as it exists more imaginatively—between correspondents enabled Pease to invent herself as an instructor, it meanwhile allowed Metcalf to formulate an intellectual identity for herself. Each woman cast her correspondent in the other's desired role, chiasmically constructing one another by way of their individual roles. In other words, because Metcalf looked to Pease as her instructor, Pease became an instructor; likewise, Pease taught Metcalf with the assumption that she was an intellectually-capable woman and so Metcalf began to understand herself as such. Recognizing the way in which the Society letters allowed her a space to inhabit a learned identity, Mabel Metcalf reminded her teacher that "This society is a grand thing for women like myself who have gone hungry in their youth, for a knowledge which circumstances prevented their obtaining."<sup>62</sup> While unable to obtain a traditional classroom education (presumably her preventative "circumstances" entail geographical and economic barriers), Metcalf conceived of the society as an alternative route to otherwise unattainable knowledge. She recognized that within the space of the letter she could overcome these prohibitive "circumstances." She admits to Pease, "I know that you are a thoroughly educated gentle-woman of literary tastes and ability...As for myself, there is nothing about me which would have attracted a girl like yourself had we met in ordinary society."<sup>63</sup> Metcalf's implication, of course, is that outside "ordinary society," i.e. inside the epistolary space, she can make herself "attractive" to Pease, or any other "thoroughly educated

---

<sup>62</sup> Mabel Metcalf to Mary Ripley (Pease), Westmoreland, N.Y., 18 January 1881, included in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>63</sup> Mabel Metcalf to Mary Pease, draft, no date, included in Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

gentlewoman.” Assuming a learned identity in the letter may initially seem predominately like mere expression in a liminal space, but in fact, the trying on of borrowed garments served as a dress rehearsal for a more fully expressed intellectual identity. In Metcalf’s case, this meant her gradually solidifying her learned self-conception and then mobilizing that new identity in her promotion to the rank of Society instructor, a role that required her to understand herself as a woman learned enough to guide another.

As Metcalf used the letter as a place of economic and educational freedom, Society members who faced still greater forms of societal disadvantage than did Metcalf also found intellectual—and inclusive—possibilities in their correspondence. Denied attendance at Chautauqua and mainstream educational programs, deaf students found Ticknor’s Society hospitable to their intellectual desires.<sup>64</sup> Reflecting on her fifteen years of Society work (first as a student and then as a correspondent), a deaf student remarked, “My first knowledge of

---

<sup>64</sup> Founded in 1874, a year after Ticknor’s Society, Chautauqua’s origins are found in the tradition of Methodist Camp Meetings and the Sunday School Movement. Though initially located on Lake Chautauqua, New York, the movement diversified into a wide-range of popular adult education programs that spread to communities across the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In 1878, cofounder John Heyl Vincent began the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC), a national “home-based” reading program meant to resemble college curriculums for the middle-class. The four-year curriculum, written examinations, organized discussions, and graduation ceremonies comprised the CLSC’s simultaneously sectarian and scientific program; its motto reveals its twin impulses: “We Study the Words and Works of God.” Fueled by extensive publicity and inexpensive tuition, the CLSC enrolled hundreds of thousands of students, many of whom were women. Though its enrollment was a mere fraction of the CLSC’s, Ticknor’s Society was unique in its commitment to the intimate relationship between a single student and correspondent. As one Society student noted: “The individual correspondence to my mind gives the Society a great advantage over any other system of Home Study, for there is a stimulus in personality that can never be obtained from books.” Agassiz et al., *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*, 175. Likewise, both its students and correspondents were comparatively far more diverse (in terms of race, class, and physical ability). The Society’s diversity was enabled by its organizing structure of unseen epistolary relationships. See Andrew G. Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 45, 104-107.

this Society came at a time of much perplexity, when circumstances rendered a collegiate course impracticable, and its equivalent was difficult to find. Intelligent study and the stimulus of other minds...was very desirable for me, and possible under no other system.”<sup>65</sup>

Like Metcalf, this woman originally joined the Society as a student, and later, Ticknor asked her to serve as an instructor to other students. Both Ticknor and this woman refused to allow physical disability to disqualify one for academic work. Ticknor, in fact, regarded her Society’s education by correspondence as fundamentally inclusive: “we regard no differences, making no account of age or wealth, color or race. A telegraph operator, a compositor, a matron of a public institution, a railroad treasurer...a colored teacher in the South, another colored woman well married at the North...can have the same opportunities with their wealthier sisters.”<sup>66</sup>

This egalitarian educational utopia arose from singular, intimate bonds forged between Society women. Strangely enough, it was the generic *impersonality* of Society epistles that enabled these fellowships to form. Beyond serving as an imaginatively productive space (which ultimately enabled it to be intellectually productive as well), the Society letters reveal significant intimacy between writers. In an era when popular letter-writing guides explicitly encouraged women to use personal correspondence to “bind...hearts closely together,” we see both students and teachers drawing one another

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>66</sup> “The Work Accomplished by the Boston Society” 1. Though Ticknor here touts formal inclusion, she fails to acknowledge that the letter generically permitted each of these students to disclose as little or as much about themselves and their stations as they desired. In *Epistolary Practices*, Decker writes that the exchange between two distance writers features a central paradox: “the exchange...confirms even as it would mitigate separation.” In the Society letters this confirmation of separation in the letter itself enables women to feel comfortable in the act of self-creation as intellectually engaged writers.

into epistolary relationships marked by great confidence and care, creating a nurturing educational space to be trusted.<sup>67</sup> Even as their very existence marked separation between two people, personal letters “dealt in the currency of human intimacy.”<sup>68</sup> Though Mabel Metcalf would recoil in embarrassment when she discovered her instructor’s age, Mary Pease revealed to her student two years before she sent her photograph that, “I like to get *near* my correspondents.”<sup>69</sup> Her ironic choice of preposition—“near”—suggests her belief in the letter’s ability to transcend emotional distance even as it continually reinscribes that geographical distance in its very nature. Upon receiving Metcalf’s own photograph, Pease turns her student’s outrage on its head, happily noting, “I am delighted that you look so young. There is little more than ten years between us.” In mitigating the difference in their ages by claiming that her correspondent looks “so young,” she converts Metcalf’s disappointment into an assertion of their relative closeness (“little more than ten years”) and thus contracts their division, forming a bridge of intimacy to Metcalf.

When Cincinnati student Grace Huntington suffered the death of her father, she turned to her Society correspondent for support: “A few days after your last letter my father’s foot was caught in the elevator of the building in which his office was and crushed and he died from the effects of the accident leaving a desolate household. Write to me as soon as you can.” Huntington faced the gloom of a deserted home and instead of—or in addition to—the solace of neighbors and present friends, she found in her Society

---

<sup>67</sup> Frost, *Frost's Original Letter-writer*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Henkin, *The Postal Age*, 100.

<sup>69</sup> Emphasis my own.

correspondent the compassion that she desired. The Society letter was for Huntington an acceptable place to look for emotional comfort.<sup>70</sup> Though her instructor's response is not extant, one week later, Huntington again wrote to thank her teacher for her sympathy, suggesting that she received prompt and comforting regards. The deliberate cultivation of such intimacy between students and teachers was a central tenet of Ticknor's design for her Society.

Even as the Society expanded exponentially, Ticknor maintained that: "...the work thrives so that it is reaching vast dimensions, without seeming to lose its essential element of individual sympathy." By stressing the value of "individual sympathy" in her "disembodied university," Ticknor marked her program as uniquely able to suit the needs of any one student's particular situation. Intimacy between students and correspondents encouraged the former to trust that the latter had their best interests at heart. Without personal interaction or physical reassurances, the epistle itself would have to affirm and then continually reaffirm this confidence in one another. Extant Society letters affirm that instructors over and over again asked for their students' trust. Concluding their letters with one of several variant subscriptions, instructors often designated their epistolary relationships as familiar and intimate. Signing off with powerful commandments—"Believe Me," or "Believe Me, Truly Yours," or "Believe Me, Your Friend"—correspondents repeatedly inscribed their relationships with assurances of trust and confidence.

Correspondents' pleadings to "believe me" reveal an awareness that the epistolary

---

<sup>70</sup> As Carol Smith-Rosenberg argued in her seminal "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," women's letters were a safe, socially-acceptable space for intimate, emotional exchange between women. *Signs* 1(1975): 1-29.



relationship—one without knowing glances, gentle nods, warm handshakes—had to be explicitly codified with faithful rhetoric in order to convince students that their efforts were in earnest. Moreover, these commands had to persuade students that their correspondents' preceding curricular plans or tactful corrections were the result of refined training or careful consideration. In this type of subscription the instructor continually asserts both her academic authority and her caring dependability. Housed together in a sealed envelope, these essential twin attributes became the professional model for Ticknor's epistolary pedagogy.

### III. Circulation: Publicity, Gender, and Geography

I go to see my mother every day, and I tell her about the children. A little colored girl living with her hears me, and she brought vividly to my mind how your teaching me widens out to many others; for when I remarked to my mother that my children told every new thing they learned at home, the girl said 'And I teacher it to the *hands*,'—the colored people in the 'quarters.'—Anonymous Student, 1892

Soon after Anna Ticknor died in October 1896, one of her long-standing students from Savannah, Georgia opined: "...Miss Ticknor was emphatically my Alma Mater; she supplied all that my natural mother (talented as she was) could not give; and whatever is worthy in my character or daily life, whatever is my success as a teacher, is largely due to her."<sup>71</sup> As *alma mater*, the nurturing mother, Ticknor worked within and through the home to foster intellectual outlets for her Society students. All the while she persisted in using the traditional and gendered language of domesticity to describe her work and her goals. Each year that the Society celebrated its birthday with a joyful gathering and status report,

---

<sup>71</sup> Agassiz et al., *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*, 144.

Ticknor reiterated what she claimed was her exclusive interest in nurturing women's domestic lives. Society studies, according to Ticknor, should not encourage students to ignore their responsibilities in the home, their "natural sphere."<sup>72</sup> And even as increasing numbers of educated women began to enter the work force and their career choices expanded beyond school teaching alone, the Society to Encourage Studies at Home held steady in its assertion that: "It is the home we are working for" and that "whatever our share in the much discussed higher education of women, our doctrine is always that...there can be no higher earthly aim in her education than that of fitting her to elevate the character and increase the resources of the home."<sup>73</sup> As Ticknor stated it, then, the Society encouraged women to daydream about Shakespeare or botany while washing the dishes—"Its mistress may labor with her own hands in its service, but while she sews, or cooks, or scrubs, her mind is cheered by thoughts of the subject she is studying"—but it stopped short of encouraging them to use such subjects to transcend their roles as wives and mothers.<sup>74</sup>

Anna Ticknor's insistent rhetoric of women's "natural" domestic duties and her modest educational aims belies the actual workings of her Society, both in its innovative epistolary pedagogy and in the actual use its students made of their studies. In fact, Ticknor's students, engaged and eager as they were to share their learning, often strayed far beyond the home and translated their learning from the relatively private sphere of a two-person correspondence into a wider network of learning in the schoolroom, in the reading

---

<sup>72</sup> "Society to Encourage Studies at Home," *Twelfth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1883), 12.

<sup>73</sup> *Twentieth Annual Report*, 6; "Society to Encourage Studies at Home," *Tenth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1883), 12.

<sup>74</sup> *Twentieth Annual Report*, 6.

club parlor, and in the popular press. Ticknor did not prohibit or even discourage this circulation—or use—of her Society’s lessons, but her unceasing reiteration of its domestic aims at first glance suggests a deep-seeded ambivalence about the role that educated women should and would play in the final years of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it reveals an implicit clash between the Society’s stated aims and its actual results.

Anna Ticknor began her enterprise by diligently policing its structural, political, and rhetorical appearance. She strove to avoid charges of implementing “anything technical or learned,” adjectives that could suggest gender transgressions.<sup>75</sup> Though Ticknor and other blue-blooded Boston women conceptualized, organized, and implemented the Society, they invited Samuel Eliot (Ticknor’s cousin) to serve as its chairman and oversee its quarterly meetings and annual gatherings. His presence, they hoped, would “add dignity and weight to these occasions,” revealing their own anxiety about the insufficient authority of a society created for and by women alone.<sup>76</sup> This structural decision also entailed Ticknor’s appointment of herself as “secretary” (a designation apparently in name only). Ticknor, though, was quick to defend Samuel Eliot’s role when Horace Scudder, the prominent American editor, began publishing notices of *her* work (i.e. not Eliot’s) in the *Churchman*. She insisted: “Our chairman does much more than preside at our Annual Meeting. He presides at our frequent committee meetings, has an important voice in the selection of books, and is continually consulted on other

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., i.

matters, indeed we depend very much on his judgment and advice.”<sup>77</sup> Drawing on the language of female dependence to reassure Scudder (and by extension the American reading public) that she was not up to radical initiatives, Ticknor carefully praises Eliot in order to displace the Society’s authority from herself to a suitable man, even as all extant records indicate that she always tightly held the Society’s reins.

Horace Scudder’s “mistaken” account of the Society as solely Ticknor’s initiative signified the dangers of public notice. She initially strongly resisted all published accounts of her work in a cultural moment still uncomfortable about what to do with highly educated women (such learning remained a potential liability to one’s marriage prospects). Hoping to avoid scandal of any sort, Ticknor insisted during her formulation of her program that, “home study for women should be as little as possible associated with public notice and external excitement” and that it “would not be healthily affected by...public comment or applause, any more than by the artificial excitement of open competition, certainly not if we should seek it ourselves.”<sup>78</sup> Here the priority is on the efficacy of study itself, as the Society as a financial enterprise would certainly have been “healthily affected” by “public comment or applause.” But as much as Ticknor hoped to keep the press at bay, after *The Atlantic Monthly* ran a two-page acclamatory report about the “exceedingly effective” Society in September 1875, the floodgates were open for the publication of hundreds of other newspaper stories promoting the Boston program. This advertising of

---

<sup>77</sup> Anna Ticknor, “To Horace Scudder,” October 3, 1875, Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

<sup>78</sup> “Society to Encourage Studies at Home,” *Eighth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1881), 8.

sorts multiplied the number of students each term thereafter.<sup>79</sup> Eventually, Ticknor slowly came to accept publicity as a *fait accompli* and, in fact, such notice seemed to her proof of the educational necessity of her Society.

The newspaper accounts of the Society lauded it as: “the lifting up of education to a point higher than showy accomplishments,” and others asked, “should not [it] be copied indefinitely?”<sup>80</sup> Cautioning her members in light of such encomium, Anna Ticknor reminded her teachers, students, and the public that the program would always remain firmly centered in the home. In fact, for the first nine years, Ticknor ran it out of her own parlor, allowing herself no latitude for hypocrisy. Any domestic revolution that she initiated would happen without her leaving her own house. But when nearly 1,000 students enrolled in 1881-1882, she relented: “the Society, after enjoying the hospitality of a private house for its head-quarters for nine years, should establish itself, in a modest way, in hired rooms.”<sup>81</sup> In the same breath that Ticknor announced her move to “hired rooms,” she also raised the tuition from \$2 to \$3, a change that may well have hastened the decreasing enrollments in the years after 1882.<sup>82</sup> For Anna Ticknor this transition from

---

<sup>79</sup> “Education,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 36 (1875): 372-373. Though this article appears anonymously, in a letter to Horace Scudder in August 1876, Anna Ticknor thanks him for his “pleasant notices of our Society in the *Scribners* and *Atlantic*.” From 1875 to 1889, *The Atlantic Monthly* published at least six articles on the Society.

<sup>80</sup> *The Herald*, 6 June 1880; *New York Times*, 31 January 1877; *New York Tribune*, 9 Sept. 1875.

<sup>81</sup> “Society to Encourage Studies at Home,” *Ninth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1882), 11.

<sup>82</sup> In the same year, women’s private colleges such as Vassar, Smith, and Wellesley charged \$250-450 (between \$5,230 and \$9,415 in today’s dollar). By comparison, a year’s tuition in Ticknor’s Society would cost \$42 (pre-1882) and \$63 (post-1881) in today’s dollar. Samuel H. Williamson, “Six Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present,” *MeasuringWorth*, 2008, accessed 18 Aug. 2008, [www.measuringworth.com/uscompare](http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare).

“home labor” to more commercial labor (with new attention to costs) and its negative effects on enrollment may well have signified the dangers of women overreaching their sphere of influence. Nevertheless, she continued to explicitly advocate for the local while her students enacted the global exchange of knowledge. Such apparent ambivalence, however, veils the much more common historical dilemma of individuals (especially women) working for systematic change in the face of a dominant culture of resistance.

The case of Bronson and Louisa May Alcott illuminates this very tension. Working in a culture unwilling to accommodate his extremist ways, Bronson, we recall, was run out of his Temple School because of his pedagogical radicalism. Learning from her father’s mistakes of stridency, Louisa disguised her own progressive—and radical—pedagogy in what appeared to be a relatively conservative form, the domestic novel. In that genre she was able to forward her dynamic instruction without garnering the public vitriol that her father faced. Likewise, in her biography of Catherine Beecher, Katherine Kish Sklar succinctly names this paradox of progress in terms of her subject’s “skill in altering the forms of her own culture even while she insisted that she was preserving them.”<sup>83</sup> Anna Ticknor, like Beecher before her, developed just such a keen sense of how best to facilitate educational change. Her strategies hinged on her ability to maintain the Society’s guise of domestic preservation (thus preventing dismissive charges of women’s rights radicalism) while enabling her students—women who were not necessarily publicly affiliated with the

---

<sup>83</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 72. Mary Kelley identified a similar practice in antebellum female academies that maintained the language of republican motherhood which, in turn, “licensed a more expansive gendered republicanism that women had been deploying in civil society since the end of the eighteenth century.” Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 102.

Society—to implement change in both their local and national communities.<sup>84</sup> By translating their private epistolary experience into other genres of learning, the Society students then made public both new ways of knowing and new knowledge.

\* \* \* \*

The exchange of letters between two geographically—though not emotionally—separated women was the Society’s principal teaching method. This process directly educated 7,086 students in twenty-four years; however, this number reveals only the beginning of the Society’s much larger contribution to American education. The letter’s original audience of one easily multiplied when the recipient shared her learning: in the parlor, in the schoolhouse, in the press, and in the clubroom. The most common path for such sharing was the bloodline within the family. The late-century vestiges of the ideology of republican motherhood meant that student-mothers translated Society lessons into material for their children. Schoolteachers shared their learning with their young pupils in the nation’s classrooms, and clubwomen exchanged their knowledge with one another in parlors and local libraries. Though perhaps more oblique in method, the popular press also became an outlet for many students to publish and circulate their learning in short fictions and essays, effectively making the American reading public the recipients of the Society’s

---

<sup>84</sup> Ticknor did support her students’ circulation of their learning. In a February 1877 letter to student “B.P.D.” Ticknor explained: “...You say you do not let your neighbors know of your studies, lest they suspect you of neglecting your duties. It seems to me that, by this time, they must have practical demonstration of the performance of your duties; and, by silence about pursuits which they might be induced to share, you are to some extent, great or small, depriving them of an interest and incentive. Few can be supposed to be likely to share or to profit by the Goethe studies, but the wholesome English reading would, if they could be lured to it, improve and lift their characters, through their intelligence. You ought to be a missionary, and open their eyes gradually to the beauty and refreshment of some higher intellectual interest than a newspaper or a magazine.” Anna Ticknor to “B.P.D.”, Boston, 21 February 1877. Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

lessons. In each of these increasingly disseminated modes of transmission—and with missionary zeal—Society members articulated the lessons they learned for a new audience, often shifting learning genres along the way.

When a Society reading assignment, such as the *Life of Benjamin Franklin*, became a schoolroom lecture about American invention, Ticknor's students who had engaged in private correspondence marked by intimacy and trust converted their knowing to more public forms of discourse. In this kind of knowledge rendering, they synthesized the material gleaned in their individual relationships with Society teachers and library books into new pedagogical scenarios. This transmission suggests great flexibility in the students' conceptions of learning. Consequently, they introduced revised methods of instruction with expanded curricular offerings for diverse audiences, from aging fathers to students in the postbellum South. These women treated their epistolary educations as material to be shared, instead of the material for self-advancement alone. Indeed, if intimacy structured the original epistolary exchange, generosity structured its circulation.

Maternal dissemination was the most ubiquitous means of knowledge circulation from the Society. Mothers who studied botany or American history with the far-flung correspondents replicated the process of shared learning and created new curriculums for their children (and sometimes for their parents as well). By the 1870's this kind of mother-teaching had a long, established history in America.<sup>85</sup> From the late eighteenth century onward, mothers across the country had conceived of their own education as an enabling force in the development of their children. The learned and unmarried republican woman

---

<sup>85</sup> See Sarah Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America: Women's Narratives on Reading and Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004).



represented, according to Linda Kerber, “an unenviable anomaly.”<sup>86</sup> With children, though, she could use her knowledge to perform a “great service to the Republic”: the raising up virtuous male citizens.<sup>87</sup> The instruction of sons—and eventually daughters as the century wore on—became a way to justify useful and improved female education. Not surprisingly, then, Society students frequently reported mobilizing their epistolary learning to instruct their offspring in their newly acquired disciplines. Boston’s *Sunday Herald* took note of this trend when it lauded the Society as “reach[ing] far and wide,” confirming the “old saying...that men are mainly what their mothers make them, and this society is educating and training our mothers of today and our mothers yet to be.”<sup>88</sup>

The act of mother-teaching was not particular to Ticknor’s society, but the content of the lessons often was. An 1878 student in the English Literature division confessed that since her own enrollment, her children (of both genders) had “forsaken Mother Goose, and neglect[ed] Hans Andersen while all the bedtime stories must be about the lovely Lady Una, with her milk-white lamb, or the brave Red-Cross Knight.” Exchanging Andersen for Spencer, a decidedly more sophisticated curriculum, this student enabled her children to imaginatively inhabit the *Fairie Queene* instead of reciting nightly nursery rhymes: “As we were gathering ferns and flowers in the woods, I heard his sister question him as to whether, if we should meet the dragon there, he would be brave enough to be our Red-

---

<sup>86</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 190.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>88</sup> *The Sunday Herald*, Boston, 9 June 1878, n.p. Included in an 1878 Society scrapbook in the Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, Boston Public Library, Boston.

Cross Knight.”<sup>89</sup> This child’s contemplation of a bodily inhabitation of the Spenserian hero suggests the way that this Society student animated her own learning while reconfiguring the traditional home curriculum.

The Society not only influenced the lessons students passed *down* to their children, but it also gave rise to lessons passed *up* to their parents and *over* to their spouses. An 1883 student described a kind of inverted mode of hereditary learning that the Society indirectly created: “My father became interested in my work, and the books I read were a source of great pleasure to him...He was a professional man, not much given to reading outside of his specialty, and the Boston course opened up to him something entirely new.”<sup>90</sup> Likewise, another student in the same year described how she and her spouse shared in Society learning: “my husband and I have been helped over many lonely hours by the books needed for study.”<sup>91</sup> In both of these instances, daughters and wives shepherded the adult men in their lives through broader curriculums, nurturing their learning and expanding the single-gender constituency of the Society. Indeed, such sharing of Society material forged intellectual bonds between family members, with women significantly serving as the fount of the new knowledge. Their doing so suggests the value these women—and their family members—ascribed to their studies. Not only were the readings worthy of

---

<sup>89</sup> “Society to Encourage Studies at Home,” *Fifth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1878), 14.

<sup>90</sup> “Society to Encourage Studies at Home,” *Tenth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1883), 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

transmission to children, but they were also valuable to those with greater access to educational opportunity (the professional father and the interested spouse).<sup>92</sup>

At times, such transmission extended beyond the immediate family. An 1892 correspondent described how her own Society work filtered to her extended family and then transformed the pedagogical strategies of a cousin, “a rather clever and educated fellow, [who] became so interested in my work that...he organized a class of younger persons for the study of American history. I gave him the benefit of your lists and maps... He put them through on such original lines, making them think instead of cram facts, that the results quite dazzle them. They do not know it, but they are all S.H.-ers.”<sup>93</sup> In this case, the Society student’s studies in the private domestic space travel outward to the public realm, indexing the permeable line between private and public in late nineteenth-century culture. Indeed, Ticknor’s pedagogy—an alternative to “cram[ming] facts”—infused American public education in this translated iteration of Society learning.

The intimacy of the home may well have emboldened Society students to become teachers to their family members, but they also transmitted their learning far beyond their own parlor walls. As schoolteachers and authors, Society women engaged a much larger “classroom” in which to spread their newly-acquired knowledge across the nation with missionary avidity. For the childless Helen Clark Thompson (1835-1893) of Bertie County, North Carolina, her Woodville Graded School became a different sort of offspring, “a

---

<sup>92</sup> Ticknor was well aware of this mode of dissemination: “...we are really doing something unique, because we are making it penetrate more into distant homes than any school can do which merely sends back a student, admirably grounded perhaps, but having the stores she carries home so divided that the members of the family know probably less of her knowledge than when it can be made week by week the subject of family sympathy.” Note the men’s department and its demise.

<sup>93</sup> Agassiz et al., *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*, 135.

child of Studies at Home,” born of its epistolary courses and a postwar South in dire need of new schools.<sup>94</sup> Thompson was an active Society member, studying in several departments during her years of epistolary learning. In 1886 she traveled to the Annual Meeting in Boston and was one of four students to publicly present to the Society a writing from her previous year’s study—“a piece of imaginative prose.” While her academic correspondence with her instructors is not extant, Ticknor included several of her letters about the school she opened in Woodville, North Carolina in the Society’s *Sixteenth* and *Seventeenth Annual Reports*.<sup>95</sup> In these published letters “Mrs. T” effusively reports her debt to Ticknor, and the larger community of the Society, for the knowledge, inspiration, and monetary support it provided her and her southern school. Her story illustrates the way that a relatively small educational experiment in Boston had extraordinary multi-generational and geographical reach.

In 1871, Helen McKenzie Clark of Bertie County, North Carolina married her first cousin, Thomas W. Thompson. She was already thirty-six and a schoolteacher at Bertie Union Academy when they wed. They made an appropriate match, as both the Clark and Thompson families owned large plantations on the Roanoke River before the Civil War. Lewis Thompson, father of Thomas, owned more than 1,000 slaves on two plantations (the one in Bertie County and one in Rapides Parish, Louisiana) at the outbreak of the war. Beyond his landholdings, Lewis Thompson was a successful lumber distributor and trustee

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>95</sup> These reports name “Mrs. T” or “Mrs. T.W. Thompson” as a resident of Lewiston, North Carolina. State enumeration roles enabled me to identify her as Helen Clark Thompson, the wife of plantation owner Thomas W. Thompson.

at the University of North Carolina. When Lewis died in 1867, Thomas W. took over his father's businesses. He also seems to have inherited his father's commitment to education in North Carolina, heartily supporting—in money and in spirit—his wife's teaching and Society participation.<sup>96</sup>

Following the Civil War, Helen Thompson worried that local youth in Eastern North Carolina were “growing up in ignorance,” without the educational continuity provided by longer school terms and consistent instruction. Though she had previously taught at Bertie Union Academy (later named Woodville Academy), Thompson took “the burden of all expenses herself” and opened her own Woodville Graded School in approximately 1888. In its first year, according to Thompson, the school served fifty to seventy students whose parents paid ten dollars a term for up to five children to attend. At this tuition level, Thompson and two other instructors struggled with unruly pupils who resisted their discipline. In 1890, Thompson raised her tuition to \$5 a student, losing forty in the process, but “getting better work, and better discipline.”<sup>97</sup> As she welcomed more serious students, however, Thompson suffered financial setbacks. Even as a fire and flood left her \$50.00 in debt to her school's teachers, she took up “truck-farming” firsthand to

---

<sup>96</sup> Lewis Thompson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/t/Thompson,Lewis.html> and “Descendents of Colin Clark,” <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/u/r/q/Margaret-molly-W-Urquhart/GENE9-0003.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Helen Thompson's student body was comprised of “a class formed from well-to-do people before the war, who are much reduced in circumstances; and the class who are making some money and coming to the front; in fact they are standing, both young women and young men, on the borderland of good and bad citizenship.” *Seventeenth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1890), 12.

cover her costs.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, she looked to her Society sisters to fill the school's empty coffers, effectively rallying members at a distance to support her southern efforts.<sup>99</sup> And indeed they contributed. Thompson's school became a collective offspring of the Society, one in which a student did the teaching, Anna Ticknor gifted used texts, and the extended sisterhood contributed the necessary funds.

Just as Society student-mothers modified their domestic pedagogy as a result of their own learning, Helen Thompson's association with the Society to Encourage Studies at Home dramatically transformed what she taught and how she taught it. In her antebellum instruction, Thompson offered a standard curriculum at Bertie Union Academy: reading, writing, and arithmetic.<sup>100</sup> But when she opened her own school after

---

<sup>98</sup> Truck-farming is the practice of producing goods for transportation to distant markets. Though Helen Thompson notes that her husband has given financial support for the school and that she has taken up truck-farming, it is curious that she seems to be in such dire financial straits. Following Lewis Thompson's death, Thomas took up his father's business interests and evidence in the financial records extant in the Lewis Thompson Papers at the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina suggests that the family continued to prosper financially in the post-war years. Given the deep pockets of the Thompsons, it seems that Helen committed herself to maintaining a self-sustaining school. When this was not possible, it appears that Helen Thompson took up additional forms of labor herself (truck-farming) and solicited the aid of other women.

<sup>99</sup> "Unfortunately the fire and floods have left me in debt \$50.00 to our teacher of last year, but she, very kindly, has given me time to pay it. Though I haven't succeeded in renting my house at Lewiston since January, I see a way to pay my debt very soon. I am truck-farming....Though not half the patrons of the school have paid their bills...and many of them will not even pay for their books, if alive, I shall certainly have some sort of school next September...I must again thank the ladies for their timely aid in the beginning of our school. Without it the school would have been 'swamped.'"

<sup>100</sup> "Historic Woodville: Bertie Union (Woodville Academy)," <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ncbertie/woodville/bertieunionsch.htm>. Accessed December 21, 2008. Thompson's new curriculum for the Woodville Graded School may be partially explained by the radical transition from common schools (in which all students learned together in a shared space with infrequent access to textbooks and other materials) to graded schools (in which instructors grouped students by age and curriculums were dramatically revised to incorporate new, less empirical pedagogies) in the postbellum South. See Chapter One, James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

the war, she included lessons in Latin, French, Greek, and mythology, subjects generally outside of the standard curriculum of rural North Carolina schools, but well within the curriculum of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home.<sup>101</sup> Thompson was not alone in her translation of material for younger students. Over its lifetime, the Society enrolled more than 1200 schoolteachers as students, approximately twelve percent of its student body. “Miss F.T.,” a Society student and public schoolteacher in Frederick, Maryland described her own 1880 teaching as equally indebted to Ticknor’s program: “I was teaching a class of thirteen in modern history, and saw, step by step, what invaluable aid my S.H. study was in inspiring them with a vivid interest and clear ideas, while the auxiliary list suggested many delightful books, which I gave them to read outside of school hours...Two other large classes I also succeeded in interesting by means of my ‘Society Work.’” In both of these instances, students wielded the Society’s extensive offerings to enrich classrooms by expanding their curricular depth.

The Society’s influence, however, extended well beyond the curricular offerings at Thompson’s school, inducing nothing less than her total reconception of learning itself: “Instead of accumulating a mass of facts and dates (which has been a great disappointment to me) and deserving 100 per cent. on all recitations, there seems to have been a readjustment of mental faculties, and a power never felt before of going to the heart of a

---

<sup>101</sup> At least one of her students at the Woodville Graded School intended to use her Society-infused education to teach others. In 1890, Thompson’s oldest and most advanced pupil planned to sit for a scholarship to the Normal College of Nashville, Tennessee. *Seventeenth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1890), 12.

problem and solving it, directly, for other people.”<sup>102</sup> Thompson refers to this revolution in her thinking as a “curious and unexpected result” of her experience as a Society student. This description along with her ambiguous jesting about rote learning—“which has been a great disappointment to me”—suggests that Thompson’s epistolary learning transformed her understanding of an ideal education. Instead of accumulative learning for self-edification through external validation, “deserving 100 per cent. on all recitations,” Thompson appears to apprehend a new constructive use of learning for problem-solving and to benevolent ends. This alteration in Thompson’s conceptualization of education came of her experience of personal change as a result of her Society participation. In an 1889 letter to Ticknor, she writes that her school was “in existence *only* through the influence of Studies at Home on my own life and character.” Later, she clarifies her debt, “it is all the outcome of our Studies at Home for without that training, I should never have had enough confidence in myself to assume such a responsibility, and I should never have tried to imitate such a noble charity, without having felt it myself.”<sup>103</sup> Here Thompson intimates that beyond the curricular and pedagogical, the Society inspired institutional creation itself.

As Thompson translated epistolary learning for her secular school, student and Sunday School teacher Lucy Skeel endeavored to nurture her students’ spiritual growth

---

<sup>102</sup> Society to Encourage Studies at Home, *Seventeenth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1890), 11.

<sup>103</sup> Society to Encourage Studies at Home, *Sixteenth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1889), 5.



through the Society's art history pedagogy and curriculum.<sup>104</sup> At the June 1881 Annual Meeting, Skeel presented her essay on "The Renaissance" and then proceeded to use her art history studies to enhance her teaching and begin her own women's group in Newburgh, New York. Moreover, she used the popular press to disseminate her innovative and Society-infused methods more widely. In a July 1881 of the *Christian Union*, she published "To Sunday School Workers," an article advocating the pedagogical use of art reproductions, in photographic form, in Sunday School classrooms. These images, according to Skeel, would visually correct young students' biblical misunderstandings, as "we all know how tired the children sometimes become in Sunday-school, and how little attention they pay to the teacher's explanation." Skeel reports asking her students to identify St. John the Baptist and getting the comic reply; "Oh, I know him; he lives near us, down by the river." At this moment, Skeel realized that "If I could have showed him Bugiardini's picture...I think the lesson would have been made easier for both scholar and teacher."<sup>105</sup> Skeel's advocacy of the art image as a teaching tool evidences Society instruction infused into the religious arena.

Lucy Skeel's introduction of images into the Sunday School classroom was not the only public trace she left of her Society studies. In an 1887 edition of the *Christian Union*, she published "Book's Tourists," a prescription for serious readings and rules for other women's clubs to emulate. Here she described her own study group as one that "journey[ed] through Europe by meeting once a week at the houses of different members."

---

<sup>104</sup> Art history students and correspondents sent reproductions of all sizes through the mail, allowing members rare access to images unavailable in their local communities.

<sup>105</sup> Lucy Skeel, "To Sunday School Workers," *Christian Union*, 6 July 1881, 8.

Women unable to travel widely gathered each week for the serious study of European art, architecture, criticism, and literature. In effect, the New York club replicated almost exactly (though in live form) the “Imaginary Journeys” curriculum that Ticknor’s Society offered students who vicariously took the Grand Tour through their epistolary exchange about European arts and literatures. Skeel’s club translated works from French, and they prohibited members from distracting the discussion with simultaneous “plain sewing or fancy work...as bitter experience has convinced us that the book has yet to be written that can hold its own when whispers of ‘Scissors, please!’...make a murmured accompaniment to the reader’s voice.”<sup>106</sup> This injunction and the group’s ambitious reading schedule distinguishes Skeel’s group from the majority of clubs whose members divided their attention between the discussion at hand and their sewing projects. Hence, even as Ticknor’s Society spawned club participation, it seems to have induced a change in tone.<sup>107</sup>

Skeel’s intellectually ambitious club was only one of dozens organized by single Society members. In the its final four years, the number of women’s club members studying indirectly under the Society’s guidance eclipsed the number of individual paying students. Like Skeel, scores of students used their Society curriculums and materials (including books, images, and scientific samples) to construct programs of study for their hometown clubs to follow. In Kalamazoo, Michigan, for example, the local newspaper reported: “...It is noted of certain ladies in Michigan who are connected with the society that they took respectively zoology and physical geography, and each made her study of

---

<sup>106</sup> Lucy Skeel, “Book’s Tourists,” *Christian Union*, 15 December 1887, 663.

<sup>107</sup> Ruggles-Gere, 35.

service to a large number of local students, the one who took zoology carrying on a class of 128 members upon the same course.”<sup>108</sup> Society members who “made” their “study of service” to others disseminated their epistolary education on a large scale, effectively infusing their own communities with Ticknor’s program. When such students translated their studies to the club classroom, they retroactively made the Society into a modified Normal School, a source of both curricular and pedagogical training. By 1893, the Society’s twentieth year, enrollment had dropped to 378 students engaged in epistolary relationships and 379 club members learning in the decidedly more social and alternative classroom of the club parlor. In its final year, the Society enrolled 329 individual students and 468 club members. Shortly before her death in 1896, Anna Ticknor appeared reconciled to this shift, even as it hastened her Society’s decline: “We may...recognize the social influence of these Clubs, as being perhaps greater, in spreading knowledge and its attractions, than that of individual members who may not reach more than their own households, though one who has social habits and gifts has often been known to interest a whole neighborhood or village.”<sup>109</sup>

The upsurge in club participation dramatically expanded the Society’s influence, while Anna Ticknor held fast to her commitment to the single learner, recalling an earlier moment in American self-education, when Emersonian self-reliance founded the tools for

---

<sup>108</sup> “Studies at Home,” *Daily Telegraph*, Kalamazoo, MI, 19 August 1876. The Society made their collected materials available club members: “Special aids were given to students in the different branches. In science, specimens were sent for chemical analysis; in art, *The Portfolio* was sent in turn to various members, and a leading library established, the students paying two cents a day for the use of a book and meeting the expense of returning to the secretary. The study of English prose literature has received especial attention under advice of the proper.”

<sup>109</sup> *Twenty-third Annual Report*, 6.

learning in a decidedly asocial location: the individual mind. Moreover, Ticknor's Society was remarkably egalitarian—enrolling, amongst others, African Americans, working class wives, the physically disabled—whereas women's clubs of the same period were almost always racially and religiously segregated.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, even as her ambivalence seeped into her reflections on the club movement, Ticknor apparently accepted that her students would use their learning in these rapidly expanding social networks.<sup>111</sup>

Unlike Helen Thompson or women's club leaders who looked directly into the eyes of the students and members with whom they shared their Society learning, Anstis Spencer, Caroline Swan, Emma Levi, and many others disseminated their society learning to audiences they could not see. These women, along with dozens of other students and teachers, published Society-inflected essays, poems, and stories in American periodicals at the turn of the century. Their writings, enabled in various ways by Ticknor and her sisterhood, served to distribute multiple components of Society learning and pedagogy, gradually affecting broader educational change. Anstis Spencer, like many others, contributed essays to a variety of postbellum periodicals that advanced the Society's pedagogy without mentioning it directly. Spencer delivered her essay "Values as Affected

---

<sup>110</sup> Gere, 5. Gere argues that "White middle-class clubwomen, for whom race was a prominent feature of self-identification—just as it was for women from other social backgrounds—devoted considerable energy to constructing and affirming their positions of privilege and power by using exclusionary tactics, both literally and figuratively," 5.

<sup>111</sup> Following Ticknor's death and the closing of the Society in 1897, the remaining staff founded the Anna Ticknor Memorial Library from the Society's store of books. Its organizers had women's clubs in mind when they planned for the library: "Too often these women's clubs have been hampered in their work for want of books; there is no way to borrow books away from the literary centres, and yet there are many people who would be glad to pay a moderate charge for the use of books." Ticknor's library holdings, then, came to support the movement that had diminished the Society's student body. "Society to Encourage Studies at Home," *Twenty-fourth Annual Report* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1897), 9.

By Transportation” at the 1893 annual gathering, and then a year later she published “A Vacation Hint” in the *Congregationalist*. This essay argued for the benevolent instruction of young girls in rural America by educated women on holidays: “That little girl will, in all probability, grow up to be an ignorant woman, perhaps a bad woman, and yet now, for a little while, her heart and head are hungering for something better.” Even as she pessimistically believed in the predetermined ignorance of country girls, Spencer averred that it is the “country visitor[’s]” responsibility to disseminate her own knowledge of botany or biology to “inspire and uplift” the local children.<sup>112</sup> Thereafter these leisure-class women were to use the letter as a mode of continual educational exchange with these impromptu pupils.

The Maine poet Carolina Swan, who was briefly a Society student and then quickly became a teacher as well, published an essay on Richard Hooker in *The Atlantic* that became required reading for future Society students in English literature. Her essay simultaneously spread new knowledge to a broad American audience and asserted her (and the Society’s) intellectual rigor. In Ticknor’s assigning the essay, she validated her students—and teachers—as producers of valuable knowledge. She also intimated that Caroline Swan was a model for the level of intellectual accomplishment possible for Society students.<sup>113</sup>

Whereas women like Helen Thompson circulated the Society’s curricular content among their own students, Emma Levi disseminated its affective architecture—generated in

---

<sup>112</sup> Anstis Spencer, “A Vacation Hint,” *The Congregationalist* 28 June 1894, p. 892.

<sup>113</sup> Caroline Swan’s attachment to the Society was publicized in George Bancroft Griffith, *The Poets of Maine* (Portland, M.E.: Elwell, Pickard & company, 1888), 657.

the disembodied epistolary exchange—in order to cultivate interracial sympathy in postbellum America. Though we know relatively little about Levi—save for that which she disclosed in the seven letters she sent to Anna Ticknor between 1884 and 1886 that are excerpted in the festschrift—we know that her experience as a Society student enabled her dynamic relationship with its founder. In her letters, Levi reveals that she “belong[ed] to the despised race,” spent at least part of her childhood in New Bedford, and, simultaneous to corresponding with Ticknor about her writing in 1884, was a schoolteacher in Rockville, Maryland.<sup>114</sup> She was also a student in the Society, but her course selection and academic work are not extant. Her letters to Ticknor do not concern Society course work per se. Instead, they reveal a rich interchange between two women about writing, editing, and publishing that was born out of the Society’s culture of exchange. Just as Mabel Metcalf’s comportment as a student had chiasmically fashioned Mary Pease into a teacher, Levi’s solicitations to Ticknor for composition advice made the latter into an editor, a role that may appear outside the Society’s domains and yet was made possible by its very structure.

“I dreamed many dreams,” confessed Levi to Ticknor, “and saw many visions of what I would do and be by and by; but, like many women with fairer faces, I have buried all these but one...my dream is to write something fit for publication.” However impossible

---

<sup>114</sup> Agassiz et al., 105. Her letters to Ticknor appear under the headings: “From E.L. (a student).” In one of these letters she mentions the names of her protagonists in “Through the Gates” (though not the story’s title) as Len and Emily, and in one of Ticknor’s replies, she mentions the *Christian Union*. A keyword search of that periodical revealed “Through the Gates” by Emma Levi, published in 1884, the same year as the letters. The 1850 U.S. census lists an “Emma Levi (mulatto)” born about 1848 in Baltimore County, Maryland. Given that Levi was teaching in Maryland in the 1880’s (perhaps she had returned to her home state after the war), it may be reasonable to assume that this is she. There are no other possible census matches. She published one more story in the *Christian Union*: “In Chipper Chase,” 9 June 1887, but it appears to be her last prior to her marriage and her name change.

such a dream may have felt to Levi, she admitted her ambition in the same breath that she recognized that it was “a hope which must be fed on encouragement, and I have had so little of that.”<sup>115</sup> Anna Ticknor, Levi must have known, had plenty to give. In turn, she called on Ticknor to extend her encouragement beyond the domain of Society lessons and to help her with writing and navigating the publishing world. The well-connected Bostonian had her finger on the pulse of the publishing world and enjoyed personal connections with magazine editors, such as Hamilton Mabie of the *Christian Union*. Describing her own work in a letter to a friend, Ticknor noted, “It is, after all, not absolute instruction that we offer so much as guidance, criticism and sympathy.”<sup>116</sup> In turn, it was precisely these three aids that Ticknor extended to Levi. She told her that she would deal with her “openly,” offering wide-ranging writing advice from the macro—“Compassion and sympathy are not excited by stings and little bitter references to ill doing”—to the micro: “the handwriting must be larger and clearer.”<sup>117</sup> Ticknor’s unabashed advice may strike readers today as problematic, trying as the privileged white woman was to teach a postbellum African American how to *do* sympathy without recognizing her own subject position. Even as this may sound a troubling note, Ticknor’s overwhelming advocacy for Levi’s publishing interests cannot be diminished, nor can her own cultivation of epistolary intimacy and confidence (in her stated “openness”). This intimacy, in turn, created the conditions for offering constructive advice across a geographical and racial divide.

---

<sup>115</sup> Emma Levi to Anna Ticknor, Rockville, MD, 8 November 1884. Agassiz et al., *Society to Encourage Studies at Home*, 105.

<sup>116</sup> Agassiz et al., 18.

<sup>117</sup> Anna Ticknor to “Miss E.L. (a student),” n.d., Agassiz et al., 114.

Emma Levi seems to have assiduously followed Anna Ticknor's advice. And the result of their correspondence came in May 1886 when Levi published "Through the Gates" in the *Christian Union*.<sup>118</sup> This short story about a recently-liberated couple hoping to legalize their slave marriage in the postbellum South explores the mirrored domestic desires of the former master's daughter (Miss Mally) in her upcoming nuptials and those of the now-free Len and Emily, characters Levi based on two of her Maryland friends. She hoped that her story would foster interracial sympathy, that "those who are better favored than we are will be able to understand a little better that we do have joys and sorrows and hopes, though we differ from them in everything but the fact of being human beings."<sup>119</sup> Written in a period that placed a high premium of female virtue, the story illustrates the shared humanity of African American protagonists and white readers in their desire to attain marital legitimacy for themselves and their children. Levi's story is not unique in its overt requests for interracial sympathy, but as a byproduct of Ticknor's Society and her personal attention, it stands as a forceful and fascinating formulation of Levi's own experience of sympathetic—and yet rigorous—encouragement in her exchange with a white woman. She seems to have drawn on the particular structure of sympathy inherent in the epistolary exchange and reformatted it in a different genre of knowledge transmission: the short story. In fact, Levi's is a sympathy born of the open acknowledgment of difference

---

<sup>118</sup> "Through the Gates" ran in Lymon Abbott and Henry Ward Beecher, eds., the *Christian Union*, 27 May 1886, 9-11. "Miss E.L. (a student)" to Anna Ticknor, 6 March 1886, Agassiz et al., 110. Levi writes, "'Len and Emily' are living people, and their marriage a few years ago and the main points of the story are facts. But the names I have given there are fictitious, their real names being Wesley and Ann Ewell."

<sup>119</sup> "Miss E.L. (a student)" to Anna Ticknor, n.d., Agassiz et al., 108. The 1880 U.S. Census lists "Wesley Ewell" as born in 1835 and living in Maryland, married to "Ann M. Ewell" as born in 1840.



("we differ from them in everything"), mirroring the Society's acceptance—and encouragement—of difference as a governing condition of their educational exchange.<sup>120</sup>

#### IV. Commencement

"It is, moreover, but the beginning of a chain of influences which will be long in reaching its culmination and whose results will be revealed in the records of the future."<sup>121</sup>

When Anna Eliot Ticknor died on October 5, 1896, her Society's voluntary staff gathered to "take immediate action." Though they appointed a temporary Secretary to finish out the twenty-fourth term, there was little doubt "that it was an impossibility to *fill* her place" permanently.<sup>122</sup> With perfect clarity, the staff knew that the Society had long been "father, mother and family" to Ticknor.<sup>123</sup> And though they did not remark it, it was also her offspring, a project born of her single-minded desire to improve the lives of nineteenth-century women divided by mountains, seas, ages, races, and classes. It was, they knew, "an expression of her individuality," and imbued so completely with a single individual, it could not withstand her death.<sup>124</sup> She had personally convinced hundreds of women to become epistolary educators without pay, such that "whatever was done by her helpers was done, directly or indirectly, for her, individually."<sup>125</sup> Following her death, then,

---

<sup>120</sup> Levi's profits from her fiction enabled her to further her own schooling.

<sup>121</sup> "A Noble Enterprise—Society to Encourage Studies at Home," *Providence Journal*, 18 Feb. 1879, n.p.

<sup>122</sup> *Twenty-fourth Annual Report*, 4.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>124</sup> Agassiz et al., 208.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

the remaining staff knew that the society could not maintain the “personal quality which was at once the strength and the weakness of the Society, as no leader could be found who could command the same devotion from the corps of teachers,” especially at a time when, “the number of women from whom we could expect gratuitous service was by no means so great as twenty years ago.”<sup>126</sup>

At the time of the Society’s closing, the diminishing supply of voluntary teachers was matched by the diminishing supply of interested students. Though Ticknor had launched the field of American correspondence study in 1873, during the Society’s twenty-four years, many cognate organizations opened their doors (or their envelopes) and drew increasing numbers away from the Boston organization. Appealing to a similar student population, the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, the largest co-educational and modified correspondence school, enrolled 32,684 women between 1882 and 1893 alone.<sup>127</sup> New university extension programs attracted increasing numbers of women who were eager to partake in “college privileges.” For the more casual student, reading groups like the Round Robin Reading Club (est. 1893) proliferated, offering inexpensive and diverse syllabi without the attendant epistolary expectations. Ticknor’s Society, then, with its unswerving commitment to the singular and intimate relationship between correspondent and student, could not sustain itself in a market with so many other options.

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>127</sup> See note 60.

And yet it did survive. Its materials continued to circulate in the Anna Ticknor Library Association and in the other reading clubs to which the Society books were donated.<sup>128</sup> Its affectionate bonds between women at a distance long outlived the school term. Its pedagogy infused American education broadly. Emma Levi's story and the work of Helen Thompson, Lucy Skeel, and others indexes the dissemination of this mode of learning. Though Ticknor advocated learning for its own sake, each of these women proved that their studies had great applicability to the wider community. Their work affirms the durability and flexibility of their Society acquisitions.

The correspondence study that Ticknor had inaugurated in America persisted well into the twentieth century, replaced only in name with "distance learning" when various electronic technologies replaced pen and ink exchange. As these technologies continue to develop, so too does their respective pedagogy. And yet if we look closely enough, I think we still find Ticknor's efforts lingering in pedagogical innovations aimed at providing greater access to education for all Americans.

---

<sup>128</sup> Katherine Loring ran the Anna Ticknor Library Association until it closed in 1902.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### **“What has the artist done about it?”:**

#### **Jane Addams, Education Reform, and the Work of Art**

“A settlement would avoid the always getting ready for life which seems to dog the school, and would begin with however small a group to really accomplish and to live.”

– Jane Addams

“Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?”

– Henry David Thoreau

On February 17, 1900, Jane Addams spoke to a group of Chicago educators about the failure of local schools to address the most pressing needs of immigrants and their children.<sup>1</sup> Instead of casting blame on schoolteachers or administrators for disregarding the educational relevance of children's firsthand experiences, the pioneering social worker and founder of Hull-House drew up an indictment of artists: “What has the artist done about it—he who is supposed to have a more intimate insight into the needs of his

---

<sup>1</sup> I follow Jane Addams's own usage when referring to the hyphenated “Hull-House,” instead of the alternative “Hull House.”

contemporaries, and to minister to them as none other can?”<sup>2</sup> Addams’s question entwined two concerns that had long dominated her life: the complex and evolving relationship between art and culture and the available methods for educating her neighbors. Not only did the inquiry itself establish a path for her own pedagogical reform, but it also suggested the potential for looking beyond the disciplinary boundaries of education narrowly defined for an innovative solution to an institutional problem.

Hull-House became Addams’s ever-evolving answer to her own question. Founded by Addams and her friend Ellen Gates Starr inside a decaying mansion in Chicago’s Nineteenth Ward, Hull-House has become the most famous of the Progressive Era’s settlement houses. From its birth in 1889, Hull-House tended to the needs of its poor, largely immigrant neighbors. But as Addams conceived of it, Hull-House was far more than a neighborhood project. It was, as she so often explained, an “experimental effort,” endowed with “the power of quick adaptation,” to solve nothing less than “the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life.”<sup>3</sup> For Addams, democracy encompassed more than the workings of the liberal state or the creed upon which it was founded, more even than that most fundamental right, the franchise. It was a social ethic upon which an equitable politics must depend. Addams’s democratic ethic meant living within a community and attuning oneself to the needs and ideas of others while maintaining the integrity of individual, direct, and unmediated experience.

---

<sup>2</sup> Jane Addams, “Educational Methods,” reprinted in *Democracy and Social Ethics*, ed. Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1902; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 92.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Addams, “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” in *Philanthropy and Social Progress* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1893), 22-23.

Education's task was to foster this social ethic, to instill a commitment to democracy's foundational interpersonal relationships and to the interdependence of all its members. Here, then, was Hull-House's most valuable pursuit and its essential pedagogical commitment. Hull-House, Addams believed, would "add the social function to democracy," that is, propelling all of its various educational, artistic, and practical programs designed to address the needs of America's immigrant poor would be an unswerving commitment to helping individuals see one another with the compassion and clarity born of historical conscientiousness.<sup>4</sup>

Addams's "ministering" artist and educator was, she believed, unique in his ability to meet that commitment. Its rooms filled with these artists and educators, immigrant and non-immigrant, poor and middle class, Hull-House became more than a meeting place for Chicago's immigrant poor or a staging ground for acts of genteel benevolence. It became a vast, embodied pedagogical experiment, "an attempt to express the meaning of life in terms of life itself, in forms of activity."<sup>5</sup> Addams contended that this kind of experiential pedagogy "alone [had] the power of organizing a child's activities with some reference to the life he will later lead."<sup>6</sup> Turn-of-the-century Chicago's public schools lacked such power. Constrained by nineteenth-century pedagogical dogma of curricular standardization and classroom uniformity, and overwhelmed by the disparate needs of the an ever-expanding populace, the city's public schools ignored the educational value of individual self-

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>5</sup> Jane Addams, "A Function of Social Settlement," *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 13 (1899): 36.

<sup>6</sup> Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and The City Streets* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 109.

expression and would have found the notion of helping children “express the meaning of life in terms of life itself” a cryptic if not wrongheaded goal. The settlement, though, with its steadfast commitment to meeting the actual needs of the working poor, could make experiential learning viable for all, from the parent to the child.

This chapter traces that commitment and contends that Addams’s pedagogy, as embodied first in the actual work of her settlement and later in the literary work of her popular autobiography, represents a radically egalitarian strain of education that existed in opposition to traditional learning environments that were often inhospitable to the needs of both women and America’s immigrant poor. Addams becomes here more than a social reformer. By examining Addams *as a writer*, we can recover her pedagogical innovations in their full imaginative depth. And by understanding Addams *as a pedagogical theorist*, we can come finally to see how her writing worked as a textual embodiment of her innovative ideas.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter also enters into a long scholarly discussion of Addams that in the last decade has become wonderfully chatty and especially insightful. In 2004-2005 alone, seven book-length studies appeared on the market.<sup>8</sup> But even as biographers and historians have

---

<sup>7</sup> Here, in part, I follow the historian Lawrence Cremin who argues that Addams ought to be understood as an education theorist on par with John Dewey and not simply an activist laboring diligently by her mentor’s side. See Cremin, *American Education, The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 179.

<sup>8</sup> Robin Berson, *Jane Addams: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004); Katherine Joslin, *Jane Addams: A Writer's Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Victoria Bissell Brown, *The Education of Jane Addams* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Marilyn Fischer, *On Addams* (Australia: Thomson Wadsworth, 2004); Anja Schëuler, *Frauenbewegung und Soziale Reform: Jane Addams und Alice Salomon im Transatlantischen Dialog, 1889-1933* (Stuttgart, Germany: F. Steiner, 2004); Peggy Caravantes, *Waging Peace: The Story Of Jane Addams* (Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds Publishing, 2004); Louise Knight, *Citizen: Jane Addams and The Struggle for Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

remained interested in Addams, educational theorists and literary scholars have given her relatively little notice. Addams's friend and collaborator John Dewey continues to dominate discussions about progressive and pragmatist educational reform.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, literary scholars have been content to let Katherine Joslin's *Jane Addams, a Writer's Life* stand as the one extended study of Addams's prose. And even Joslin only deals glancingly with Addams's memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull-House, With Autobiographical Notes* (hereafter *Twenty Years*), which is the primary focus of this chapter.<sup>10</sup> Addams's highly literary nonfiction deserves, as Joslin has contended, a place alongside the realism of Theodore Dreiser and Henry James. Her experimental and inventive autobiography also deserves a place of high regard in American literary history, alongside *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, *The Education of Henry Adams*, Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*, and Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

To some readers, this dissertation's largely positive portrayal of Jane Addams may seem, like an old scar, irritatingly familiar. But the Addams that appears here is not the sainted "Lady Abbess of Chicago," as one of her early admirers imagined her. Nor is she the peerless visionary who, as Williams James explained, "*can't help writing truth*."<sup>11</sup> I am not

---

<sup>9</sup> While Ellen Condliffe Lagemann's small anthology of Addams's educational writings inspired little additional scholarship, it did make readily available fourteen of her relevant essays. *Jane Addams on Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> Shannon Jackson's *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000) is unique as a cultural studies investigation of the activity—the performance—at Hull-House. I engage with Jackson's study more specifically in Section IV of this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Harriet Park Thomas and William James quoted in Allen F. Davis, introduction to *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, by Jane Addams (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), vii, viii (italics original).



only mindful of the vast body of literature that has done so much to re-examine the efforts of Progressive Era reformers like Addams, but I am dependent upon much of it.<sup>12</sup> In spirit and method, however, this is a different kind of work, and as the following pages make clear, I part company with those scholars who have been content to “unmask” Addams as, at best, an ineffectual assimilationist or, at worst, an apostle of the middle class whose work among immigrants has long obscured her devotion to Anglo-Saxonism.<sup>13</sup>

The Addams here is a writer and a pedagogue whose innovations, like those of Louisa May Alcott and Anna Ticknor, began outside the institutional school space but later came to penetrate the classroom walls. By deeply engaging with the unique educational needs of her Chicago neighbors and developing responsive teaching strategies to meet these particular needs, Addams helped to transform education in America. Her work also completes the bridge that this dissertation has traced between antebellum domestic moral instruction and the public and political initiatives most commonly associated with the Progressive Era. In offering a critical engagement with her settlement work and her *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, I hope to put Addams’s educational—and deeply literary—thought back into circulation and thereby recover the impulse to creatively intervene in the nation’s educational challenges.

---

<sup>12</sup> For example, see David Rothman, “The State as Parent: Social Policy in the Progressive Era,” in Willard Gaylin et al. *Doing Good: The Limits of Benevolence* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: One Hundred Years of Experts’ Advice to Women* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> These critiques of Addams have been made by Rivka Shpak Lissak and Robert A. Carlson, respectively. See Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull-House and the New Immigrants, 1890-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and Carlson, *Quest for Conformity: Americanization Through Education* (New York: Wiley, 1975).

## II. The Barrage of Books: Jane Addams and the Failure of American Schools

Throughout her adult life, Jane Addams felt greatly disappointed in American schools and their methods. In her careful critiques of both local schools and her own alma mater, we find the motives that propelled her own progressive pedagogy. Though at times Addams worked through institutional channels to reform Chicago's schools, she continually returned to her settlement as her preferred place to address pedagogical problems. By the time she published *Twenty Years* in 1910, her relationship to Chicago's mainstream educational institutions was, at best, uneasy. In her 1902 essay "Educational Methods," she criticized the public schools as hopelessly conventional, as they persistently "la[id] all the stress on reading and writing."<sup>14</sup> Addams, of course, was not opposed to literacy, but rather, she bristled at the idea long held in American schools that books—and students' requisite absorption of them—were always the most effective vehicles for meaningful instruction. As early as 1899, she had surmised that local educators believed "that it is not possible for the mass of mankind to have experiences which are of themselves worth anything." In turn, teachers instructed their pupils as if all knowledge "must be brought in from the outside, and almost exclusively in the form of books."<sup>15</sup> Such an approach to classroom learning, Addams argued, rendered the child without "any clew to the life about him, or any power to usefully or intelligently connect himself with it."<sup>16</sup> This disjuncture between the classroom's book-based learning and the child's unique

---

<sup>14</sup> Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1902), 180.

<sup>15</sup> Jane Addams, "A Function of the Social Settlement," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 13 (1899): 45.

<sup>16</sup> Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 180.

experiences rendered institutional education useless, as it provided the child no means to locate his social value, and thus no means to “obtain the fullness of life,” a state predicated on one’s self-valuation through familial and social understanding.<sup>17</sup> Without this understanding, the student’s activities would become “inevitably perfectly mechanical” and he would be reduced to a “slavish life without seeing whither it tends and with no reflections on it.”<sup>18</sup>

By the turn of the century and in a period of rapid industrialization, the school had become, according to Addams, “an epitome of the competitive system, almost of the factory system.”<sup>19</sup> She contended that schools, with their mindless and repetitive tasks and their dulling of any intellectual pleasure for the sake of speedy advancement, destroyed students’ self-expression and vital creativity. Moreover, Chicago’s public schools bent too easily to the needs of local businessmen. Eager to find trained clerks, business leaders pressured schools to design curriculums around the skills they desired. They did not explicitly plead for public schools to “train office boys and clerks so that [we] may have them easily and cheaply,” but they did ask school leaders to “[t]each the children to write legibly and to figure accurately and quickly; to acquire habits of punctuality and order; to be prompt to obey.”<sup>20</sup> As the vast majority of Chicago’s public schoolchildren would labor in factories instead of offices, Addams distrusted a curriculum that promised to provide the

---

<sup>17</sup> Jane Addams, “Foreign-Born Children in the Primary Grades,” *National Educational Association, Journal of Proceedings and Addresses* 36 (1897): 109.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>20</sup> Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 85.

wealthy with cheap, competent labor, but which also provided no promise for—or relevance to—the industrial workers themselves. If public education were bound too closely to the market, it could not simultaneously bind individuals together.

Though at times Addams did concede that the dominant pedagogy of factual acquisition could theoretically provide students with “enormous advantages,” she continued to insist that it disrupted the essential relationships within the family. The public school, she claimed, “too often separates the child from his parents and widens that old gulf between fathers and sons which is never so cruel and so wide as it is between the immigrants who come to this country and their children who have gone to the public school and feel that they have there learned it all.”<sup>21</sup> Addams’s single-minded focus on public schooling seems to have blinded her to the possibility that other factors, such as popular culture, might have just as much or more to do with opening up rifts between immigrant parent and child. Nevertheless, this gulf between immigrant generations was the result of the utter discontinuity in the immigrant’s rural and “primitive” life in Europe and the urban demands of factory life that rendered parents’ prior knowledge obsolete. Students, in turn, found themselves “disturbed by the contrast between school and home,” and their learned hubris resulted in schools sending children with damaged familial relationships—and thus “without a sufficient rudder”—into “the perilous business of living.”<sup>22</sup> When the public realm of the school disturbed the private realm of the home (instead of working in tandem), the learned student became “locked up” and “rigid,” “shut

---

<sup>21</sup> Jane Addams, “The Public School and the Immigrant Child.” Reprinted in Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, ed. *Jane Addams on Education* (1908; New York: Teacher's College Press, 1994), 137.

<sup>22</sup> Addams, “The Public School,” 138.

off from his uneducated family and misunderstood by his friends.” When it detached the familial and social bonds, school knowledge became “a great burden.”<sup>23</sup> For Addams, the children educated—or rather, miseducated—in this system were liable to become disaffected laborers at best and criminals at worst; for the student too often “throws off the control of the home because it does not represent the things which he has been taught to value [at school] he takes the first step toward Juvenile Court...because he has prematurely asserted himself long before he is ready to take care of his own affairs.”<sup>24</sup>

Addams’s attempts to rectify these problems by working through conventional channels of political power only frustrated her further. In 1905, she accepted an invitation to join the Chicago Board of Education; she remained a member for the next three terms. In joining the board, Addams stepped into a decade-long struggle between Chicago’s underpaid teachers and their tight-fisted administrators.<sup>25</sup> At stake, though, was more than teachers’ salaries. At the time, the board members were attempting to institute challenging promotional examinations to test the competency of schoolteachers. Such measures,

---

<sup>23</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House, With Autobiographical Notes* (1910; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1998), 281.

<sup>24</sup> Addams, “The Public School,” 137.

<sup>25</sup> Addams’s nephew and biographer James Weber Linn details this episode in his *Jane Addams: A Biography* (New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1935), 224-237; Addams herself also recounts this long struggle between Chicago Mayor Edward Dunne and the Teachers’ Federation in *Twenty Years*, 213-217. After reading Addams’s account of this episode in *Twenty Years*, Ella Flagg, who served with Addams on the board and then later became the Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, wrote to Addams: “...I am fully persuaded that you owed it to your reader to give them something of your educational ideas in addition to recounting the work of the Dunne School Board; and I think you owed it to Miss Addams to show what she aimed to do for the children. So far as the School Board episode is concerned, it is sketched true to life.” Ella Flagg to Jane Addams, Chicago, 12 December 1910, *The Jane Addams Papers*, edited by Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984) (hereafter cited as *Addams Papers*).

Addams argued, “so restricted the teachers inside the system that they had no space in which to move about freely and the more adventurous of them fairly panted for light and air.”<sup>26</sup> While simultaneously casting a backward glance at Common School reforms of the mid-nineteenth century and presaging the even more rigorous professionalization of teaching in the following decades of the twentieth century, the examinations pleased the public who longed for indications of instructional advancement while penalizing teachers who, like Addams, looked beyond conventional pedagogy for innovative methods for reaching Chicago’s immigrant poor.

To Addams’s thinking, “The whole situation...had become an epitome of the struggle between efficiency and democracy.”<sup>27</sup> Teacher exams would surely expedite hiring and firing through their supposedly objective standards, but they would do little to promote curricular or pedagogical reform aimed at helping individuals—both teachers and students—comprehend their responsibility to one another within a democratic state. This polarizing and enduring battle between politicians and educators frustrated Addams as she stood outside the normal lines of ideological debate. Amidst these struggles for teachers’ freedom, Addams chaired the School Management Committee and found that “a majority of the members seemed to me exasperatingly conservative, and during another year...they were frustratingly radical, and I was of course highly unsatisfactory to both.”<sup>28</sup> At this point, Addams was, according to John Farrell, “caught in a bitter political struggle,” and thus,

---

<sup>26</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 217.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

“unable to make any significant impression on the educational policies of the Chicago School System.”<sup>29</sup> This representative episode amidst Addams’s larger struggle to improve education through conventional channels suggests that she was better able to consolidate her educational innovations inside of Hull-House and in the pages of her many essays.

Perhaps chastened by her lackluster performance on the Chicago Board of Education, Addams thereafter resisted formal affiliations with educational institutions. When in 1913 Professor Albion Small, Chair of the new Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, offered her a plum part-time graduate teaching position, Addams declined, extending her institutional resistance to include higher education. Mary Jo Deegan has persuasively argued that this decision resulted from her ardent desire to remain “outside of the academy,” even as “she was deeply dedicated to teaching.” Addams’s commitment to “adults who could not otherwise enter the academy, because of their poverty or lack of credentials” meant that her primary efforts had to remain in places where the entrance gates were left open to all.<sup>30</sup> Even though the University of Chicago was

---

<sup>29</sup> John C. Farrell, *Beloved Lady: The History of Jane Addams' Ideas on Reform and Peace* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967), 97.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1988), 10. Addams did, however, remain closely, if informally, connected to the University of Chicago, maintaining close friendship with faculty members and continuing to guest lecture there occasionally. University of Chicago Professors regularly lectured at Hull-House as well; in this sense, there was some reciprocity between the two institutions. Addams also arranged one-term scholarships there for the most promising Hull-House participants. Hilda Satt Polacheck, a Polish immigrant who was forced to leave school early to help support her widowed mother and family, recalls the day Addams presented her with the opportunity: “She was very calm, as if she had asked me to have a cup of tea. She did not realize that she had just asked me whether I wanted to live...For some time I could not talk. I kept thinking, I did not graduate from grammar school. How could I hope to go to the great university.” Hilda Satt Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger, The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, ed. Dena J. Polacheck Epstein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 86.

unique among top universities for its founding admission of women and minorities, it could not effect the broad educational change that Addams desired for her immigrant neighbors.<sup>31</sup>

Chicago's schools, with their excessive reliance on text-based learning, were not the only educational institutions that troubled Addams and ultimately motivated her progressive pedagogy at Hull-House. Just as she had condemned local schools for methods that tore families asunder, she reflected on her own education with an equally critical eye. Addams was a member of the first generation of American women to attend college in significant numbers, and she often expressed her frustration with the education that she and her fellows received once they were finally allowed to pass through the academy's gates. The curriculum at Rockford Seminary, she wrote, had put her "absolutely at sea as far as any moral purpose was concerned."<sup>32</sup> The culprit for this driftlessness was the methodology for women's learning in the last decades of the nineteenth century that divorced education from reform, the life of the academy from the life of the polity. Across one of Rockford's walls, students themselves had inscribed Aristotle's pronouncement that: "There is the same difference between the learned and the unlearned as there is between the living and

---

<sup>31</sup> Addams resistance to institutional affiliation and her growing distrust of college curriculums in the decade before 1900 may help explain why she discontinued Hull-House's annual summer school at her alma mater Rockford College. She may well have also recognized that within her own settlement house she could safely enact radical reform without the threat of constraining institutional oversight.

<sup>32</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 46. Rockford Seminary officially became Rockford College in 1892 when its trustees elected to change the institution's name; the seminary, however, had been granting the Bachelor of Arts degree since 1882, when Addams and several other alumnae returned to campus to accept the first of these degrees.



the dead.”<sup>33</sup> Their education, at least in this physical reminder, advocated the use of learnedness to segregate, instead of serve, others. When she and her classmates focused exclusively on their books their public usefulness, Addams feared, was obscured.<sup>34</sup>

In a heavily gendered—and remarkably traditional—assertion, Addams blamed herself and her peers for studying to the point of destroying their natural ability to listen and respond to the emotional calls of others. She claims to have founded Hull-House in order to reconnect educated women with the needs of others, to spring them from their books in order that they face others with a keen emotional intelligence. When in 1899 she publicly contended that her settlement stood for “emotion as opposed to abstraction” and “application as opposed to research,” she productively and formally fused feminized and maternal care with academic acquisition.<sup>35</sup> But such a conclusion was long in the making:

I gradually reached a conviction that the first generation of college women had taken their learning too quickly, had departed too suddenly from the active, emotional life led by their grandmothers and great-grandmothers; that the contemporary education of young women had developed too exclusively the power of acquiring knowledge and of merely receiving

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 35. Addams claims to have had some ambivalence about this quotation: “We worked in those early years as if we really believed the portentous statement from Aristotle which we found quoted in Boswell’s Johnson and with which we illuminated the wall of the room occupied by our Chess Club; it remained there for months, solely out of reverence, let us hope, for the two ponderous names associated with it; at least I have enough confidence in human nature to assert that we never really believed that ‘There is the same difference between the learned and the unlearned as there is between the living and the dead.’ She and her classmates also inscribed Carlyle’s oppositional statement on the same wall: “‘Tis not to taste sweet things, but to do noble and true things that the poorest son of Adam dimly longs” (35). The tension between these pronouncements illustrates the changing and unstable position of this first generation of college women who were often seeking a clear rationale for their particular kind of learning in relationship to their future personal and professional plans.

<sup>34</sup> For the reading practices amongst this generation of educated women, see Barbara Sicherman, “Reading and Ambition: M. Carey Thomas and Female Heroism,” *American Quarterly* 45 (1993): 73-103.

<sup>35</sup> Jane Addams, “A Function of Social Settlements,” 188.

impressions; that somewhere in the process of 'being educated' they had lost that simple and almost automatic response to the human appeal, that old healthful reaction resulting in activity from the mere presence of suffering or of helplessness.<sup>36</sup>

Though she had pined for erudition as a schoolgirl, Addams, by the twentieth century, saw such a goal as potentially corrosive to the very basic ability of women to mother their own children and the children of the nation at large. In an unusual rhetorical formulation, Addams employs mechanized diction here (women were, in the passive voice, “being educated”) in order to show them as mere drones of prescribed learnedness. Paradoxically, such passive reception of learning damaged their gendered and equally mechanistic “automatic response to human appeal.” This syntactical oddity, perhaps, points to Addams’s deep ambivalence about the methods and results of traditional schooling. It may well also reveal an unconscious impulse to repudiate in prose, as she did in practice, the “women’s role.” In either case, it reminds readers of an irony that Addams never admitted: that she had the tools to critique, and ultimately reject, classroom learning only because that learning provided her with the means to do so.

As a student at Rockford (1877-1881) and then even in Hull-House’s first years, Addams put great faith in both classical learnedness and the burgeoning scientific methods that later she came to disparage in her educational criticism. In her Rockford valedictory address of 1881, however, she championed women’s “God-given” insight, “a mighty intuitive perception of Truth,” while lamenting that such a capacious asset meant “nothing in the force of the world.” Like Priam’s daughter Cassandra, who was gifted with the power of prophecy but cursed by the absence of women’s “*auethoritas*” [sic], contemporary middle-

---

<sup>36</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 51.

class female students, in Addams's view, had access to "the sudden acquisition of much physical knowledge," but they made themselves unintelligible when they mired their intellectual ability in "spiritualism," "clairvoyance," sentimentalism, or "high discontent." The solution to this problem, according to Addams, was increased intellectual rigor. Women's "accurate study of at least one branch of physical science" would enable them to test their intuition against "genuine" and verifiable "Truth." In their mastery of scientific "scholarly training," women would only then "bring this force to bear throughout morals and justice," and more importantly, they would gain *auethoritas* [sic]. "With her faculties clear and acute, from the study of science, and with her hand on the magnetic chain of humanity," this new woman, Addams argued, would obliterate the legacy of Cassandra while accurately diagnosing the nation's social ills.<sup>37</sup> At the time of her speech, Addams herself planned to attain such mastery and become physician, a pragmatic position increasingly open to women at the end of the century and one that would combine advanced scientific training with benevolent and emotional engagement.<sup>38</sup>

Addams maintained her conviction in science's saving powers—and the education that produced it—through Hull-House's founding and early years. Her faith in this model

---

<sup>37</sup> Jane Addams, "Cassandra" 1881. Reprinted in Jean Bethke Elshtain, ed. *The Jane Addams Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 10-12.

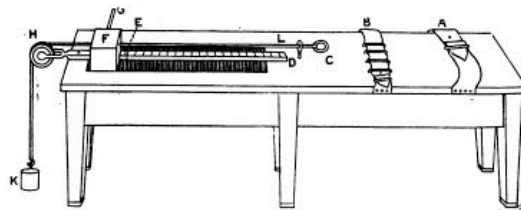
<sup>38</sup> But Addams's plans for medical school were stymied shortly after she graduated from Rockford by both her persistent back problems and by the common and disturbing diagnosis of "nervous exhaustion," a disorder that seems to have afflicted—and derailed—the particularly ambitious women of Addams's generation. Her extended visit to S. Weir Mitchell's infamous hospital for female "hysterics" was followed by what she termed an unrelenting "family claim," or the longstanding American notion that educated women like her ought to remain in the home in order to raise up a new generation of responsible, patriotic citizens. This final pressure became particularly acute following the death of her father in late 1881 and her presumed responsibility to become the companion of her stepmother. In her post-college life, then, Addams was temporarily reduced to Cassandra's fate, forced to temper her scientific enthusiasm with familial duty.

was so complete, in fact, that it persuaded her that the most accurate way to measure the exhaustion of her neighboring laborers was quantitatively: through the use of an ergograph, an instrument borrowed from the University of Chicago's physiology laboratory and believed to precisely measure muscle fatigue.

#### Demonstration of Ergograph.

By C. F. SONNTAG.

THE forearm is laid upon *this* table, and this strap fixes the wrist in position. The second finger is fixed in the small strap, and the amount of weight on the pulley is graduated from time to time. Then, as in the ordinary ergograph, you flex and extend the finger, and the writing-point makes a record on the drum which is moving at a very slow rate. By measuring the distance the block travels along the rod, and multiplying that by the weight employed on the pulley and the time taken to do it, you get, as the result, the number of foot-pounds of work performed.



A simple ergograph. A, strap for fixing forearm; B, strap through staples for fixing fingers not in use; C, ring for finger to be tested; D, brass runner graduated in sixteenths of an inch; E, maximum recorder; F, pen carrier; G, writing pen; H, pulley; K, weight; L, cord. The part shaded in the diagram is cut out of the table.

Figure 2: An Ergograph

Taking her own advice for establishing *auethoritas*, Addams assembled a motley crew: an “imposing procession,” as she put it, of “an anxious student and a young physician who was going to take the tests every afternoon...Dr. Hamilton the resident in charge of the investigation...a scientist who was interested to see that the instrument was properly installed...[and] I.”<sup>39</sup> Yet even with all the trappings of modern scientific research, including

<sup>39</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 197. Addams described her own role as: “follow[ing] in the rear to talk once more to the proprietor of the factory to be quite sure that he would permit the experiment to go on.” Addams’s taking up the “rear” in order to facilitate the experiment is illustrative of both her role as a mediator between academics and business owners and her ability to convince both parties of their mutual interests.

the acclaimed instrument, the team could only manage to prove that sweatshop laborers were *less* fatigued after work than before it, the inverse of Addams's hypothesis and, furthermore, illogical.

The failure of the ergograph, an instrument that Addams concluded “was not fitted to find it out,” though, signifies Addams's ultimate recognition of the limitations of “scientific” study and of the methodology she so hopefully espoused as a senior at Rockford. It serves also as a forceful reminder of the affective shortsightedness Addams identified in American education. Science's failure to “prove” anything about the struggles—or the joys—of the worker meant that Addams had to look elsewhere for both the understanding of her neighbor's needs and for the solutions to their struggles. She took, in fact, a remarkably catholic view of things, forcefully analyzing and addressing problems in, amongst other areas, city living (e.g. improving local sanitation efforts and increasing access to utilities), child development (e.g. running a nursery school, offering bathing and recreational facilities), and nutrition (e.g. opening a soup kitchen and teaching healthful cooking techniques). She worked through political channels and she developed an enduring social philosophy. In concert with these pragmatic solutions, Addams broadened her vision, looking to art to access a concurrent affective solution and to see what the ergograph and all her scientific training effectively obscured.

### **III. Culture as Understanding: Jane Addams's Artist**

Though radically different educational institutions, both Chicago's public schools and Rockford Seminary troubled Addams in a similar way. Their overemphasis on accumulative and book-based learning—including their concomitant stress on

memorization and regurgitation—forced a wedge between students, their families, and their cultures’ histories. Such pedagogy, Addams feared, put the school and the community at odds, because the former “occup[ie]d] such an isolated place in the community.”<sup>40</sup> Even though Addams originally adopted traditional pedagogic methods (formal lectures and curriculums) for her project at Hull-House, by 1899 she sought to divorce the settlement from both the educative model of the public school and the university. Her resistance to the latter arose from its attempts to “swallow the settlement and turn it into one more laboratory: another place to analyze and depict, to observe and record.” Instead of allowing Hull-House to become “an imitative and unendowed university,” she turned her attention to a pedagogy grounded in art and culture’s transformative power to create and nurture interpersonal understanding.<sup>41</sup> On the most basic level this necessitated working “out a method and an ideal adapted to the immediate situation.”<sup>42</sup> The ideal investigator of this social struggle, Addams then came to realize, was not the academic but the artist, a qualitative researcher of social disease who used her imaginative tools to ameliorate real problems in the human condition. Putting aside the ergograph, Addams came to place her faith in the ability of the artist and the art she produced both to discover the real struggles of Chicago’s families and to improve the lives of her immigrant neighbors through their cultural rehabilitation of interpersonal relationships.

---

<sup>40</sup> Addams, “A Function of the Social Settlement,” 193.

<sup>41</sup> Addams, “Public School and Immigrant Child,” 137. Hull-House ultimately and quite literally met with the fate that Addams here scorned, being “swallowed” by a university. In 1963, the original Hull-House settlement buildings were razed to make room for the one-hundred-acre University of Illinois Chicago campus.

<sup>42</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 280.

While by 1908 Addams defined culture as “a knowledge of those things which have been long cherished by men, the things which men have loved because thru generations they have softened and interpreted life, and have endowed it with meaning,”<sup>43</sup> she had not always believed it to be an understanding that produced affective and moral relations. Like many well-to-do women of her generation, Addams first espoused the Victorian ideal of high art’s power to uplift humanity.<sup>44</sup> She read John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold while at Rockford, wedding herself to the former’s romanticized image of labor and the latter’s vision of culture and character united in democracy. Her resultant aesthetic idealism carried her through two Grand Tours of the continent, including a critical visit to Toynbee Hall, where her previously inchoate sense of art’s improving power was confirmed in a sustainable project.<sup>45</sup> In Europe, she determined that the paintings and sculptures she had seen held the key to improving the lot of Chicago’s immigrant poor. Proper aesthetic appreciation, she contended in 1895, would universally compel benevolent behavior. High art could “change the tone of their minds,” and lead to personal “harmony” and rapid moral and intellectual improvement.<sup>46</sup> It would, in turn, make the working class more attentive both to its own needs and to industrial America’s changing economic landscape. And so in Hull-House’s early years, Addams dressed its walls with reproductions of European masterpieces and encouraged its downtrodden neighbors to borrow copies of

---

<sup>43</sup> Addams, “The Public School,” 137.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, *The Education of Jane Addams*, 146.

<sup>45</sup> Founded in London’s East End in 1884, Toynbee Hall was the first known settlement house. See Standish Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform, 1880-1914: The Search For Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>46</sup> Jane Addams, “The Art-Work Done by Hull-House, Chicago,” *Forum* (July 1895), 614.

these works so they could adorn their tenement walls with Fra Angelico's angels and photographs of the Acropolis. The exhibited pictures were carefully chosen, such that "only pictures which combine, to a considerable degree, an elevated tone and technical excellence" would be accessible to anyone in need of aesthetic elevation. Merely average pictures, Addams worried, would not allow the visitor to "assimilate the good when he finds it." To make matters worse, aesthetic compromise of any sort endangered the best art's ability to be "helpful" to the spectator's "life of mind and soul." Addams and her early settlement residents (who were mostly female college graduates) deemed taking risks with mediocre art unacceptable because they believed that "very much of the influence of the House" was "due to the harmony and reasonableness of the message of its walls."<sup>47</sup> With equal measures naiveté and class myopia, their intense focus on Hull-House's dressing meant that they concentrated their efforts on the excellence of displayed objects instead of on the spectators themselves.

But beginning in November 1900, ten months after Addams had questioned what the artist had done to improve American education and ten years after Hull-House's founding, high art—in all its critically proclaimed excellence—took a back seat. Without empirical evidence that art appreciation changed her neighbors' condition, Addams gradually came to a revised "belief that the pursuit of cultivation would not in the end bring either solace or relief." Consequently, she shuttered the house's Butler art gallery, began formulating her autobiographical writings, and opened her Labor Museum, an

---

<sup>47</sup> Residents of Hull-House, *Hull-House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago, Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing out of the Social Conditions* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1895), 210-211.



imaginative experiment in using historical forms of old-world labor and craft to compel interpersonal and intergenerational reconnections between individuals that the local schools and factories had decimated.<sup>48</sup> Addams's changing relationship to high art, argues Shannon Jackson, was part of both Hull-House's larger "experiments that reconceptualized the settlement's relationship to aesthetics" and the growing circulation of Arts and Crafts philosophies in Chicago. In this period, Addams shifted her gaze from European masterpieces and Arnold's valuation of them to a conviction that her neighbors did not necessarily need "the best," but rather a means to "solace their toil."

Her revised thinking was timely. The nearly half century between Ruskin's inspiring *The Nature of Gothic* (1853) and Addams's reassessment of her neighbors' cultural needs included an unprecedented period of industrialization. Though Ruskin's artisanal and romantic rejection of the factory encouraged a young Addams, she was enough of a pragmatist to realize that industrialism was here to stay. Faced with the reality of new labor practices, Hull-House, like a coterie of eager ethnographers, surveyed neighbors and found "a complete absence of art." Instead, it found "people working laboriously without the natural solace of labor which art gives." Workers were, in turn, without the possibility of "expressing their own thoughts to their fellows by means of labor." Self-expression for the laborer was, in effect, dead. Amidst this situation, Addams belatedly "discovere[d] how impossible it is to put a fringe of art on the end of the day thus spent." She knew also that marching exhausted workers through her art gallery was "not only bad pedagogics, but...an

---

<sup>48</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 51. Jackson, *Lines of Activity*, 254-255. Section V of this chapter considers Addams's autobiographical writings and Section IV considers the cultural and affective work of the Labor Museum in greater detail.

impossible undertaking, to appeal to a sense of beauty and order which has been crushed by years of ugly and disorderly work.”<sup>49</sup> But Addams realized problem was far more grave than exhaustion. By 1900, industrial labor had become ruthlessly ordered. Addams realized that her neighbors’ artisanal skills had become obsolete in the new mechanized economy. Meanwhile, schools did little to reform education to match the changing needs of Chicago’s working poor. These twin forces of emotional and family destruction, then, compelled her to find a sustainable way meet her neighbors’ intellectual and affective needs amidst the clamor of the machine.<sup>50</sup>

In abandoning her belief in high art’s improving power, Addams did not dispense with art altogether. Instead, she transferred her attention from the object in view to its creator. Enjoyable and satisfying production came to replace artistic reception. Addams therefore radically exploded the category of art itself. Fine art—including painting, sculpture, writing, and singing—had long been her designated medium for aesthetic appreciation; but in her revised formulation, Addams proclaimed that “life itself” would be the new instrument of artistic expression. This opened the ranks of artists to all who produced work that brought people together, including the cultured and the ignorant (the very opposite of Aristotle’s proclamation on Rockford’s wall), and helped both viewers and creators overcome atomization of industrial America. Echoing William Morris’ claim that “real art is the expression by man of his pleasure in labor,” Addams now explained that:

---

<sup>49</sup> Addams, “A Function of Social Settlements,” 41-42.

<sup>50</sup> Other scholars have taken note of Addams’s shifting notion of culture and its uses during this key period: Mary Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and The Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1988), 281; Helen Horowitz, *Culture & The City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 126-144.

“The chief characteristic of art lies in freeing the individual from a sense of separation and isolation in his emotional experience.”<sup>51</sup>

Addams soon reappraised her neighbor’s productions—including their labor, their traditions, and their history—and found a different kind of art surrounding Hull-House. Her new expansive view—linking forms of labor to ways of life—prompted Addams to reformulate her prior conception of culture itself. Departing significantly from Arnold’s “the best that has been thought and said,” Addams came to believe that “culture is an *understanding* of the long-established occupations and thoughts of men, of the arts with which they have solaced their toil.”<sup>52</sup> Instead of concentrating on the material art object (“the best”) or that which is produced, she points to the creator or viewer’s historical understanding, thereafter, credited daily practices—“the occupations and thoughts of men”—with the revered title “culture.” This definitional shift also entailed a perspectival realignment from culture as that which is evaluated externally to culture as an understanding created within communities. The question of artistic excellence is disregarded in favor of the question of emotional empathy and individual production.

The central aim of Addams’s amended cultural “understanding,” was the production of “solace” that she believed was the natural right of all people. Though she largely resisted any hint of nineteenth-century sentimentality, her notion of solace provided a similar framework for universal, humanizing action. For Addams, solace entailed more than placing a band-aid on a gaping wound; it was to affectively restore individuals who

---

<sup>51</sup> William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1882), 58; Addams, “Function of Social Settlements,” 36.

<sup>52</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 160. Emphasis my own.

had been broken by “Americanization” and dehumanized by the factory’s numbing repetition. And solace could do still more. To provide solace to the immigrant family was to reunite a mother with her estranged child, and to reunite that mother and her child was, by imaginative extension, to repair the relations between all people, from the patrician settlement worker to the Irish immigrant sweater.<sup>53</sup>

Once in place, solace’s effects could be immediate and wide-ranging, but as a sustained approach to instilling “potency” in one’s life, it had to be taught. For Addams this process was intimately bound to both artistic creation and familial exchange. Just as “the poet bathes the outer world for us in the hues of human feeling,” Addams explained:

...so the workman needs some one to bathe his surroundings with a human significance...His education, however simple, should tend to make him widely at home in the world, and to give him a sense of simplicity and peace in the midst of the triviality and noise to which he is constantly subjected. He is to be *taught* to solace himself, taught to find for himself a ‘potency.’ He, like other men, can learn to be content to see but a part, although it must be a part of something.<sup>54</sup>

Addams’s educational aim, to make the immigrant laborer “widely at home in the world,” foregrounds the familial and domestic strategies she employed. The worker of this formulation, one who is cut off from both historical knowledge of his role and self-expressive labor altogether, feels at home nowhere. He was, in this sense, a kind of affective orphan who needed some form of parental—and specifically maternal—intervention in

---

<sup>53</sup> In her biography of Addams, Jean Bethke Elshtain reads Addams’s deep admiration of George Eliot’s protagonist Romola as based on the character’s conception of sympathy as the “glue that hold[s] the moral universe together.” *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 84.

<sup>54</sup> Addams, “Educational Methods,” 96.

order to comfort himself and obtain “the fullness of life.”<sup>55</sup> While his material condition may well have remained unchanged after such learning, Addams acknowledged that his emotional life needed human significance in order for his burden to be bearable. In constructing the worker’s need as, in essence, maternal, and therefore private, Addams’s project becomes one of bridging private needs with public programs. It seems hardly a coincidence that the story Addams tells of herself in *Twenty Years* is that of just such a motherless child who has to make a home for herself wherein she can meaningfully connect with others to abate her imperiling sense of uselessness. In this way, she makes her own private needs—and the needs of all her neighbors—public; nevertheless, they are satisfied through an educational revolution of the home from within.

The two case studies that follow, one on Hull-House’s pedagogical experiment in its Labor Museum and the other on Addams’s autobiography *Twenty Years at Hull-House, With Autobiographical Notes*, illustrate this triangulation of art, education, and experience.

Addams herself gestured toward the essential link between these concerns: “I have in mind an application to a given neighborhood of the solace of literature, of the uplift of the imagination, and of the historic consciousness which gives its possessor a sense of connection with the men of the past.”<sup>56</sup> Both the Labor Museum and the autobiography attest to the results of this powerful fusion of Addams’s pedagogical belief in “learning from life itself” and the production of solace through artisanal craft. These studies, in

---

<sup>55</sup> Addams, “Foreign-Born Children,” 110. My argument here and elsewhere undoubtedly derives from class discussions in Robert Cantwell’s 2005 seminar on Jane Addams. His more recent, though unpublished, lecture “Culture as Solace: Jane Addams Theorizes the Industrial Age” lucidly explicates Addams’s “democratic” conception of culture.

<sup>56</sup> Addams, “Function of Social Settlements,” 40.

turn, show how the artist could—and did—“do something” about American education in the first decade of the twentieth century.

#### **IV. Learning in Action: The Hull-House Labor Museum**

On January 25, 2009, the *New York Times* ran a feature story on Ellis Preparatory Academy, a public school in the South Bronx structured according to the needs of immigrant students who have had little or no schooling in their native countries and are often illiterate in their native languages. Of the 150,000 New York City students currently working to master the English language, 15,000 arrived in the United States without having learned how to learn, and of those, only twenty-nine percent will graduate from high school. Ellis Academy, whose very name echoes the country’s immigration practices in the time of Jane Addams, has room to educate just eighty-two of them. The rest are mainstreamed and of these, most drop out after endless frustrations and unsuitable curricula that, for example, require students to master the process of evaporation when “they don’t know how water is constructed.” They are not, it seems, encouraged to “learn from life itself,” but rather to catch up with their classmates at a breakneck pace. Principals often resent having to enroll these students because, as they say: “what this group does for my school is bring down my numbers.” In their state-mandated fixation on outcomes and measurable standards, these schools do little to help such uneducated students bear their burden; failing test scores dwarf emotional and familial health. And yet, many of these students arrive with grand aspirations for themselves and the families they often are slated to support, only to find them dashed by the educations that fail to meet their particular

needs.<sup>57</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, Jane Addams hoped that her Labor Museum would be able to solve the kinds of problems in which these New York City students are still embroiled. They are the heirs to what remains a messy educational system, one designed without the needs of recent immigrants in mind. Mainstream educational practices continue to fail to address the panoply of challenges involved in educating children in a modern, urban, and now *post*-industrial world.

As Addams prepared to shutter Hull-House's Butler art gallery in the late fall of 1900, she began to plan for a Labor Museum that she hoped would serve as an experiential and educational space. She quickly decided that it would forgo the stultifying academic lectures—that inevitably and “insensibly drop[ped] into the dull terminology of the classroom”—but were the mainstays of Victorian-era museums.<sup>58</sup> In their place would be live displays of immigrants practicing their traditional artisanal trades. In the decade prior to the museum's opening, Hull-House had offered conventional lectures on topics from “spectrum analyses of star dust” to “Slave Labor in the Roman Empire.” These offerings mimicked university lectures and were given by pedantic academics who showed little sympathetic understanding of their audience. And audiences, it seems, were no more accepting.<sup>59</sup> Wanting, then, to distance herself from both the traditional museum and the conventional classroom, Addams stewed about her new program's pedagogical structure.

---

<sup>57</sup> Jennifer Medina, “In School for the First Time, Teenage Immigrants Struggle,” *The New York Times*, 25 January 2009, sec. Education, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/education/25ellis.html?emc=eta1>.

<sup>58</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 277.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

Then, early in her planning, she decided on a live museum by recalling that: “the spot which attracts most people at any exhibition or fair, is the one where something is being done.”<sup>60</sup> Partly through her conversations with John Dewey, Addams had come to believe that people learn through action, a marked change from Ruskin and other contemporaneous curators who installed static exhibits. Even as maximizing its educative potential impelled Addams, she deliberately resisted labeling her project with an academic title: “The word ‘Museum’ is purposely used in preference to ‘School,’ both because the latter is distasteful to grown-up people from its association with childish tasks, and because the former still retains some of the fascinations of the show.”<sup>61</sup> This decision in name was about more than semantics; it was about what kind of pedagogy would prevail. By the late-twentieth century, museum critics would identify the structural differences in these two educative spaces, a distinction that Addams seems to have anticipated much earlier: “Museum exhibitions are certainly not school classrooms, which enforce incremental, cumulative learning through authoritarian leadership over rigidly defined social

---

<sup>60</sup> Addams, “First Outline of a Labor Museum at Hull-House, Chicago,” Unpublished carbon, 1900, Addams Papers, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3. The very articulation of Addams’s anxiety about what to call her project evidences some sort of internal questioning about how closely Addams wanted to align her museum with Dewey and his contemporaneous Laboratory School. In the museum’s founding documents, she does not mention either one, implicitly claiming that the museum’s origins were hers alone. But Dewey’s 1899 *The School and Society*, a work released just prior to the museum’s founding (and one she cites directly in *Twenty Years*), detailed his similar experiential, hands-on pedagogy. The many parallels between Dewey’s school (including his description hereof) and Addams’s Labor Museum suggest that Dewey’s influence may have been foundational to her project. But even as these two theorists found sympathy in each other’s methods, Addams orients her museum toward the production of affective experience and engagement in a way that Dewey’s school never does.



units...Exhibitions are places of free choice.”<sup>62</sup> As one of Addams’s primary goals was to humanize Chicago’s workers by enabling their self-expression, a live museum was ideal. So instead of gazing at reproductions of Renaissance masterworks or sitting through soporific lectures, visitors to the Labor Museum would watch Russian and Italian women dying and carding wool, working stick spindles and wheels. And they were invited to participate as well.

Still, at first glance the Labor Museum could seem both quaint and staid. In the entryway a huge framed timeline loomed over the museum’s guests. It spanned from 2000 B.C. to 2000 A.D., and was there to make a simple point: that men and women had been spinning and weaving with their hands for thousands of years while the steam-powered loom had been on the scene for mere decades.<sup>63</sup> In the main exhibition space, the timeline’s history came to life. Visitors roamed through displays of dying, carding, spinning, and weaving. In other rooms, potters threw bowls and metal workers shaped steel, copper, and iron. Addams deliberately organized these displays along an evolutionary progression, one that may have artificially forced disparate practices into a single chronology but that nonetheless demonstrated the birth of industrial methods by way of conscious and conscientious alterations in the artisan’s project. Visitors first would see what Addams’s partner described as “probably one of the most primitive forms [of spinning] known”—a Syrian man wielding two short sticks crossed at right angles to make a

---

<sup>62</sup> Elaine Heumann Gurian, “Noodling Around with Exhibition Opportunities,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 181.

<sup>63</sup> Jessie Luther, “The Labor Museum at Hull-House,” *The Commons* 70 (May 1902), 3.

spindle of the kind used by Bedouins. After the Syrian came an Italian woman dressing a distaff, followed by a German mother working the spinning wheel. As visitors moved from station to station, they watched the spinning become faster and tighter, each station improving upon the last. In the museum's glass-fronted display a similar logic prevailed. An exhibit on spinning, for instance, might feature examples of wool moving from scouring to dyeing to carding to weaving—moving, essentially, from sheep to textile.<sup>64</sup>

All of this might seem hopelessly didactic, but the Labor Museum consistently overturned prevailing ideas of the museum itself and, especially, of the museum's relationship to the people who wandered its halls. Consider, for a moment, the Labor Museum in its own cultural moment. In turn-of-the-century Chicago, memories of the city's 1893 World's Fair were never far away. The Fair's organizers described their exposition as "an illustrated encyclopedia of civilization."<sup>65</sup> It featured, on the one hand, a gleaming White City whose neo-classical architecture and imposing scale summoned visitors to contemplate the grandeur of genteel culture. On the other hand, the Fair's Midway Plaisance became a colossal sideshow teeming with the "exotic": Sudanese sheiks,

---

<sup>64</sup> Marion Foster Washburne's description of the Labor Museum is the only extant first-person visitor account. This description, along with Addams's own reports of the museum, forms the basis of my descriptions. See: Marion Foster Washburne, "A Labor Museum," *The Craftsman* 6 (September 1904), 570-580; Jane Addams, "Labor Museum at Hull House," *The Commons* 47 (June 30, 1900), 1-4; Addams, *First Report of the Labor Museum at Hull House*, Chicago, 1901-1902 (Chicago, 1902), 1-16; Addams, "The Hull House Labor Museum," in *The Child in the City: A Series of Papers Presented at the Conferences Held During The Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit* (Chicago: Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, The Department of Social Investigation, 1912), 410-14; Addams, "Hull House and Its Neighbors," *Charities* 12 (May 1904), 450-451; Jessie Luther, "The Labor Museum at Hull House," *The Commons* 70 (May 1902), 1-13.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Rydell, *All the World's Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 45.

Javanese carpenters, an Algerian Village, and something called the Persian Palace of Eros.<sup>66</sup>

In their aspirations and exhibits, the White City and the Midway stood as perfect opposites. Yet their effect on audiences could be strikingly similar. In their awesome displays both the White City and the Midway cultivated distance between the viewer and the object or person on view. The White City commanded reverence. The Midway encouraged pseudo-ethnographic gawking. The Labor Museum, by contrast, held out greater expectations for its visitors. Instead of commanding reverence or encouraging ogling, Addams hoped her museum visitors might learn to feel, a more active and engaged behavior. Uninterested in exotic or the prurient, Addams tried to enable the production of emotions like respect, compassion, sympathy, and nostalgia. Put in the terms of exhibition strategy, Addams and her museum championed what Ivan Karp has termed “assimilation”—that process that highlights similarities between the displayed and the viewer.<sup>67</sup> This meant bringing the viewer and the participant/viewee into affective proximity. There remains just one first-person account of a visitor’s experience of touring the Labor Museum, but in this case his words are particularly apt: “What does take place is what the visitor cannot see, although he may afterwards experience it himself. It is a change of mental attitude.”<sup>68</sup> Addams, in short, taught affective change through historical knowledge, not wonder through exoticism.

---

<sup>66</sup> John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 23.

<sup>67</sup> Ivan Karp, “Other Cultures in Museum Perspective,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 379.

<sup>68</sup> Marion Foster Washburne, “A Labor Museum,” 77.

Beyond understanding her own industrial worth (something she could glean in the historical continuums of the museum), the visiting laborer was encouraged to feel pride and sympathy, emotions deemed irrelevant in the factory. Unlike the majority of museums or folklife exhibitions that, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett tells us, “are guided by a poetics of detachment, in the sense not only of material fragments but also of a distanced attitude,” Addams’s Labor Museum worked through a poetics of attachment.<sup>69</sup> The participant and the viewer were intimately linked through familial, cultural, or neighborly bonds. Her live museum simultaneously removed the barriers between object and viewer and suggested that the participant was worthy of respect. In an age that valued speed and efficiency, precision and uniformity, Addams allowed the immigrant worker to feel his labor was a valuable part of the larger system. In the factory, he may spend his days in “flat and monotonous toil,” but in the space of the Labor Museum, he was united to his parents and grandparents, a goal equally humble and fundamental to humanity.

The intended visitors to the museum were the neighboring immigrants themselves or their children, the members of the second and third generation who now toiled in America’s factories, spoke English, and were alienated from their foreign-born parents, just as their parents had been alienated from the history of their own industrial labor. Consider something as mundane, as “quotidian,” as the large framed timeline at the Labor Museum’s entrance.<sup>70</sup> Addams hoped it would teach factory laborers who visited her

---

<sup>69</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 434.

<sup>70</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 410.

museum about the contributions of their artisan forefathers and the precedents that gave rise to the factories in which they now labored. She designed the timeline to redistribute the weight of history. For Addams contended that even modern machinery, when viewed in this historical context, could be seen as what she called “a social possession [with] an aggregate value” because such machinery depended upon a long history of technological development that was the modern-day worker’s rightful inheritance.<sup>71</sup>

Hence, hers was a prescient, bottom-up approach to teaching history:

To put all historic significance upon city walls and triumphal arches, is to teach history from the political and governmental side, which too often presents solely the records of wars and restrictive legislation, emphasizing that which destroys life and property rather than the processes of labor, which really create and conserve civilization.<sup>72</sup>

The point was more than academic. By forging historical connections, Addams hoped to provide workers with a sense of self-worth based on knowledge of their own meaningful contributions to both the industrial system and civilization at large. This necessitated using material processes to teach labor history, which in turn fostered the worker’s sense of self, one that valued instead of dismissed individual—and seemingly invisible—contributions. In effect, the timeline looming in the entryway began the museum’s process of turning its working-class visitors into spectators of themselves.

Addams’s conviction of the social necessity of enabling laborers’ affective self-expression through historical knowledge sets her project apart in critical ways from her friend John Dewey’s contemporaneous Laboratory School. In his popular 1899 *School and*

---

<sup>71</sup> Jane Addams, “The Labor Museum at Hull-House,” *The Commons* 47 (1900): 1.

<sup>72</sup> Addams, “First Outline,” 7.

*Society*, Dewey came closest to Addams in his pedagogical attention to historical progress, though he stopped short of her affective goal:

In the ideal school there would be something of this sort: first, a complete industrial museum, giving samples of materials in various stages of manufacture, and the implements, from the simplest to the most complex, used in dealing with them; then a collection of photographs and pictures illustrating the landscapes and the scenes from which the materials come, their native homes, and their places of manufacture. Such a collection would be a vivid and continual lesson in the synthesis of art, science, and industry.<sup>73</sup>

Like Addams, Dewey argued for the educational value of the worker's apprehension of the progress of labor; yet the tone of his argument was empty of sentiment, affection, or familial care. Instead of intuiting the bond between the generations, Dewey's interest was almost pedantic. He did not mention—and seemed uninterested in—either the social or emotional value of the experience he advocated. In comparison to Addams, his very rhetoric is mechanized, limiting his ideal vision to a “synthesis,” a far cry from Addams's “solace.” Certainly Dewey provided a structural blueprint of the Labor Museum in this description, but he wanted to turn artisanal skill into a static display, one that did not feature the artisan as an active participant nor the spectator as able to form an affective bond with the actor.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the basic structure of his school precluded the intergenerational communion that was foundational of Addams's educative museum. The child in Dewey's school learned by accepting his place in the industrialized world. While in the Labor Museum this same child may have found that he inhabited the exact same place

---

<sup>73</sup> John Dewey, *The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 90.

<sup>74</sup> Dewey, 20-22.

in the industrialized economy, he would also have learned that in his labor he was knit to his parents, their parents, and the parents throughout history. In the end, what makes the Labor Museum the more compelling pedagogical alternative was Addams's resistance to stultifying either the visitor or participant. Labor, in other words, was enlivened instead of enshrined.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, assessing Addams's museum and its affective influence from our own vantage point remains elusive. Performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson has offered the most recent and cogent critique of the project. She reads the very founding of the Labor Museum as Addams's *mea culpa* for Hull-House's implicit Americanizing agenda: "While Hull-House residents rarely vocalized an assimilationist agenda, the acculturating classes, children's groups, and young people's clubs indirectly contributed to this intergenerational conflict."<sup>76</sup> She deems the museum, then, as an attempt at manufacturing "nostalgia" to make up for Hull-House's other and more pervasive cultural disruptions. In what she claims was little more than a "liberal hope for a counter-public sphere that bracketed power differentials," singular participants inappropriately came to metonymically signify entire nations (i.e. "The Russian Spinning" or "The Italian Weaving"), thus flattening out smaller regional differences in their indigenous traditions.<sup>77</sup> The result of the

---

<sup>75</sup> Dewey's rendering of industrial advances as "thoughts precipitated in action," does, however, provide a method for viewing the Hull-House Labor Museum as the embodiment of cognition. Ultimately, it is Jane Addams's thinking (with a nod to Dewey) made manifest.

<sup>76</sup> Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity* (University of Michigan Press, 2000), 256. In her attempt to demythologize Addams, Rivka Shpak Lissak offers a similar interpretation of Hull-House's supposedly insidious assimilationist practices. *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull-House and the New Immigrants, 1890-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>77</sup> Jackson, 257.

museum's live displays was, according to Jackson, "interest but also the discomfort of a manufactured spectacularity."<sup>78</sup>

Part of the textile exhibit was, after all, a regular demonstration of "Navajo blanket" weaving. Such a practice raises obvious questions of authenticity within the museum space. While the goods produced in the museum relied on actual historic technologies, they arose from a dislocated context. Instead of weaving on a Turkish loom in Istanbul, for instance, the Labor Museum "worker" (who, in most cases, was not Turkish) did so in Chicago, a geography without the exact cultural knowledge to verify, use, or appreciate the cultural product. While the experiential nature of the museum allowed for viewers and participants to achieve some measure of unity, Addams did—like her contemporaneous curators—display archaic methods because they had become obsolete (and consequently valuable) in industrial America. The Navajo blanket starkly reflects an entire culture made obsolete by Anglo-Americans. By encouraging children to reproduce the blanket in the museum, Addams elides the reality of Anglo-inflicted violence, but she also implants and perpetuates cultural memory of the Native Americans, albeit out of context. For Jackson, such curatorial practices were an unpardonable sin. Accordingly, the museum's provocation of any inkling of an ethnographic gaze from its spectators radically undermined its value.

Addams has always been vulnerable to critiques like Jackson's. Detractors could claim that instead of addressing the social forces that dehumanized the industrial worker, Addams sought to ameliorate their bad lot. While Addams seems to have accepted Ruskin's thesis that mechanized labor turned the worker into a machine, unlike Ruskin,

---

<sup>78</sup> Jackson, 259.



she hoped to provide solace to the worker, instead of reformation to the work. At the center of her conception of solace is a change in the worker's consciousness, a change that politics alone cannot provide. Addams explains, "Democracy claims for the workman the free right of citizenship, but does not yet insist that he shall be a cultivated member of society with a consciousness of his social and industrial value."<sup>79</sup> Addams worked to fill in the affective gaps left in American industrialism. Her notion of solace accepted that social and economic justice is not immediately attainable for the immigrant worker. Though this acceptance may appear hopelessly condescending and ultimately ineffective, we should not underestimate the importance of helping the laborer understand his own worth in an economy that deemed him replaceable. At an historical moment ripe with labor conflict and violence, and in a time when "labor" itself was a word spoken in hushed tones, Addams not only proudly named her project a "Labor Museum," but she also dignified labor with its own exhibition. This undertaking underscores Addams's conviction that what the laborer most needed was solace, a social action, and a form of grief management that her museum could provide.

And though weary of my own tendency toward defensiveness about Addams and her project, I want to suggest that Jackson, in looking for revolutionary perfection, misses the affective and pedagogic worth of the museum by simultaneously reading it too literally and ahistorically.<sup>80</sup> In her conviction that the museum flattened out cultural differences, she in fact, flattens out the museum's cultural work. Take, for example, her justifiable

---

<sup>79</sup> Addams, "The Labor Museum," 3.

<sup>80</sup> Jane Addams, "Labor Museum at Hull House," *Commons* 47 (June 30, 1900): 1-4.

consternation that promotional photographs for the museum featuring the Polish Hilda Polacheck (née Satt) were erroneously entitled “Russian Spinning.” Polacheck’s family had, in fact, fled Poland because of Russian invasions that made emigration necessary. This editorial offense leads Jackson to conclude that the museum deleteriously “erase[d] any sense of individual creativity.”<sup>81</sup> But what Jackson elides is Polacheck’s confessed gratitude for the Labor Museum and exuberance for the role it played in her own life. At a time when the young Polacheck worked more than ten hours a day on a factory knitting machine and bore witness to devastating industrial accidents, she had no idea that the cotton with which she worked grew from the ground or even that wool came from sheep. These Labor Museum revelations, she avowed, “made my eyes pop out of my head,” and empowered with this new knowledge, she immediately jumped at the chance to participate in the exhibition space.<sup>82</sup> Even as she came to confess that the museum did not “solve all the problems,” she attested: “I am sure that the Labor Museum reduced the strained feelings on the part of immigrants and their children.”<sup>83</sup> This disparity, then, between the official historical record, i.e. the mislabeled photograph and Polacheck’s testimonial suggests the need for a different kind of interpretation. Instead of assessing it by measurable standards and quantifiable outcomes, the museum calls for an imaginative reading, one that bridges Addams’s belief in the artist with her pedagogical priorities.

---

<sup>81</sup> Jackson, 260.

<sup>82</sup> Polacheck, 64.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.



Figure 3: Original Caption: "Hilda Satt Polacheck Oct. 1913 (Russian Spinning)"

The museum's emphasis on diverse but nonetheless familiar women's domestic arts enabled visitors to become participants and participants to become viewers, inverting the established structure of authority in the contemporaneous classroom.

In *Twenty Years*, Addams tells the story of a group of Russian women who arrived at Hull-House in search of entertainment one winter's night. When they realized that no party was planned, the residents showed them the Labor Museum in an effort to provide them some enjoyment. Within minutes the Russian women were spinning the distaffs and working their native looms. Addams looked on as the Russians moved "from having been stupidly entertained, they themselves did the entertaining." With the student/teacher paradigm reversed—through "a direct appeal to former experiences"—the women put themselves "into the position of teachers...a pleasant change from the tutelage in which all Americans, including their own children, are so apt to hold them." In this process, the

Russians who arrived as spectators found themselves teachers with an unexpected kind of cultural capital that “instruct[ed] their American hostess in an old and honored craft.”<sup>84</sup>

This encouraged inversion of cultural authority marks Addams’s project as something far different than a celebration of the primitive by disaffected bourgeois women.

Their lesson was not lost on Addams. The Labor Museum’s spinning frames, in fact, prompted (as we saw in Section III) her redefinition of culture to “an understanding...of the arts with which they have solaced their toil.” This revelation, in turn, compelled Addams to try to “recover for the household arts something of their early sanctity and meaning”<sup>85</sup>:

My mind was filled with shifting pictures of woman's labor with which travel makes one familiar; the Indian women grinding grain outside of their huts as they sing praises to the sun and rain; a file of white-clad Moorish women whom I had once seen waiting their turn at a well in Tangiers; south Italian women kneeling in a row along the stream and beating their wet clothes against the smooth white stones; the milking, the gardening, the marketing in thousands of hamlets, which are such direct expressions of the solicitude and affection at the basis of all family life.<sup>86</sup>

In Addams’s lyrical reevaluation of women’s “household arts” worldwide, each of the women’s activities—from grinding grain to gathering water to gardening—is intimately connected to fundamental sources of life. Their daily actions, with immediate and gratifying effects in the lives of their children, are, for Addams, the very source of solace. Though turn-of-the-century Chicago had little use for such obsolete skills, Addams wanted her Labor Museum to teach these “primitive activities,” and in doing so, to imaginatively

---

<sup>84</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 160-161.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

recover maternal attachments that, for her, were the basis of a will to live, even in the industrial age.<sup>87</sup>

As Addams began to formulate her notes for her autobiographical account of Hull-House, the relationship between parent and child foregrounded her story of the origins of the Labor Museum.

I meditated that perhaps the power to see life as a whole is more needed in the immigrant quarter of a large city than anywhere else, and that the lack of this power is the most fruitful source of misunderstanding between European immigrants and their children, as it is between them and their American neighbors. And why should that chasm between fathers and sons, yawning at the feet of each generation, be made so unnecessarily cruel and impassable to these bewildered immigrants?<sup>88</sup>

In this early document, as in the published copy of *Twenty Years*, Addams conjoined the struggle between immigrant parents and their children with that between immigrants and established Americans. By fusing this tension under the Hull-House roof, Addams's project appeared to ameliorate the former struggle, while its effects were more wide-ranging. In this sense, the innovative instructional methods of the Labor Museum at Hull-House were, to a certain degree, representative of Progressive era educational reform that sought to use communities themselves as resources for solving public issues.

---

<sup>87</sup> This domestic and maternal orientation remained throughout the life of the museum (and Hull-House more generally). In fact, the vast majority of the museum's photographs depict immigrant women working the spinning wheels or looms. By persistently putting the woman's face forward, Addams effectively translated the lessons of the domestic space (fundamental housekeeping and handcrafts) into a palliative for the laborer. Tellingly, the photographs of the museum that do depict men always show them in the pottery or metal shops—the two areas that enjoyed the most commercial success—suggesting that men too could learn valuable lessons in the museum space, which might, in fact, translate to actual financial gain.

<sup>88</sup> Addams, "Autobiographical Notes," 494.

Moreover, as Addams grew increasingly weary of local public schools whose practices damaged familial connections, she attempted to structure her museum to foster such communication within the family: “An overmastering desire to reveal the humbler immigrant parents to their own children lay at the base of...the Hull-House Labor Museum.”<sup>89</sup> In nearly all her accounts of the project, Addams tells the story of Angelina, an Italian schoolgirl who, ashamed of her mother’s refusal to acculturate to American fashion (she wore a “kerchief over her head, uncouth boots, and short petticoats”), refused to enter Hull-House by the same door. Once Angelina learned that her mother was celebrated by visitors to the Labor Museum as the “best stick spinner in America,” however, she began to reappraise her.

Angelina asked Addams about her mother’s apparently remarkable skills, and Addams “took occasion to describe the Italian village in which her mother had lived, something of her free life... I dilated somewhat on the freedom and beauty of that life—how hard it must be to exchange it all for a two-room tenement, and to give up a beautiful homespun kerchief for an ugly department store hat.” In this lesson, Addams deliberately joins the “freedom and beauty” of Angelina’s mother’s village life (signified in the “kerchief over her head”) with her “an ugly department store hat.” While Addams does, at least in part, return here to her earlier notions of taste and its improving power, she also teaches Angelina (through an intimate engagement with her emotional life) about the critical relationship between women’s domestic arts—their “primitive activities”—and the solace produced through these activities that was necessary for survival in the fact of

---

<sup>89</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 155-156.

industrialization's corrosive impact on the family.<sup>90</sup>

Angelina, it seems, learned this lesson well; afterward “she allowed her mother to pull out of the big box under the bed the beautiful homespun garments which had been previously hidden away as uncouth; and she openly came into the Labor Museum by the same door as did her mother, proud at least of the mastery of the craft which had been so much admired.”<sup>91</sup> Using an alternative and experiential approach to teaching, the Labor Museum simultaneously taught mother and daughter to regard themselves and each other anew.

But even as she taught Angelina to reorient herself to her mother, Addams recognized the limitations of her pedagogy. She writes:

That which I could not convey to the child, but upon which my own mind persistently dwelt, was that her mother's whole life had been spent in a secluded spot under the rule of traditional and narrowly localized observances, until her very religion clung to local sanctities—to the shrine before which she had always prayed, to the pavement and walls of the low vaulted church—and then suddenly she was torn from it all and literally put out to sea, straight away from the solid habits of her religious and domestic life, and she now walked timidly but with poignant sensibility upon a new and strange shore.<sup>92</sup>

The immigrant “torn” from her native village and “put out to sea” was, for Addams, a kind of cultural orphan washed up on American shores without a connection to the very

---

<sup>90</sup> This pedagogical moment evidences Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's “museum effect,” a model for the process of psychological change possible through an exhibit. She writes, “Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in the museum setting, but also the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its wall.” “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 410.

<sup>91</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 161.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

activities—and the “local sanctities”—that gave her life meaning and solaced her domestic labor. But even as this reading of Angelina’s mother was deeply sympathetic, Addams, strangely enough, “could not convey” it to the student in front of her. The reasons for this could be infinite, and are, perhaps, irrelevant now.

Nevertheless, I want to suggest that this very moment of pedagogical paralysis immediately following pedagogical success reveals her complex relationship to her own teaching. In this educative moment, Addams needed a kind of imaginative freedom to comprehend, in all its complexities, Angelina’s mother’s life. She needed the literary to forge the connection between the particular life she describes and the shared experience of America’s immigrant poor, the very motive that drove her work in the Labor Museum. It is no accident, then, that Addams names Angelina in her anecdote (she does, in this sense, focus on the student instead of on the teacher), but does not identify her mother save for in her relational role to Angelina. This anonymity, in turn, teaches readers (Addams’s global students who encounter this educative moment in *Twenty Years*) through a kind of rhetorical process whereby the reader substitutes anyone for the mother and then finds themselves learning—through words instead of live actions—Angelina’s lesson.

The reader is also a proxy for Angelina as the student who receives the second half of the lesson. In Addams’s inability to “convey” to Angelina her mother’s disconnection from the emotional sustenance of life, she makes herself able to instruct a much larger class of students. The rhetorical form, in effect, becomes the cultural model of Addams’s liberal and progressive vision. In this and other detailed descriptions of the museum in *Twenty Years*, Addams effectively delocalized it, spreading the museum’s lessons far beyond her



Chicago neighborhood, into the homes of her thousands of readers. Ultimately, both the museum and its mobile form in her autobiography made the world intelligible to her neighbors by teaching them the “language” of craft and labor, both in the “old country” and in America.

## V. Follow My Lead: Transporting Hull-House

“In reality, every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self.”  
-Marcel Proust

As much as the Labor Museum experiment stands as perhaps the most tangible iteration of Addams’s educational aims, and even as it enthroned her as an important alternative teacher, it was, as a live exhibit, singular and self-contained. Its influence was necessarily limited by mundane factors, such as exhibition hours, available space, internal funding, and ultimately by a fixed life span (the museum building itself was razed in 1963 but had long since become inactive).<sup>93</sup> Moreover, that which made it a dynamic space of learning necessarily narrowed its scope; one had to be *at* Hull-House in order to experience the Labor Museum and benefit from its pedagogical methods of teaching both audiences and participants to use “life itself”—direct experience—as a means of producing personal growth. Addams remained deeply devoted throughout her life to this and other local improvements for her Chicago neighbors, but she was also far more ambitious in her commitment to American educational improvement than the Labor Museum alone could satisfy.

---

<sup>93</sup> Shortly after Addams died in 1935, the Labor Museum ceased to attract participants and viewers. As subsequent directors of the settlement turned their attention to “more practical labor reform efforts,” they turned away from the museum. It was closed entirely in the late 1930s.

In seeking to “socialize democracy” nationally, Addams knew that she had to broadly teach women of her generation to risk themselves in an emotional and political, though largely private, reconceptualization of others that would ideally lead to their public participation in community development and social welfare. She needed, in other words, to offer them both an alternative lens through which to view their previous learning and a new means of further educating themselves. It is crucial to remember that the very origins of Addams’s project at Hull-House arose not solely from her visionary benevolence toward the immigrant poor, but rather in conjunction with her own “mingled sense of futility, of misdirected energy” after she graduated from Rockford (51).<sup>94</sup> During her postgraduate “snare of preparation,” she came to realize simultaneously that young, educated women lacked opportunities for meaningful work outside of the home—they had little chance to “try out some of the things they had been taught”—and that immigrant families suffered in a similar fashion upon their arrival in America. The previous section of this chapter addresses how Addams came to teach the latter, and though these methods applied to a certain extent to the educated residents at Hull-House, she still needed a means of delocalizing and popularizing her pedagogy, unmooring it from its place and period and circulating it far beyond the confines of Chicago.

Her *Twenty Years at Hull-House, With Autobiographical Notes* (1910) became just that, a means of teaching others, and women in particular, to recognize their social duty by participating in Addams’s narrative interpretation of herself. The subordinated subtitle—*Autobiographical Notes*—gives readers the first clue about how she intended to reach this

---

<sup>94</sup> Further references to *Twenty Years at Hull-House, With Autobiographical Notes* in this section will be cited parenthetically.

group of students. As a genre, the autobiography is precariously perched between the personal and the private. As such, it can reveal their complex relationship, just as Hull-House itself existed between the domestic and the social, mobilizing the power of the former to reform the latter.<sup>95</sup> Mirroring this reform strategy, Addams uses *Twenty Years* to model a radical form of women's public participation. Its radicalism, however, is never prohibitive because she initially appropriates—and wields—socially acceptable patriarchal authority and couches her own activism in safe, domestic rhetoric (and spaces) that only subtly instructs readers to transition from their domestic concerns to those of the larger public through justifiable social commitments that originate in the home. Throughout *Twenty Years*, Addams consistently intimates that all can have access to a fully realized education through life itself. To illustrate this possibility in *Twenty Years*, she merges her own life experiences and her development of a feminized and social self-definition with the pedagogic form.

By the time Addams published this, her fourth book, she was a well-known figure and an author whose essays reached national and international audiences. She regularly published in popular periodicals, from *The Atlantic Monthly* to *McClure's* and from *The Ladies' Home Journal* to *The Chautauquan*. Ultimately, her stylistically savvy essays and books spanned nearly five decades and engaged hundreds of social and civic topics. In them she routinely and persuasively argued for various reforms with steady logic backed by empirical evidence drawn from her Hull-House projects. But the 1902 essay "Educational Methods,"

---

<sup>95</sup> Women who write autobiographies, Sidonie Smith argues, "cross the line between private and public utterance, unmasking their desire for the empowering self-interpretation of autobiography as they unmasked in their life the desire for publicity." *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 44.

with which this chapter begins, struck a decidedly different tone in its charge to artists, not to schoolteachers, to fix the country's educational problems. *Twenty Years*, begun just three years after this essay was published and finished four years after that, reads as Addams's attempt to take up her own charge and to perform the part of the artist who remakes American education by providing "intimate insights into the needs of [her] contemporaries" and "minister[ing] to them" as none other could: by way of her own private story.<sup>96</sup>

Addams believed that the best texts—with their insights and ministrations—could carry with them "a consciousness of participation and responsibility" that, in turn, could lead to social action.<sup>97</sup> They could, at least in part, suffice for the immediate, personal experience that often compels individuals to reorient themselves in their environments and behave differently. In conceptualizing how literature works, Addams explained: "Without Zangwill's illumination [in *Children of the Ghetto*] we would have to accumulate much more experience, but it is no compliment to the artist, if, having read him, we feel no desire for experience itself." Literature, then, could be a bodily experience, a "quickening of the blood," that enables readers "to know" the needs of others so intimately that no matter how far removed they are from the text's setting, they can still be in affective proximity to it. This conceptualization of the way texts work marked a shift from Addams's earlier "Appreciation" and "mere intellectual apprehension" to "a larger and more embracing one,

---

<sup>96</sup> Addams, "Educational Methods," 92.

<sup>97</sup> Katherine Joslin argues that Addams "was conscious of her art, musing on the power of fiction, drama, music, painting, sculpture, even film to transport an audience and to transform its understanding of the human condition" (221).

not only with our minds, but with all our powers of life.”<sup>98</sup> Addams believed that these powers, ones that originate in the imaginative capacity of both writer and reader, could radically reform American life.<sup>99</sup>

In surveying Addams’s remarkable and very public accomplishments at Hull-House and beyond, it becomes all too easy to forget that in making her private life public in *Twenty Years*, Addams was defying autobiography’s androcentric tradition. Traces of this tension linger throughout the text, between, on the one hand, her frequent self-effacement (e.g. calling herself the “ugly duckling”) and on the other, her resolute early identification with her father and Lincoln. Her autobiography, in fact, opens self-consciously, with Addams justifying the terms by which she carefully selected particular memories to relate to her readers.<sup>100</sup> “On the theory that our genuine impulses may be connected with our childish experiences, that one’s bent may be tracked back to that ‘No-Man’s Land’ where character is formless but nevertheless settling into definite lines of future development,” Addams asserts, “I begin this record with some impressions of my childhood” (7). This initial—and almost diffident—assertion of her narrative logic suggests Addams’s original plan was either to write a conventional autobiography according to established (and overwhelmingly male) standards of the time or to assure her readers that that was her plan.

---

<sup>98</sup> Addams, “Function of Social Settlements,” 37-38.

<sup>99</sup> Her belief in literature’s affective and cultural work *and* its ability to represent life in industrial America in gritty, hard-nosed detail places Addams squarely between the nineteenth-century’s sentimental and domestic tradition and its late century turn to realism.

<sup>100</sup> Following in the critical tradition of examining autobiography generically, I read Addams’s “memories” as stories about or commentary on “original experience” that can never be recovered in totality or with fixed meanings. Autobiography, then, “becomes both the process and the product of assigning meaning to a series of experiences, after they have taken place by means of emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary, and omission” Smith, *Poetics*, 45.

Nancy K. Miller has linked anxious preliminaries of this sort among female autobiographers to their need to project a self that is at once their own and society's. In order, for instance, to escape criticism of overreaching normative gender roles, Addams, like other women autobiographers, crafted an opening statement that proclaimed to readers her intention to write a linear narrative (from her "childish experiences" to her "future development"), adhering to an autobiographical plan well within accepted generic standards of the day.<sup>101</sup>

It comes as no surprise, then, that Addams shapes her early experiences so that they might fit a culturally privileged storyline of progressive, evolutionary development. In what amounts to merely the first instance of a pattern of vocational predestination that runs throughout the early part of Addams's narrative, she claims—on just the second page of the autobiography—that she first discerned her future line of work at the tender age of six. Traveling with her father on business in town, she spontaneously realizes that her vision of town as "bewilderingly attractive," was nothing more than the naïve fantasy of a "country child" (8). With her "first sight of the poverty which implies squalor," she "felt the curious distinction between the ruddy poverty of the country and that which even a small city presents in its shabbiest streets" (8). This singular vision of unjust inequality, she suggests, leads to her declaration to her father that: "...when I grew up I should, of course, have a

---

<sup>101</sup> Nancy K. Miller, "Women's Autobiography in France: For a Dialectics of Identification," in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, and Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980), 262. See also Paul John Eakin, *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972). For discussion of Addams's negotiations with Macmillan about the content of *Twenty Years*, see Joslin, 102-106.

large house, but it would not be built among the other large houses, but right in the midst of horrid little houses like those" (8).<sup>102</sup> This proclamation is at once a bold declaration of purpose and an implicit reassurance of what will be the domestic inclination of the autobiography. Just as quickly as she fashions herself a singular individual, whose house will be unlike all of those around her, she reassures readers that she will retain an acceptable domestic orientation; she, therefore, does not risk mentioning her subversive early inclinations toward public work. In this way, Addams's stylistic decision recalls Anna Ticknor's unyielding insistence on domestic rhetoric in her *Society*, even as she enacted an educational revolution within the domestic sphere.

As in this early scene, Addams uses her father in the first two chapters of *Twenty Years* both to justify her social work career and dampen suspicions readers might harbor about her ambition. John Addams was a prosperous mill owner and an Illinois congressman whose unimpeachable integrity, Addams claims, precluded schemers from even trying to bribe him. Through him she reads and interprets her young self, her religion, her ethics, and her relationship to others. By claiming that she conducted her early life in a "sincere tribute of imitation" to her "self-made" father, Addams justifies her dreams of social action and helps defuse potential readings of her ambitions as sexually transgressive.

Abraham Lincoln, a friend of her father's, serves as her other lodestar in the autobiography's early portions. Through the irreproachable Lincoln, the iconic unifier, she

---

<sup>102</sup> Addams's critics have long challenged the veracity of this and other recollections in *Twenty Years*. My belief in the fundamentally constructed nature of the text renders the question of veracity insignificant.

filters her own dawning awareness that “people themselves were the great resource of the country” (29). By exclusively accounting for her young ambitions by way of her father and Abraham Lincoln (who serve as culturally-acceptable proxies for her radical—and decidedly unfeminine—dreams of public action), she temporarily effaces her own femininity and maternal needs. Addams’s mother, Sarah, died when Jane was an infant and receives just two bloodless sentences in *Twenty Years*: “My mother died when I was a baby and my father’s second marriage did not occur until my eighth year” (12). Julia Kristeva has argued that the female autobiographer who, like Addams, writes for herself a public role and an individual selfhood “raises herself to the symbolic stature of her father,” and in doing so, silences her mother.<sup>103</sup> This choice effectively erases the figure of domesticity and disempowerment from the autobiographical subject herself and allows her to write for herself a role outside of the home. The premature death of Sarah Addams makes her nearly total absence from *Twenty Years* initially appear benign, until Jane is mistaken for her mother at the death of Sarah’s faithful nanny, Polly. Alone with Polly during her final throws of death, Jane is seized by a paralyzing “sense of solitude, of being unsheltered in a wide world of relentless and elemental forces” (18). In this moment, Addams seems to first realize—and admit—her need (and the larger human need) for some form of maternal comfort and community that could not be satisfied exclusively by the father. After this experience, a fledgling recognition of the necessity of affective attachments between individuals slowly begins to penetrate her narrative, as demonstrated in her and her Rockford classmates’ self-designation as “Breadgivers” to her revised reading methods. This

---

<sup>103</sup> Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1977), 28, quoted in Smith, 52.



recognition utterly disrupts her far more conventional autobiographical celebration of a singular—isolated—life.

So conventional are these early chapters that they seem written by the young Addams who assiduously studied the lives of “Great Men,” first at her father’s side and then later under the direction of her instructors at Rockford Seminary. The eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century biographies and autobiographies that Addams enjoyed during these years were, broadly speaking, the records of exceptional and very public men. Carlyle, who had been one of Addams’s favorite authors during childhood and early adolescence, described his revered “heroes” as: “The leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers (sic), patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do to attain.”<sup>104</sup> Carlyle, of course, withheld this lofty designation from all but a select few who were, in turn, “the light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world.”<sup>105</sup> They were prophets and guides for all to follow, their thought alone mighty enough to transform the material world.

But as brightly as Carlyle’s “light-fountains” shone, they proved poor guides for Addams after her father’s sudden death in 1881.<sup>106</sup> With her father gone, Addams quickly began looking for an alternative model on which to pattern—and through which to read—

---

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841; reprint, Lincoln, N.B.: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 1.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>106</sup> In *Twenty Years*, Addams claims that her rejection of Carlyle came long before her father’s death. She writes that while reading “Heroes and Hero-Worship” at age fifteen, she attended an “Old Settler’s Day,” celebration of American ingenuity and development and “found it difficult to go on. Its sonorous sentences and exaltation of the man who ‘can’ suddenly ceased to be convincing.” *Twenty Years*, 29.

her own ambitions. Just months after graduating from Rockford and two weeks after her father died, Addams wrote to her future Hull-House partner of this need explicitly: “It was my ambition to reach my father’s requirements and now when I am needing something more, I find myself approaching a crisis and look around rather wistfully for help...the good men and books I used to depend on will no longer answer.”<sup>107</sup> The “Great Men” of Addams’s schooling were, after all, ancient Greeks and Romans, American political heroes, and writers of unparalleled fame. Their stories were the records of men who single-mindedly pushed toward public and powerful roles, a course that a proper nineteenth-century woman would hardly deign to chart in life or in print.<sup>108</sup> That in the early chapters of *Twenty Years* Addams returned, stylistically speaking, to the “good men and books” upon which she used to depend ought to be understood as a shrewd rhetorical decision—one that lent her an immediate cultural authority—rather than a retreat to the comforts of memory and habit.

For, taken as a whole, *Twenty Years* serves as a record of Addams’s formulation of a feminized way to read both her own life story and experience itself. The preface of her autobiography, written *after* she finished the narrative proper—and in stark contrast to the

---

<sup>107</sup> Jane Addams to Ellen Gates Starr, Cedarville, 3 September 1881, Addams Papers. Louisa Knight has argued that reading the lives of great men made Addams believe that gender was irrelevant to public potential. My own sense is that following her father’s death, Addams broke from the models offered to her of women’s public roles, and as this letter reveals, consciously endured the anxiety of working outside of an established—though largely unavailable—model.

<sup>108</sup> Male autobiography of Addams’s period took for granted a kind of Western individualism that understands the subject as an “isolated being.” See Georges Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” (1956) in James Olney, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 29-30. Olney, the progenitor of this school of thought, argues that the autobiographer is “surrounded and isolated by his own consciousness, an awareness grown out of a unique heredity and unique experience...Separate selfhood is the very motive of creation.” *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 22-23.

first chapters—initiates readers into her revised method of reading and writing experience. It also establishes the means by which readers, who could not all come to reside at Hull-House, could both inhabit the communal space of the settlement and experience an alternative model of learning. Finally, the recurrent scenes of reading after the opening two chapters in *Twenty Years* come to simultaneously transform Addams's self-conception and, by extension, the way that readers read Addams and themselves.<sup>109</sup>

To make her pedagogical experiment succeed, Addams created in *Twenty Years* a kind of living manual—one that would figure Hull-House as a vital force and teach readers how to access these energies in the act of reading. Writing in the midst of the settlement's activities, instead of from an aloof, retrospective stance allowed Addams to give readers access to the immediacy of her project and it also enabled them to see—and to read—from Addams's perspective.<sup>110</sup> Such radical reorientation of perspective is never easy, but as Janet Gunn argues, the autobiography especially “puts the reader to work—both on it and on himself or herself in the effort to become the reader the text demands.”<sup>111</sup>

From the first sentence of *Twenty Years*, Addams consciously “put[s] the reader upon his guard,” disorienting her from her conventional expectations (5). Rather than

---

<sup>109</sup> Julie Watson and Sidonie Smith argue that women reading other women's autobiographies often experience them as “mirrors of their own unvoiced aspirations.” *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Julie Watson and Sidonie Smith (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>110</sup> Addams's claimed that it was a failing of the text that she could not write from a temporal distance, that “the people with whom I have so long journeyed have become so intimate a part of my lot that they cannot be written of either in praise or blame” (5). What she claims to have felt was a weakness, however, was anything but. As readers, we come interact with Addams's subjects, not from some remote perspective, but rather, in their very immediacy.

<sup>111</sup> Janet Gunn, 20.

provide her readers with “too smooth and charming” a story—a story, Addams feared, that would be told in two forthcoming biographies of herself—she uses her preface to fuse herself with Hull-House. “No effort is made,” Addams writes, “...to separate my own history from that of Hull-House during the years when I was ‘launched deep into the stormy intercourse of human life’ for, so far as a mind is pliant under the pressure of events and experiences, it becomes hard to detach it” (6). Here Addams suggests that even *Twenty Year’s* second half—a less “personal” account of her social, or public, self—is actually as autobiographical as the early chapters. Katherine Joslin has argued that: “About a third of the way through the book...the heroine disappears, leaving Hull-House itself as the hero of the tale.”<sup>112</sup> While Hull-House does indeed assume the protagonist’s role in the later portions of *Twenty Years*, Addams has infused herself so intimately into the house, that her being never “disappears”; it is instead powerfully transformed.<sup>113</sup>

Addams’s refusal to separate herself from her settlement house itself exemplifies the revised self-conception at which she arrived after renouncing the “Great Men” model of her youth. And yet, even in this statement of a communal female self—symbolized in a shared domestic space—Addams momentarily reverts to the oldest model of western autobiography in quoting from Augustine’s *Confessions* (“launched deep...”). Addams’s evocation of Augustine at once reminds her readers of the conventions of the autobiography and initiates them into her transformative reappropriation of the genre.

---

<sup>112</sup> Joslin, 107.

<sup>113</sup> *Twenty Year’s* images reiterate this fusion; early in the narrative, readers find images of Addams, her father, Ellen Gates Starr, all singular, specifically recognizable individuals. Once the narrative turns to the activities at Hull-House, this type of image falls away; Norah Hamilton’s sketches of urban poverty replace singular, known selves. These later images are all indistinct enough that readers could imaginatively translate them to their own lives.

Moreover, by yoking Augustine to the house itself, Addams begins to empower the domestic space with authority. In order to invest it with social and public power, she had to revise her own narrative position so that the house itself could speak.

Addams's professed fusion of self and settlement called for a spatial—or even an architectural—construction of her life in the text. She recognized a need to “abandon” the traditional chronological construction of an autobiography “in favor of the topical” (6). “Time,” she writes, “seemed to afford a mere framework for certain lines of activity and I have found in writing this book, that after these activities have been recorded, I can scarcely recall the scaffolding” (6). In fixing her attention on “activities,” Addams simply claims to lose interest in their story of origins or their “scaffolding,” but she more importantly directs her reader to the very fabricated nature of the text and her eventual rejection of the conventional autobiographical form, thereby undermining what Hans Robert Jauss has called readers’ “horizon of expectations.”<sup>114</sup> In her private correspondence to friend and critic Graham Taylor in December 1910 she admitted that: “I did try my hardest to make an honest record, but life has been pretty complicated and the way by no means clear.”<sup>115</sup> By defusing any absolute sense of historical continuity or accuracy in her preface, Addams urges readers to understand her text and by extension her work at Hull-House as an interconnected and interpersonal series of actions that at once produced the

---

<sup>114</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 3-45 passim.

<sup>115</sup> Jane Addams to Graham Taylor, Chicago, 9 December 1910, Addams Papers. Though Addams felt the need to apologize or explain her non-linear narrative, feminist critics have argued that women’s autobiography rarely follows such an undeviating or sequential path. See, for example, Norine Voss, “‘Saying the Unsayable’: An Introduction to Women’s Autobiography” in *Gender Studies*, ed. Judith Spector (Bowling Green, O.H.: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986), 220.

edifice (Hull-House), the autobiography, and the self. Readers, by implication, are asked to dwell in *Twenty Years*, as they would in a woman's home, inhabiting a series of distinct rooms joined under a single roof instead of, as reader W.L. Richardson explained, "galloping" through a linear chronology without taking the time to absorb all that Addams offered.<sup>116</sup>

Both her 1881 letter to Ellen Gates Starr and her preface to *Twenty Years* suggest that Addams recognized women's particular need for new reading methods that would enable new social understanding. But in order to convince all of her readers—both those who were well-educated and those who were not—to risk forging interpersonal relationships across class and cultural divides, Addams had to universalize the possibility of valuable experience and disavow the necessity of elite learning in order to instruct her readers in an alternative approach to texts. Addams disparaged Rockford's nearly exclusive emphasis on students "acquiring knowledge" and "merely receiving impressions" as she formulated her programs for learning from direct experience. Consequently, at Hull-House itself, she produced her particular pedagogy in reaction to—in both positive and negative ways—her Rockford learning.<sup>117</sup> In *Twenty Years*, she revisits her seminary years for rhetorical reasons as well: to convince readers that her program—the one enacted throughout the autobiography—required no erudition and no specialized training at an exclusive college.

The narrative's trope of reading lessons indexes Addams's own development as an

---

<sup>116</sup> W.L. Richardson to Jane Addams, Chicago, 4 December 1910, Addams Papers.

<sup>117</sup> Sarah Robbins has argued that contrary to Addams's refutation of Rockford, she positively integrated its communal modes of learning into her Hull-House pedagogy. "Rereading the History of Nineteenth-Century Women's Higher Education: A Reexamination of Jane Addams's Rockford College Learning as Preparation for her *Twenty Years at Hull-House*," *Journal of the Midwest History of Education Society* 21 (1994): 27-45.

emotionally-engaged reader, and it simultaneously teaches readers a method by which to read *Twenty Years* and their own experiences.

As students, Addams and her Rockford classmates urgently wanted to “break through [the] dull obtuseness” of seminary learning and read literature “more sympathetically” (35). In attempting to achieve this new relationship with a text, they, for example, resorted to taking “small white powders at intervals during an entire long holiday,” desperate for a profound emotional experience with Thomas De Quincey’s popular writings (35).<sup>118</sup> In this case, they sought the ecstatic, but ultimately had to accept that, “no mental reorientation took place.” Disappointed and confused, Addams and her friends confessed their experiment to a teacher, who took away their De Quincey volume and sent them to separate rooms and then to church services, presumably to repent their foolishness. This episode, in all its strangeness, reveals both Addams’s desperate young search for a “sympathetic understanding of all human experience” through literature and the method for attaining an embodied mode of reading (36). Without the means for this kind of engagement, Addams and her peers conformed to the institutionally-established approach to texts, accumulating long lists of completed works, but “never dream[ing] of connecting them with our philosophy” (36). For Addams, of course, this orientation had begun long before, with her father paying her five cents a “Life for each Plutarch hero I could intelligently report to him, and twenty-five cents for every volume of Irving’s ‘Life of

---

<sup>118</sup> Thomas De Quincey’s popular autobiography *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) detailed the author’s drug-induced dreams. The text was popular with nineteenth-century American women, including those in the Society to Encourage Studies at Home.

Washington.” Books, John Addams’s actions suggested, were to be consumed quickly and efficiently, without regard to their integration into one’s developing “philosophy.”<sup>119</sup>

While in *Twenty Years* Addams portrays her taking elixirs and receiving cash for completed texts as little more than naïve and unproductive, she later returns to De Quincey to explore more forcefully the actual dangers of using texts as she and her classmates had, and thus providing readers with the needed justification for revising their own methods. Following her Rockford graduation and during her “snare of preparation,” Addams visited East London, her first real experience with the “wretchedness” of impoverished urban living. As she watched members of the “submerged tenth” fight one another for scraps of rotten vegetables, she found no comfort and had no means of translating her previous cultural acquisitions into either understanding or amelioration. Sitting—both literally and figuratively—above the horrors of an East London street atop an omnibus, Addams claims to recall De Quincey’s “The Vision of Sudden Death.” She remembers—and narrates in the present tense—that as the mail coach De Quincey rides in barrels toward an unaware couple in love, he is paralyzed, unable to shout ahead to warn the couple of their impending trampling. Only when his mind has been relieved by recalling “the exact lines from the ‘Iliad’ which describe the great cry with which Achilles alarmed all Asia militant...is his will released from its momentary paralysis, and he rides on through the fragrant night with the horror of the escaped calamity thick upon him” (51).

For De Quincey, and by extension for Addams and for her readers as well, this moment of affective debilitation (to the point of endangering others) reorients him to his

---

<sup>119</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years*, 36.



previous schooling. He “bears with him the consciousness that he had given himself over so many years to classic learning—that when suddenly called upon for a quick decision in the world of life and death, he had been able to act only through a literary suggestion” (51). Though initially horrified that she might be forever trapped in De Quincey’s “vicious circle” of literary inaction when she first recalls this textual moment in East London, Addams realizes with clarity that her previous schooling, like De Quincey’s own, entailed little more than “lumbering our minds with literature that only served to cloud the really vital situation spread before our eyes” (51). Literature, Addams suggests in this episode, is worthwhile when it induces ameliorative social action, but worthless when it deadens one’s responsiveness. Such a realization hastened Addams’s revised understanding of the value of artistic creation from mere appreciation to an interpersonal or social—understanding that could produce solace.

Her transformed relationship to texts—with its attendant critique of reading as “merely receiving impressions”—prompts readers of *Twenty Years* to consume the autobiography quite differently (51). To this end, Addams pictures moments in which texts accomplish the work of cultural understanding for social amelioration. These moments encourage imitation. Her own experience of encountering a “Greek testament” during the period of acute grief after her father’s death lays the groundwork for revised reading methods. A professor of Christian Ethics at Beloit College gave the bible to Addams while she was a student at Rockford. When he came to visit her following John Addams’s death, he inquired if she “had found solace in the little book he had given me so long before” (39). This simple question, according to Addams, gave rise to her spontaneous reverie

about the “village in which I was born, its steeples and roofs look as they did that day from the hilltop where we talked together, the familiar details smoothed out and merging, as it were, into that wide conception of the universe” (39). By fixing her attention so closely on the local, Addams finds herself part of a much larger story of suffering. And as she folds herself into a universal experience of grief, she shifts, almost imperceptibly and just for a moment, into the present tense (the “steeples and roofs *look*”). The effect of the syntactical change is the reader’s inhabitation of the vision and the universalizing of the moment. As Addams narrates her revelation, we find ourselves looking with her eyes, placing ourselves in her understanding. For Addams this recognition,

swallowed up my personal grief or at least assuaged it with a realization that it was but a drop in that ‘torrent of sorrow and anguish and terror which flows under all the footsteps of man.’ This realization of sorrow as the common lot, of death as the universal experience, was the first comfort which my bruised spirit had received. (39)

Unlike De Quincey’s reading, that isolated him from the needs of others and froze him in the face of human suffering, Addams realizes in this textual encounter and in the act of the imagination that it elicits that solace is found in one’s affective connection to others (in suffering and in peace) within a larger story of the shared human condition.

This, then, is what literature makes possible: an attachment to the “common lot” and the “universal experience” that solaces one’s sense of isolation and the disconnection in industrial America.<sup>120</sup> It is also what enables Addams to read Angelina’s mother and

---

<sup>120</sup> Addams uses second person pronouns in order to forcefully cast readers into a shared emotional experience, i.e. “You may remember the forlorn feeling which occasionally seizes you when you arrive early in the morning a stranger in a great city” or “A more poetic prayer would be that the great mother breasts of our common humanity, with its labor and suffering and its homely comforts, may never be withheld from you. (81). Also, beyond literary representations of Chicago’s nineteenth ward, *Twenty Years* includes Norah Hamilton’s line drawings of Lewis Hine’s

what, in turn, enables readers to do so as well. Addams's personal and embedded reading lessons in *Twenty Years* demonstrate that such an affective—and affecting—relationship to literature is not the province of the educated alone. When a young member of the Hull-House Boys' Club is wrongfully jailed, Addams tells readers that he “remembered the way Jean Valjean behaved when he was everlastingly pursued by the policemen” (278). By imaginatively inhabiting *Les Misérables*, the Hull-House boy discovered the means by which to endure his urban mistreatment; he “thought it would be queer if I couldn't behave well for three days when he [Valjean] had kept it up for years” (278). The placement of this story in “Socialized Education,” Addams's final chapter of *Twenty Years*, reminds readers that the tools of transformative learning—“the great inspirations and solaces of literature”—are often found between the pages of a book, if only one knows how to read them.

Readers, in fact, learned Addams's lesson well. They found themselves using *Twenty Years* as they had few other books. A *New York Times* critic proclaimed that the autobiography was “felt” by readers, instead of perused intellectually.<sup>121</sup> *The Chicago Evening Post* critic recognized that the alternative mode of reading that it elicited made “one realizes the extreme inconvenience of confronting such a book critically.” The critic went on,

---

photographs of Hull-House. The original photographs originally supplemented Addams's autobiographical *American Magazine* article that preceded *Twenty Years*. With wider views, they show Hull-House's physical context and subtitles place them particularly in the nineteenth ward. Hamilton's line drawings, on the other hand, are stripped of their identifiable context. They become simply aestheticized renderings of universal—delocalized—poverty and pathos. Taken alone, they are unrecognizably connected to Hull-House. Without identifying clues, Hamilton's images speak broadly to the human condition and the reader is asked to reckon with poverty in the broadest sense. The pictures also invite the reader to have a different kind of engagement with the text, one that is intellectually, emotionally, and visually charged.

<sup>121</sup> Unsigned, “Jane Addams: Hull House Twenty Years' Social Service in Chicago and the Worker's Equipment for her Task” *The New York Times*, 5 March 1911, 119.

proclaiming that the book itself was a “living being,” and thus, “to estimate it is like trying to perform a vivisection, out of curiosity.”<sup>122</sup> Accordingly, readers came to believe that the text, like Addams herself, did not need to be dissected, because its power was projected onto the hearts of its readers. “The truth which has been unfolded in that adventure,” critics announced, “is a truth now in turn unfolded to him who reads. It is a truth which no one with the instinct of pity or love can refuse.”<sup>123</sup> Indeed, readers suggested that the autobiography did more than the work of description or narration. It enacted Addams’s methods by transposing her experiences—as Zangwill had done for Addams herself—onto the reader, who was then forced to reconcile the injustices in America’s democracy with her own experience. Its “unfolding of a personality so completely in touch with the needs and aspirations of the times,” meant that Addams herself was not seen as “the product, but rather one aspect of a growing social ideal.”<sup>124</sup>

Jane Addams’s “growing social ideal” was not enshrined at Hull-House, but rather it was disseminated from the ghetto to the garden and from factory to farmland. Extra-institutional students in Chautauquan Circles studied *Twenty Years* in their parlors and in vacant schools, discussing Addams’s ideas with such intimacy that “We feel as if we knew Jane Addams and it is astonishing how we find ourselves quoting things that she says in ‘Twenty Years at Hull-House.’” Her message, it seems, stuck in readers’ heads. The incorporation of *Twenty Years* into the national Chautauquan curriculum (the organization

---

<sup>122</sup> Francis Hackett, “Hull House,” *The Chicago Evening Post*, 25 November 1910, Addams Papers.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> “Twenty Years at Hull House,” *The North American Review* 194 (1911): 629.

nationally distributed study questions for the text in its weekly magazine) illustrates the extent of the text's travels (there were thousands of reading circles all across America) and reminds us of the interconnectedness of progressive, alternative forms of learning in the period.

Merging art, reading, emotion, education, and experience, Addams constructed in *Twenty Years at Hull-House* a method of teaching and of knowing that is perhaps best understood as it was by one of her readers in the winter of 1910. Writing from a small college nestled in the mountains of Kentucky—one founded in 1855 in the middle of the slave-holding South on the simple idea that all Americans deserved access to education—Eleanor Frost could not help but feel connected to Addams when she turned the autobiography's final page: "I am surprised that your conclusions and inner experiences should have been so similar to my own when your city world has been so different from my country one. But I suppose the matter of reading people living in a different world from our own is fundamentally the same everywhere."<sup>125</sup> Frost, it seems, read Jane Addams a hundred years ago the way I still do. She found something essential—perhaps almost primitive—in Addams's own experiences, a resonance that defied geography but that had very much to do with gender. In her sympathetic connection with Addams, she came to realize the power of reading people and texts rightly. And yet Frost concluded her letter by reminding Addams of something they both knew well: that part of reading rightly was knowing when to close the book and face the person in need:

Over and over I have been convinced of the truth of your conviction—a mountain woman fifty miles from the railroad was telling me of their

---

<sup>125</sup> Eleanor Frost to Jane Addams, Berea, KY, 31 December 1910, Addams Papers.

schoolteacher a college student from another state who was spending his vacation in teaching. 'He seems to be a good man, an I reckon he knows a leap; but he stays to hisself an' reads books. I reckon he got that habit in college. But hit takes talkin' and 'mixin' to do folks good—leastways ignorant folks like us!"

Frost's representation of mountain dialect reveals a disconcerting assumption of cultural authority (she was, in fact, the college president's wife), but nevertheless, for just a moment consider the national reach and the relevance of the "conviction" that Addams turned into action. She knew, and she convinced readers to believe, that "socialized" democracy—the talking and the mixing of disparate individuals that an uneducated woman in rural Kentucky easily explained—was the most pressing lesson that all Americans needed to learn.

## EPILOGUE

Americans' search for ways to improve the nation's educational system continues unabated. Each election cycle brings new plans for improvement, new promises of reform, new measures of achievement. Suitably, October 2008 found the liberal-leaning Brookings Institute releasing a new study titled "Changing the Game: The Federal Role in Supporting 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational Innovation," by Sara Mead and Andrew Rotherham. After appraising the last two decades of American educational shortcomings—from high dropout rates to low test scores to students ill-prepared for an ever-changing global marketplace—these policy experts argue that recent reforms implemented under the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) have achieved only marginal success because they are so deeply enmeshed within the faltering system itself. Worse still, these efforts have not been formulated by pedagogical visionaries, but instead by panicked administrators who have taken the "whatever works approach," instituting temporarily ameliorative reforms that raise test scores in the short run but that have little long-term value.<sup>1</sup>

In an educational culture where such haphazard methods dominate reform efforts, Mead and Rotherman search beyond the boundaries of schooling conventionally defined for what they call "genuine game-changers." These "game-changers" will be inventive

---

<sup>1</sup> Sara Mead and Andrew Rotherham, "Changing the Game: The Federal Role in Supporting 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational Innovation," Published by the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institute, October 2008: 22-23.

alternatives to the perennial call for increased attention to standards, greater accountability, and school choice. Mead and Rotherham convincingly argue that behind the multi-million dollar budget lines, the federal government's support for real innovation remains lackluster. The United States Department of Education, they note, spends less than one percent of its budget on research and development.<sup>2</sup> To change this pitiful game, they contend that the government should court the private sector and social entrepreneurs, persuading them to put their business acumen to public use at the national level.<sup>3</sup> By borrowing models of innovation from the other fields, such as science, defense, and business, the federal government might, as it were, finally draw up a winning play. To be sure, "building predator drones," they write, "does not seem to have much in common with educating children." Yet they claim that a generic process of innovation (which they define as: "identify promising ideas and entrepreneurs, invest in the development of prototypes based on their ideas, field-test and refine those models, eliminate those that don't work, test and refine further, and eventually arrive at a small number of effective innovations") is broadly applicable across all fields.<sup>4</sup>

But this very formulation of innovation reveals a fundamental problem in what is an earnest attempt to reroute the conversation away from a purely instrumentalist view of education. Mead and Rotherham's understanding of innovation, with its concentration on

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>3</sup> For Mead and Rotherham, "social entrepreneurs" include individuals such as Teach for America's founder Wendy Kopp or Knowledge as Power Program's (KIPP) founders Mike Feinberg and David Levin. These non-profit organizations are supported by conventional foundations and new venture philanthropy organizations. Mead and Rotherham advocate the expansion of such programs, especially because they are still "largely decoupled from national policy" (6).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 43.



“prototypes” and “models,” is so inextricably bound to late-capitalist notions that it is itself hostile to real innovation. Seemingly unaware of their metaphors, Mead and Rotherham blithely suggest that while designing the weapons of war may not “seem” relevant to education, it actually is, if only we abstract out enough to appreciate the underlining process. Such abstraction, though, only further perverts real reform efforts, as it disregards the singularity of children’s educational needs. In trying to escape the logic of unsuitable solutions and further standardization, Mead and Rotherham fall back to old premises.

Yet the introduction of interdisciplinarity into the contemporary conversation about educational reform at the national level is an important contribution of this provocative study. In wedding methods of entrepreneurial business development to problems in American schooling, the authors suggest that working outside of the disciplinary borders of the field will enable innovations not possible inside of it. This is their “game-changer.” I hope this dissertation has shown that such an approach, in the most general sense, is not so new after all. In gazing starry-eyed into the future, Mead and Rotherham have forgotten the legacies of the past. In 1961, historian Lawrence Cremin warned of this danger. “Reform movements,” he wrote, “are notoriously ahistorical in outlook. They look forward rather than back.”<sup>5</sup> Eager to fashion substantive change out of novel ideas and without the drag of previous failed initiatives, radical reformers too quickly dismiss models that may have had a limited utility in their own time, but that could be more illuminating at a later moment. Almost fifty years after Cremin’s admonishment, reformers like Mead and Rotherham, while reopening the conversation about

---

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School, Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1961), 8.

interdisciplinary reform, continue to make the same mistake, pressing onward with little regard for their predecessors.

In overlooking the extra-institutional educational innovations of the past, these reformers fail to integrate important contributions and values of a decidedly unquantifiable sort. When numerically measurable results dominate the discussion, important and inventive contributions from the humanities lose their already tenuous place in the dialogue. Now, Louisa May Alcott's novelistic interventions in nineteenth-century education bear no real resemblance to the development of the starkly chilling predator drones that Mead and Rotherham advocate as a research model for education. I would no sooner suggest that students' reading of *Little Men* would lower dropout rates than I would claim that writing longhand letters to pen-pals in Southeast Asia would prepare students for the global marketplace. Nevertheless, I would argue that when we broaden the scope of our understanding of learning to include not only students' content acquisition, but also their analytical ability to read and interpret their experiences and their worlds, we find reason enough to look beyond measurable outcomes. The educational values that the teachers of this dissertation disseminated began with opening access to learning for students exiled from schools and colleges, and they eventuated in Jane Addams's holistic practices that were designed to integrate students' emotional, psychological, and intellectual needs in the early twentieth century.

To be fair, Mead and Rotherham do acknowledge, but then quickly disregard, the contributions of "diverse entrepreneurs—from Ben Franklin, Jane Addams, and George

Washington Carver to Steve Jobs and Bill Gates.”<sup>6</sup> Jane Addams may be awarded only a symbolic place here in the genealogy of American entrepreneurialism, but what about moving beyond the symbolic in order to take Addams’s pedagogy seriously, in order to see if Addams’s work might let us actually shift the dialogue about early childhood learning? Recovering her model of holistic learning with students’ unique experiences, cultural histories, and family legacies at its foundation could refocus what has become an overly politicized conversation about the necessity of parental involvement in student learning. It may also suggest how curricula for immigrant children could be remodeled to address students’ particular needs, creating an alternative to instructors cramming students with facts—for which they have little context—needed in order to pass state proficiency exams.<sup>7</sup>

The case studies of this dissertation show how great an oversight the field of education commits when it fails to recognize—or at the very least, take seriously—imaginative interventions in American schooling that come from outside the social and hard sciences. This dissertation has illuminated such experiments, but my work is more than a recovery expedition. This project shows what it is that literature—or the word writ large—can contribute to learning itself, from the nineteenth to today. Explaining such a thing has become, especially in a moment of academic budget-cutting and mass layoffs, a burden that the humanities have to bear, but such a burden also comes with the possibility of enriching the dialogue that current policy analysts are having about reform. In justifying

---

<sup>6</sup> Mead and Rotherham, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ginger Thompson, “Where Education and Assimilation Collide,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/us/15immig.html?ref=education> (accessed March 15, 2009).

their work's relevance, humanities scholars, in turn, tend to speak in soaring tones about the need for students to comprehend what it is to be human or what it is to live in this world.<sup>8</sup> Comparatively, the educational experiments of this dissertation, offer what may seem at first glance to be prosaic, but are nonetheless provocative, answers to these questions.

In this study, the novel, the letter, the museum, and the autobiography all merge with inventive pedagogical practices that become viable when translated into these generic forms. In this way, all of the imaginative innovations under examination here are interdisciplinary in nature, albeit in a predisciplinary moment of sorts. Recall, for instance, Anna Ticknor's use of the familiar letter, an efficient technology that insisted on personal investment. It offered thousands of women the possibility of critical dialogue and intellectual self-invention through intensive study at a time and in places where such activities were discouraged. Or consider once again Jane Addams's Labor Museum, a curatorial experiment that was a radical revision of contemporaneous exhibitions. It took a holistic approach—something sadly missing from today's public schools—to educating new citizens by reconnecting parents and children in meaningful dialogue. Each of these participatory forms were designed to compel students—both young and old, rich and poor—to cast a critical gaze inward and interrogate not only books and textiles, but themselves and their worlds. These case studies, in turn, show that learning that emanates from an intimate engagement with the emotional and material needs of students has a far greater

---

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Cohen, "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth," *The New York Times*, 25 February 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/25/books/25human.html?scp=3&sq=humanities&st=cse> (accessed February 26, 2009).

resonance than mechanized and uniform instruction that is assessed through standardized means in today's schools.

## I. One Final House

The dissertation began as a study of three houses, all led by unusual teachers who negotiated the transformation of their homes from private domains to educational enterprises with some form of a public interface. Crucial to the success of each of these learning experiments were the formal and informal networks of women that circulated and recirculated Alcott, Ticknor, and Addams's pedagogies. I want to conclude this study with a very brief look at one final home, a place where we find a contemporary iteration of this kind of work.

Amanda Blake Soule's home in Portland, Maine is both rustic and deliberate, equal parts Martha Stewart and homespun. It is a private, domestic space made public each day anew on her website [soulemama.com](http://soulemama.com), an "unschooling blog" that attracts tens of thousands of regular readers. It is a new discursive space that pictures old methods of innovative learning. Her blog recalls both the possibilities and the pitfalls of extra-institutional learning, and it is yet another reminder—though of a dramatically different sort—of the continued impulse to seek alternatives to mainstream American schooling and its ever-more scientific approach to teaching children.

First, a quick note on these terms: unschooling refers to a wide range of educational practices loosely assembled under the category of homeschooling. But where homeschoolers often maintain some vestige of classroom practices (perhaps they follow a set curriculum or designate certain daytime hours to formal learning), unschoolers are

more radical, idealistically inclined to dismiss all remnants of institutional learning and its hierarchies. Children direct their own learning by identifying and following their particular interests, often in nature, through lived experience, and at their own pace. In this regard, we might think of Louisa May Alcott's Dan, the rough-and-tumble street child who in *Little Men* gravitates toward experiential learning in the woods with Mr. Hyde, as a nineteenth-century unschooler. Parents support their children's learning, but resist substantial intervention into the process.<sup>9</sup> For unschoolers, learning is an organic practice of trusting one's instincts and following one's questions beginning at a very young age. Finally, it is primarily mothers—and only those who have the financial ability to stay at home with their children—who nurture the unschooling activities, casting a decidedly upper-middle class and maternal air to the undertaking.

While unschooling often unfolds during a family's walk in the woods or during a make-believe global exploration in the attic—suggesting its older, preinstitutional orientation—there is a small but vocal subgroup of unschooling mothers who catalog their children's learning experiences on their own blogs, new “online journals” that enable the public recordings of private experience.<sup>10</sup> Reading them, in turn, can feel if not voyeuristic,

---

<sup>9</sup> In his radical educational work of the 1960s and 1970s, John Holt called for the elimination of compulsory schooling that he believed destroyed students' natural curiosity. Thereafter, Holt led the modern American home- and unschooling movements of the last thirty years. See, for example, his *Teach Your Own: A Hopeful Path for Education* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1981); *Learning All of the Time* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1989). The history of American homeschooling is concisely reexamined in Milton Gaither, *Homeschool: An American History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Soule's site is a good place to begin perusing unschooling blogs, but there are also scores of “unschooling blog rings,” directories of thousands of others. See, for instance, <http://homesteadinunschoolers.blogspot.com/>; <http://www.ringsurf.com/ring/nr17/>; <http://www.flickr.com/groups/unschooling/>; and, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AlwaysUnschoolled/>.



a bit untoward. In the case of unschooling blogs specifically, this feeling arises from an uncomfortable tension between what is frequently a mother's stated desire for her children's private, domestic learning and an almost entirely unexamined global publication of this process. In comparison to Alcott, Ticknor, and Addams's careful navigation of private needs and public spaces, the writers of unschooling blogs seem unwilling to critique their practices, and as a result, there exists a pervasive culture of blind acceptance that may ultimately limit the scope and viability of unschooling.

In front of the cast-iron wood stove in Amanda Blake Soule's home, her four young children work independently, one painting a study of backyard birds perched at the winter feeder, one playing dress-up in a felt crown and cape, another stacking wooden blocks to form a doll's house, and the fourth, a cooing baby, is bound lovingly in a hemp sling around his mother's torso. All of them are unwitting actors in a learning drama that plays out each day in their home and on their mother's website. The home itself plays a leading role, its wide plank floors and vintage quilts are quite literally the ground on which all learning unfolds.

Perusing Soule's daily images is a combination of wishful catalog shopping for a way of life (an interpretation invited by the dozen or so advertisements on her blog for natural toys, organic fiber arts, and Soule's own book *The Creative Family*) and a wishful desire to believe that the extra-institutional learning pictured here can, in fact, produce such intelligent, curious, and spirited children. Her images of learning are highly aestheticized, at times dreamy, and always studied, if not staged (Figure 3).


SouleMama: remnants of a day

<http://www.soulemama.com/soulemama/2008/09/remnants-of-a-d.html>
[RSS](#)

[Home](#)
[AmandaSoule.com](#)
[Mama to Mama](#)
[Shop SouleMama](#)
[Bookshop](#)
[Press](#)
[Archives](#)
[About](#)
[Email](#)

MY BOOK :: AVAILABLE NOW




Available:

[in My Shop \(signed copies\)](#)  
[Amazon](#)  
[Your Local Bookstore](#)

Share your projects from the book in

The Creative Family Flickr pool!

MY BOOK :: AVAILABLE AUG 11



Pre-order:

[Shambhala Publications](#)  
[Amazon](#)  
[Your Local Bookstore](#)

WELCOME

Please do not reproduce images or content from this site without permission. Thank You!

Email Amanda


FOR YOU!

[My Hat of Choice \(pdf\) - new kid sizing!](#)  
[Gratitude Wrap \(pdf\)](#)

» the Jane Austen Dress | Main | harvest season »

remnants of a day

We're often asked what our days, as unschoolers, look like. I'm never able to answer that question well - truly each day is so very different - each full of smooth moments and bumpy ones alike. And even though two days are never exactly the same, each new season, month, and sometimes even week brings with it a new rhythm of some things that do stay the same. This week, with its mild and beautiful September weather, and our focus squarely at 'home,' I've found us - quite without planning - spending the latter half of the day on this blanket in the backyard. When I stood up to leave the cozy spot in the sun to start dinner yesterday, I looked down and saw these remnants of our day. The tools of living, playing and learning together...




a baseball glove and ball (always); Tin Tin; a comic book in the works inspired by Tin Tin; the Barefoot Book of Princesses; a notebook full of butterfly drawings; a deck of cards from the dozen card games played that afternoon; the Audubon Butterflies and Moths book, brought out by someone looking for a moth name after our walk in the woods; mama's knitting; iced tea the kids made in the morning; the basket waiting for someone to gather the dinner's tomatoes and basil.

It was a v

LOVING ::

[Elizabeth Gilbert on nurturing creativity](#)  
[everyone needs a rock](#)  
[untitled - by jaime m](#)  
[Coraline : Sweater XXS](#)  
[amy karof's spoons](#)  
[Geninne - hand carved stamp tutorial](#)  
[Her Morning Elegance / Oren Lavie](#)

FEATURED SPONSOR




nova

NATURAL

TOYS

CRAFTS

SPONSORS



lisa leonard designs

handmade jewelry

What a post!! I am all weepy. I have been thinking of your unschoolers for a while and meaning to research it. My oldest is in his first year of preschool, and I am not happy with it. I can't put my finger on it. There is a funny feeling in my stomach that I teach him better at home, and it scares me. I wasn't planning on that... Hmmm.

Posted by: Nicole | September 18, 2008 at 08:54 AM

It is hard to describe what we "do" all day. The trick is not feeling you have to conform to someone else's ideas of what education and worthy activity should "look" like.

Posted by: Qalballah | September 18, 2008 at 08:56 AM

Figure 3: Soulemama.com

231



And yet, they are also, admittedly, compelling.<sup>11</sup> The products of her children's learning—hand-sewn books inscribed with inventive stories in a scratchy cursive hand and illustrated lists of American presidents with stars next to the most beloved ones—appear unsullied by a rigid academic agenda or school standardization, though their politics, of course, may be all the more rigidly prescribed in unschooling homes. The activities pictured are themselves a rarity in a culture of standardized learning that only infrequently can afford personalized detours through a day's lessons.

Beyond simply airing her and her children's experiences for untold numbers of fans, Soule invites her readers to participate. In this way she consciously disseminates her experimental pedagogy for a global audience (her book has been translated into Korean and readers leave comments from Japan to Germany). Hundreds, and at times thousands, of readers use her blog's comment function to respond each day to Soule's entries. Collectively these readers form a women's network of sorts, sharing ideas about, among other things, mothering, home decoration, children's learning, unschooling, and crafting. Readers almost always offer support and thank Soule for her inspiration for their own domestic and mothering practices. At times they ask for advice about their own children (or their knitting projects, as these seem somehow inextricably linked within this community), and still others respond with encouragement and instruction. What develops over the course of a day in the comments area is a conversation about living and learning in an unconventional, extra-institutional, if bourgeois, "new" domestic culture that is a

---

<sup>11</sup> The pictures of "unschooling days," according to one of her readers, "offer much better explanations than our words." Posted by "Simbelmyne" at <http://www.soulemama.com/soulemama/2008/09/remnants-of-a-d.html> (accessed March 13, 2009).

return to much older values.<sup>12</sup> But just as Jane Addams struggled to reconcile the actual needs of her immigrant neighbors with her own early aesthetic biases, the critical reader of Soule's blog may struggle to reconcile Soule's unschooling with the actual needs of children located beyond the idealism of a moneyed New England family.

Somewhere, though, between Mead and Rotherhams's overly scientific call for national interdisciplinary educational innovation and Amanda Blake Soule's overly idealized cultivation and circulation of a domestic but nonetheless public form of private unschooling, we find vestiges of Louisa May Alcott, Anna Eliot Ticknor, and Jane Addams's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pedagogies. Their homes, both real and imagined (and not unlike Soule's today), were experiments in the educative redistribution of authority, the extension of maternal nurture or solace outward, and the creation and composition of lessons for students without easy access to halls of this country's schools and colleges. They worked across imaginative genres—institutions of a different sort—to educate Americans during a period of vast social change brought on by industrialization, urbanization, and the Civil War's conclusion. Their lessons alone did not, of course, solve the problems of a changing nation; they did not reverse the virulent racism of the postwar years, nor they did not rectify sexism and social inequality. But their work—their writing and their teaching—did transform individual lives and communities of readers and workers both, in their own time and in ours as well.

---

<sup>12</sup> For representations of this “new” and evolving domesticity, see <http://www.flickr.com/groups/thenewdomesticity>.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Manuscript Collections

Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Alcott Family. Additional Papers, 1820-1886.

Amos Bronson Alcott Papers, 1799-1888.

Louisa May Alcott Papers, 1832-1888.

Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

Mabel Metcalf Papers.

Papers of the Society to Encourage Studies at Home.

Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio.

Lucy Keeler Collection.

Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman Papers, 1846-1961.

Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Lewis Thompson Papers.

### Published Primary Sources

Addams, Jane. "The Art-Work Done by Hull-House, Chicago." *Forum* 19 (1895): 614-617.

———. "Cassandra." 1881. Reprint, in *The Jane Addams Reader*. Edited by Jean Bethke Elshtain, 10-13. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

- . *Democracy and Social Ethics*. 1902. Reprint with introduction by Charlene Haddock Seigfried. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- . "Foreign-Born Children in the Primary Grades." *National Educational Association, Journal of Proceedings and Addresses* 36 (1897): 104-112.
- . "A Function of Social Settlement." *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 13 (1899): 23-45.
- . "Hull House and Its Neighbors." *Charities* 12 (1904): 450-451.
- . "The Hull House Labor Museum." In *The Child in the City: A Series of Papers Presented at the Conferences Held During The Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit*. Edited by Sophonisba Preston Breckinridge, 410-414. Chicago: Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, The Department of Social Investigation, 1912.
- . "Labor Museum at Hull House." *The Commons* 47 (1900): 1-4.
- . Letter to Vallie Beck. Cedarville, IL, March 16, 1876. Reprint, in *The Selected Papers of Jane Addams: Volume 1: Preparing to Lead, 1860-81*. Edited by Mary Lynn McCree Bryan et al., 137. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- . Papers. 1860-1960. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 82 reels, 1985.
- . "The Public School and the Immigrant Child." 1908. In *Jane Addams on Education*. Edited by Ellen Condliffe Lagemann. 136-142. New York: Teacher's College Press, 1994.
- . *The Spirit of Youth and The City Streets*. 1909. Reprint, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921.
- . "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements." In *Philanthropy and Social Progress*. Edited by Henry C. Adams, 1-26. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1893.
- . *Twenty Years at Hull-House, With Autobiographical Notes*. 1910. Reprint, New York: Penguin, 1998.
- Agassiz, Elizabeth, et al. *Society to Encourage Studies at Home: Founded in 1873 by Anna Eliot Ticknor*. Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1897.
- Alcott, Amos Bronson. *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*. Edited by Odell Shepard. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1938.

- . “The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture.” 1836. Reprint, in *The Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists*. Edited by George Hochfield, 131-143. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- . “Journal for 1837.” Part One. In *Studies in the American Renaissance*. Edited by Larry Carlson, 27-133. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1981.
- . “Journal for 1838.” Part One. In *Studies in the American Renaissance*. Edited by Larry Carlson, 161-244. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1993.
- . *Superintendent’s Report of the Concord Schools to the School Committee, for the Year 1860-1861*. A facsimile of the first edition with an introduction by Walter Harding. Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1960.
- Alcott, Louisa May. *Her Life, Letters, and Journals*. Edited by Ednah D. Cheney. Boston: Robert Brothers, 1890.
- . *Jo’s Boys*. 1886. Reprint, New York: Bantam Classics, 1995.
- . *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*. Edited by Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, and Madeleine B. Stern. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997.
- . *Little Women, or, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy*. 1869. Reprint, New York: Penguin Book, 1989.
- . *Little Men*. 1871. Reprint, New York: Signet, 1986.
- . *Rose in Bloom*. 1875. Reprint, New York: Puffin Classics, 1995.
- . “Recollections of My Childhood.” 1888. Reprint, in *Little Women, Or Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy*. Edited by Anne K. Phillips and Gregory Eiselein, 428-433. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004.
- . *Select Letters of Louisa May Alcott*. Edited by Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987.
- “A Noble Enterprise—Society to Encourage Studies at Home.” *Providence Journal*, February 18, 1879, n.p.
- “An Invisible University for Women.” *New York Times*, June 11, 1877, 4.
- Beecher, Catharine Esther and Harriet Beecher Stowe. *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science: Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes*. New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1869.
- . *The Duty of American Women to Their Country*. New York: Harper and Brother, 1845.

- "Books for Home Reading." *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, November 1870, 471.
- Carlyle, Thomas. *On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*. 1841. Reprint, Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.
- Clark, Beverly Lyon, ed. *Louisa May Alcott: The Contemporary Reviews*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Cohen, Patricia. "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth." *The New York Times*, February 25, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/25/books/25human.html?scp=3&sq=humanities&st=cse> (accessed March 10, 2009).
- Minnie Darwell to Louisa May Alcott. 15 Oct. 1886. Louisa May Alcott Papers. Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. 1916. Reprint, Toronto: Collier-Macmillan Canada, 1966.
- . *Experience and Education*. 1938. Reprint, New York: Touchstone, 1997.
- . *The School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum*. 1902. Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. 1845. Reprint, New York: The Modern Library, 2000.
- "Education." *The Atlantic Monthly* 36 (1875): 372-373.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The American Scholar." 1837. Reprint, in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Edited by Nina Baym, et. al., 1135-1147, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003.
- . *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*. Vol. 7, 1838-1842. Edited by William Gilman. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960.
- . *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Vol. 7, 1845-1848. Edited by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1970. Reprint, New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Frost, S. Annie. *Frost's Original Letter-Writer: A Complete Collection of Original Letters*. New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1867.
- Griffith, George Bancroft. *The Poets of Maine*. Portland, ME: Elwell, Pickard & Company, 1888.

- "Historic Woodville: Bertie Union (Woodville Academy)." <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ncbertie/woodville/bertieunionsch.htm> (accessed December 21, 2008).
- Holt, John. *Teach Your Own: A Hopeful Path for Education*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1981.
- . *Learning All of the Time*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1989.
- "Jane Addams: Hull House Twenty Years' Social Service in Chicago and the Worker's Equipment for her Task." *The New York Times*, March 5, 1911, 119.
- Keeler, Lucy. "Wanted—A Memory." *Christian Union*, October 29, 1892, 791-792.
- Lagemann, Ellen Condliffe, ed. *Jane Addams on Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1985.
- Levi, Emma. "Through the Gates." *Christian Union*, May 27, 1886, 9-11.
- Litton, Alfred G. and Joel Myerson, ed. "The Temple School Journals of George and Martha Kuhn." *Studies in the American Renaissance*, 55-145. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993.
- Luther, Jessie. "The Labor Museum at Hull-House." *The Commons* 70 (1902): 1-13.
- Mann, Horace. *Lectures on Education*. Boston: Ide & Dutton, 1855.
- Mead, Sara and Andrew Rotherham. "Changing the Game: The Federal Role in Supporting 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational Innovation." Washington, DC: The Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institute, October 2008.
- Medina, Jennifer. "In School for the First Time, Teenage Immigrants Struggle." *The New York Times*, January 25, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/education/25ellis.html?emc=eta1> (accessed January 25, 2009).
- Moore, Rayburn S., ed. "The Letters of Alice James to Anne Ashburner, 1873-78: The Joy of Engagement (Part 2)." *Resources for American Literary Study* 27 (2001): 196-236.
- Morris, William. *Hopes and Fears for Art*. Boston: Robert Brothers, 1882.
- Peabody, Elizabeth Palmer. *Record of a School: Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture*. Boston: Russell, Shattuck, and Company, 1836.
- Polacheck, Hilda Satt. *I Came a Stranger, The Story of a Hull-House Girl*. Edited by Dena J. Polacheck Epstein. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- "Remarks of President Obama to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/10/us/politics/10text-obama.html> (accessed March 10, 2009).

Residents of Hull-House, *Hull-House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago, Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing out of the Social Conditions*. New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1895.

Sedgwick, Catharine. *Facts and Fancies for School-Day Reading, A Sequel to 'Morals and Manners.'* New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1848.

Skeel, Lucy. "To Sunday School Workers." *Christian Union*, July 6, 1881, 8.

———. "Book's Tourists." *Christian Union*, December 15, 1887, 663.

Society to Encourage Studies at Home. *Fifth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1878.

———. *Eighth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1881.

———. *Ninth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1882.

———. *Tenth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1883.

———. *Twelfth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1885.

———. *Sixteenth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1889.

———. *Seventeenth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1890.

———. *Twentieth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1893.

———. *Twenty-third Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1896.

———. *Twenty-fourth Annual Report*. Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1897.

Soule, Amanda Blake. "Remnants of a Day." <http://www.soulemama.comsoulemama/2008/09/remnants-of-a-d.html> (accessed March 11, 2009).

Spencer, Anstis. "A Vacation Hint." *The Congregationalist*, June 28, 1894, 892.

"Studies at Home." *Daily Telegraph*, Kalamazoo, MI, August 19, 1876, n.p.

Ticknor, Anna Eliot. *An American Family in Paris*. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1869.

———. "Health." Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1878.

———. ed. *Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor*. 2 Vols. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876.



Thompson, Ginger. "Where Education and Assimilation Collide." *The New York Times*, March 15, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/us/15immig.html?ref=education> (accessed March 21, 2009).

Turner, R. and Limming, W. *The Fashionable Letter Writer; Or, Art of Polite Correspondence: Consisting of Original Letters on Every Occurrence in Life, Written in a Concise and Familiar Style, and Adapted to Both Sexes: To Which Are Added Complimentary Cards, &c.*, rev. ed. Baltimore: W.R. Lucas, 1833.

"Twenty Years at Hull House." *The North American Review* 194 (1911): 629-631.

Washburne, Marion Foster. "A Labor Museum." *The Craftsman* 6 (1904): 570-580.

## Secondary Sources

Bergmann, Harriet F. "'The Silent University': The Society to Encourage Studies at Home, 1873-1897." *The New England Quarterly* 74 (2001): 447-477.

Berlant, Lauren Gail. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

Berson, Robin. *Jane Addams: A Biography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004.

Blair, Karen J. *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980.

Boydson, Jeanne. *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Brodhead, Richard. *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Brown, Gillian. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Brown, Victoria Bissell. *The Education of Jane Addams*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Bryan, Mary Lynn McCree, Nancy Slote, and De Angury, Maree. *The Jane Addams Papers: A Comprehensive Guide*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Burke, Colin B. *American Collegiate Populations: A Test of the Traditional View*. New York: New York University Press, 1982.

- Caravantes, Peggy. *Waging Peace: The Story Of Jane Addams*. Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds Publishing, 2004.
- Carlson, Robert A. *Quest for Conformity: Americanization Through Education*. New York: Wiley, 1975.
- Castiglia, Christopher. *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Christie, Nancy. "Women, the Public Sphere, and Middle-Class Culture." *Journal of Women's History* 20 (2008): 237-247.
- Clark, Beverly Lyon. "Domesticating the School Story, Regendering a Genre: Alcott's *Little Men*." *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 323-353.
- . *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Cott, Nancy. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977.
- Coviello, Peter. *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum America*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Cremin, Lawrence. *American Education, The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- . *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1961.
- Croly, Jane Cunningham. *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America*. New York: H. G. Allen & Co, 1898.
- Dahlstrand, Frederick. *Amos Bronson Alcott: An Intellectual Biography*. London: Associated University Press, 1982.
- Decker, William Merrill. *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Deegan, Mary Jo. *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago school, 1892-1918*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988.
- Dierks, Konstantin. "The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750-1800." In *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. Edited by David Barton and Nigel Hall, 31-41. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999.

- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Doubleday, 1977.
- Eakin, Paul John. *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deidre English. *For Her Own Good: One Hundred Years of Experts' Advise to Women*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978.
- Eiselein, Gregory. "Contradiction in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Men*." *The New England Quarterly* 78 (2005): 3-25.
- Elbert, Monika, ed. *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930*. Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2000.
- Elbert, Sarah. *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott and Little Women*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.
- Elson, Ruth Miller. *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.
- Farrell, John C. *Beloved Lady: The History of Jane Addams' Ideas on Reform and Peace*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967.
- Fischer, Marilyn. *On Addams*. Australia: Thomson Wadsworth, 2004.
- Fisher, Philip. *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Fitts, Deborah. "Una and the Lion: The Feminization of District School-Teaching and Its Effects on the Roles of Students and Teachers in Middle-Class Massachusetts." In *Regulated Children/Liberated Children: Education in Psychohistorical Perspective*. Edited by Barbara Finkelstein, 140-157. New York: Psychohistory Press, 1979.
- Fliegelman, Jay. *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- . *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, National Language & The Culture Of Performance*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Freedman, Estelle. "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930." *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979): 512-529.
- Gaither, Milton. *Homeschool: An American History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

- Gere, Anne Ruggles. *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Ginzberg, Lori D. *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Gordon, Lynn D. *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Graves, Karen. *Girls' Schooling during the Progressive Era: From Female Scholar to Domesticated Citizen*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998.
- Griffin, Clifford. *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960.
- Gurian, Elaine Heumann. "Noodling Around with Exhibition Opportunities." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine. 176-190. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.
- Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." 1956. Reprinted, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Edited by James Olney, 28-48. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Gustafson, Sandra. *Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Haefner, George. "A Critical Estimate of the Educational Theories and Practices of A. Bronson Alcott." Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1937.
- Halttunen Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982.
- Hamblen, Abigail Ann. "Louisa May Alcott and the 'Revolution' in Education." *Journal of General Education* 22 (1970): 81-92.
- Hayden, Dolores. *The Grand Domestic Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1982.
- Henkin, David M. *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Herbst, Jurgen. "Teacher Preparation in the Nineteenth Century: Institutions and Purposes." In *American Teacher: History of a Profession at Work*. Edited by Donald Warren, 213-236. New York: Macmillan, 1989.

- Hewitt, Elizabeth. *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s*. New York: Knopf, 1984.
- . *Culture & The City: Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago from the 1880s to 1917*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1976.
- . *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1999.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Jackson, Shannon. *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Jauss, Hans Robert. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Translated by Timothy Bahti. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.
- Johnson, Claudia Durst. "'Transcendental Wild Oats' or The Cost of an Idea." *ATQ* 12 (1998): 45-65.
- Joslin, Katherine. *Jane Addams: A Writer's Life*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Kaplan, Amy. "Manifest Domesticity." *American Literature* 3 (1998): 581-606.
- Karp, Ivan. "Other Cultures in Museum Perspective." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 373-385. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.
- Kasson, John F. *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1990.
- . *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.
- Kaestle, Carl. *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973.
- . *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.
- Katz, Michael B. *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2001.

- . "The Origins of Public Education: A Reassessment." In *The Social History of American Education*. Edited by B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Kelley, Mary. *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Kerber, Linda. *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Objects of Ethnography." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 386-443. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.
- Knight, Louise. *Citizen: Jane Addams and The Struggle for Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Kristeva, Julia. *About Chinese Women*. London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1977.
- Laird, Susan. "Learning for Marmee's Teaching: Alcott's Response to Girls' Miseducation." In *Little Women and the Feminist Imagination: Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays*. Edited by Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark, 285-321. New York: Garland Publishers, 1999.
- Leloudis, James L. *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Linn, James Weber. *Jane Addams: A Biography*. New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1935.
- Lissak, Rivka Shpak. *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull-House and the New Immigrants, 1890-1910*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Looby, Christopher. *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Mailloux, Steven. *Reception Histories: Rhetoric, Pragmatism, and American Cultural Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Martin, Theodora Penny. *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs 1860-1910*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.
- Matteson, John. *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father*. New York: Norton, 2007.
- Meacham, Standish. *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform, 1880-1914: The Search For Community*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987.

- Merish, Lori. *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Miller, Nancy K. "Women's Autobiography in France: For a Dialectics of Identification." In *Women and Language in Literature and Society*. Edited by Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, and Nelly Furman, 258-273. New York: Praeger, 1980.
- Moon, Michael. "Nineteenth-Century Discourses on Childhood Gender Training: The Case of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*." In *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*. Edited by Martin Duberman, 209-215. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Motz, Marilyn Ferris. "The Private Alibi: Literacy and Community in the Diaries of Two Nineteenth-Century American Women." In *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*. Edited by Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia Anne Huff, 189-206. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.
- Myerson, Joel and Daniel Shealy. "The Sales of Louisa May Alcott's Books." *Harvard Library Bulletin* 1 (1990): 47-65.
- Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Perlmann, Joel and Robert A. Margo. *Women's Work?: American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Reese, William J. *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Rieser, Andrew G. *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Chautauqua Modern Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Robbins, Sarah. *Managing Literacy, Mothering America: Women's Narratives on Reading and Writing in the Nineteenth Century*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004.
- . "Rereading the History of Nineteenth-Century Women's Higher Education: A Reexamination of Jane Addams's Rockford College Learning as Preparation for her *Twenty Years at Hull-House*." *Journal of the Midwest History of Education Society* 21 (1994): 27-45.
- Romero, Lora. *Home Fronts: Domesticity and its Critics in the Antebellum United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

- Rothman, David. "The State as Parent: Social Policy in the Progressive Era." In *Doing Good: The Limits of Benevolence*. Edited by Willard Gaylin et al., 67-96. New York: Panthenon, 1978.
- Rydell, Robert. *All the World's Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Schèuler, Anja. *Frauenbewegung und Soziale Reform: Jane Addams und Alice Salomon im Transatlantischen Dialog, 1889-1933*. Stuttgart, Germany: F. Steiner, 2004.
- Schultz, Lucille M. "Pestalozzi's Mark on Nineteenth-Century Composition Instruction: Ideas Not in Words, but in Things." *Rhetoric Review* 14 (1995): 23-43.
- Schultz, Stanley K. *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Schwager, Sally. "'Harvard Women': A History of the Founding of Radcliff College." Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982.
- Scott, Anne Firor. *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Sears, William P. "Educational Theories of Louisa May Alcott." *Dalhousie Review* 27 (1947): 327-334.
- Segal, Judy. "Pedagogies of Decentering and a Discourse of Failure," *Rhetoric Review* 15 (1996): 174-191.
- Shepard, Odell. *Pedlar's Progress: The Life of Bronson Alcott*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1937.
- Shamir, Milette. *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Sicherman, Barbara. "Reading *Little Women*: The Many Lives of a Text." In *U.S. History As Women's History: New Feminist Essays*. Edited by Linda K. Kerber and Kathryn Kish Sklar, 245-266. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- . "Reading and Ambition: M. Carey Thomas and Female Heroism." *American Quarterly* 45 (1993): 73-103.
- Sklar, Kathryn Kish. *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976.
- Smith, Sidonie. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self Representation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.



- Smith-Rosenberg, Carol. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs* 1 (1975): 1-29.
- Solomon, Barbara Miller. *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Sorby, Angela. *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865-1917*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005.
- Spengemann, William C. *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Spring, Joel. *The American School, 1642-1985: Varieties of Historical Interpretation of the Foundations and Development of American Education*. New York: Longman, 1986.
- Stern, Madeleine B. *Louisa May Alcott*. 1950. Reprint, New York: Random House, 1996.
- . Ed. *Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1984.
- Stimpson, Catharine. "Reading for Love: Canons, Paracanons, and Whistling Jo March." *New Literary History* 21 (1990): 957-976.
- Strickland, Charles. "A Transcendental Father: The Child-Rearing Practices of Bronson Alcott." *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1969): 5-77.
- Suggs, Redding S. *Motherteacher: The Feminization of American Education*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1869*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Tyack, David B. *George Ticknor and the Boston Brahmins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- . *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Vanpée, Janie. "Rousseau's Emile ou de l'éducation: A Resistance to Reading," *Yale French Studies* 77 (1990): 156-176.
- Voss, Norine. "'Saying the Unsayable': An Introduction to Women's Autobiography." In *Gender Studies*. Edited by Judith Spector, 218-233. Bowling Green, O.H.: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986.
- Wagoner, Jennings L. and Wayne Urban. *American Education: A History*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

- Warner, Michael. *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Watson, Julie and Sidonie Smith, eds. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-174.
- Williamson, Samuel H., "Six Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present," MeasuringWorth. <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare> (accessed August 18, 2008).
- Zehr, Janet S. "The Response of Nineteenth-Century Audiences to Louisa May Alcott's Fiction," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 1 (1987): 323-342.
- Zwinger, Lynda. *Daughter, Fathers and the Novel: The Sentimental Romance of Heterosexuality*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.