INTRODUCTION

Education and the “Alexandrian Library”

AN ADVERTISEMENT quoted in the September 1839 issue of the Christian Examiner trumpets the fact that The School Library’s publishers would include a “Book-case, with a lock and key . . . gratuitously, to all who take the Library.”1 This is from the “Prospectus” for Horace Mann’s The School Library, a series of books endorsed by the state Board of Education for use in Massachusetts’ newly formed district school libraries. The promotion of the bookcase is interesting not only because it positions the series as an effort to control the dissemination of literature in a burgeoning antebellum print culture—the series’ contents appear complete and self-contained in its case, while the lock and key determined who could take books out and when—but also because it, along with the Christian Examiner’s singling it out, acts as an argument for the series’ moral and economic worth. The locked case intimates that someone may want to steal the contents inside it, which, in turn, reinforces the notion that the books are actually worth something; they are, quite literally, valuable commodities. The notice concludes with the series’ “Introductory Essay” and the words of William Penn: “For learning be liberal. Spare no cost; for by such parsimony all is lost that is saved. But let it be useful knowledge, such as is consistent with TRUTH and GODLINESS.”2 That the case, therefore, is “gratuitous” implies both the publishers’ generosity in giving it away for free and also the readers’ own economic liberality, the kind of excessive economic expenditure (“Spare no cost”) they hope “all who take the
Library” will make when they purchase it at a price commensurate with its moral worth (its “TRUTH and GODLINESS”).

This book investigates the intersections of authorship, education, and the literary market in antebellum New England. It examines a coterie of what I call “literary reformers”—including canonical figures (Nathaniel Hawthorne), those less so (Elizabeth Peabody), those more recently inducted into the canon (Margaret Fuller), and still others influential but nonetheless overlooked by current literary scholarship (Horace Mann)—to argue that antebellum writers came to see in educational reform, and the publication venues emerging in connection with it, a means to encourage popular authorship while at the same time validating literary work as a profession. In attempting to forge literary careers, would-be writers had to confront an ambiguous set of notions surrounding an idea of authorship that was at an intermediate stage, shifting between older notions of writing as a largely amateur enterprise undertaken by the gentlemanly classes as an expression of civic duty, and the more modern possibility of a professionalized, commercialized, mass-market career. Considering this coterie’s efforts (like The School Library above) as what Elizabeth Palmer Peabody termed “great moral enterprise[s],” this book emphasizes the ways in which they articulate interlocking moral and economic imperatives in their search for educational commodities that could help them navigate a still-amorphous literary market.

“Moral,” in this sense, encompasses the literary practices of self-culture that were the cornerstone of what one critic calls a “national culture obsessed with values of education and personal betterment through autodidacticism,” and that are still a topic of perennial interest to modern scholars of Jacksonian America. In the last decade alone, scholars have delineated an antebellum culture that placed enormous faith in the transformative power of the printed word, in which the everyday disciplines of writing and reading crystallized individual character in an uncertain economic world, and where the seemingly ubiquitous discourse of self-culture was literary discourse, since popular literature often provided narratives of self-improvement that modeled the processes of self-reform. “Enterprise,” appropriately, identifies these literary endeavors by their dual valence as simultaneously bold, reformist undertakings and economic ventures. Participating in the great plan for mass education helped conscientious New Englanders validate market exchanges on moral grounds, while at the same time enabling them to shape the circulation of goods and ideas in an increasingly democratized culture by cultivating audiences complicit in the systems they sought to establish. As the “moral enterprise” of the four figures in this book suggests, the line between profit
and pedagogy in antebellum America was a fine one indeed; while literary men and women aimed to do good, they felt justified in demanding a share of the profits increasingly available within the nation’s print economy, and could not help feeling a twinge of bitterness if such rewards did not materialize.

In its emphasis on moral and ethical concerns, this book complements recent scholarship on the antebellum marketplace, such as *Literary Dollars and Social Sense* (2005) and *The Business of Letters* (2008), both of which characterize literary enterprises as “socially embedded exchanges” in an economic system hurtling toward “impersonal transactions.” Ronald and Mary Saracino Zboray argue that the antebellum market is best understood in terms of “social sense” precisely because profits were so fleeting, and they depict a culture still dominated by writing for social ends: for self-edification or self-improvement, to help or eulogize loved ones, to propagate ideas, to fulfill social obligations, or to serve the public good. But while fame and riches remained elusive for the majority of Americans, and while social sense remained the predominant motive for authorship, the antebellum era witnessed an important “first” in our nation’s literary history: the very real possibility that writers might do social good and make money. Put another way, it presented not merely the novel possibility that an individual might make money by writing, but also that a writer might make a living precisely by making a difference.

In reassessing antebellum authors’ moral and ethical engagements with the market, for its case study the book turns to a constellation of transcendentalists beyond the usual Emerson-centered one. While, in more exaggerated accounts, the Concord sage could not help but draw “bats and owls, and the whole host of night-birds” to his luminous intellect, one might characterize the group detailed in these pages as Elizabeth Peabody’s rather than Emerson’s immediate circle. It is she who provides the nucleus around which this narrative coalesces, as it tells the story of literary men and women engaged in ethically redemptive work, writing, collaborating, and even marrying (Hawthorne would wed one of Peabody’s sisters, Sophia, while Mann would marry the other, Mary) as they wrangled with the intersections of literature, education, and the marketplace. Unlike older studies that depict romantic authorship as solitary and alienating, this book shows how educator status enabled a practice of authorship that is both redemptive (because of its collective focus) and financially possible (because it offered the support of networks that one needed to survive in a newly commercialized environment).

It is, by now, a truism to call 1836 transcendentalism’s “annus mirabilis,” as Perry Miller once did: the year saw Emerson publish *Nature,* Frederick
Henry Hedge conduct the Transcendental Club’s first meeting, the miracles controversy erupt between transcendental and traditional Unitarians, and Bronson Alcott release the first volume of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, each event announcing to New England that the “Newness,” as it was often called, had arrived. But the period 1839–40 was yet another wonderful time for the circle of literary educators this book examines. In the summer of 1840, Peabody opened in Boston her bookstore and foreign circulating library at 13 West Street, which quickly became a locus of transcendental hustle and bustle. Similarly, in late 1839, Fuller inaugurated, in the front parlor of Peabody’s soon-to-be store, her now-famous Conversations for Boston’s education-minded ladies, and, in 1840, she began editing the equally famous transcendental periodical *The Dial* (1840–44), published by Peabody herself between 1842 and 1843. The year 1839 also marked the appearance of Mann’s ambitious *The School Library*, attempting, along with the common schools and district libraries that incorporated it, to reform, standardize, and centralize American education. Finally, in late 1840, Peabody published Hawthorne’s first children’s book, *Grandfather’s Chair*, originally intended for *The School Library*. It was the first of six such books Hawthorne would write over the next decade, marking a turn to the children’s fiction genre that would culminate in his *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys* (1852) and its sequel, *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), imaginative stories of myth and fantasy that scholars have identified as foundational in helping to transform American children’s literature for the better.

In a sense, this book depicts enterprises defined both by Peabody’s Boswell-like investment in friends’ literary careers and by her efforts to further these careers through the “moral enterprise” of education reform, helping her friends navigate a market culture still dominated by traditional, but fast-dissolving, social bonds and sensibilities. When Mann, directionless after his beloved first wife Charlotte’s death, met Elizabeth and her sister Mary in 1832, he had little interest in education. By 1837, however, he would be the state’s first Secretary of Education, having consecrated himself “High Priest” of the sisters’ most sacred cause. Likewise, when Peabody “discovered” Hawthorne in late 1837, having read with rapture his anonymous tales as they appeared in the *New England Magazine* but attributed them mistakenly to his sister, Elizabeth, she immediately took it upon herself to let him know such genius had “no right to be idle” and to direct his attention to children’s literature as an outlet for his talents. Peabody’s friendship with Fuller lacked the intimacy she enjoyed with these two men. But even though their differences would lead Fuller to disclose in 1844, “I admit that I have never done
you justice. There is so much in you that is hostile to my wishes,” she also confessed herself “always . . . in your debt” for Peabody’s unflagging support, even in those times when it was least deserved. Indeed, they were continual collaborators, from Peabody acting as “faithful booster”—soliciting magazine employment for Fuller, introducing her to Emerson, hosting her Conversations at 13 West Street, publishing her work—to their efforts to keep the financially troubled *Dial* afloat. Ultimately, Peabody would outlive them all (Fuller died tragically in 1850, Mann in 1859, and Hawthorne in 1864, while she lived until 1894), producing a remarkable career of educational and social advocacy that saw the full range of nineteenth-century preoccupations, including teaching, writing, feminism, utopianism, abolition, Indian rights, and, her most influential and cosmopolitan legacy, importing Froebel’s kindergarten model to America.\(^1^1\)

In detailing this circle’s educational enterprises, the book’s coterie focus provides a useful opportunity to “revitalize” and “revise” two essential and intertwined categories of transcendentalist scholarship: the national question and the ideology of democratic reform.\(^1^2\) *Moral Enterprise* thus investigates four literary schemes—Mann’s district school library series (chapter 1), Hawthorne’s early children’s fiction (chapter 2), Peabody’s West Street bookshop and foreign circulating library (chapter 3), and Fuller’s periodical, *The Dial* (chapter 4)—enacted in the 1840s as means to reform national print culture, and suggests how the realities of the industry both challenged and spurred these efforts. Through them, it addresses an irony integral to antebellum education, transcendental or otherwise; excoriating coterie interests that could retard the processes of self-culture, promote undemocratic elitism, or act as an obstacle to wider success by offending specific audiences, these figures’ pedagogical enterprises inevitably relied upon coterie practices common in a culture still defined by the ethos of social authorship.\(^1^3\) David Dowling has demonstrated how coterie identities functioned for antebellum authors as strategies for negotiating nascent market culture, the clannish allegiances functioning as the “symbolic and cultural capital” allowing them to reach wider audiences.\(^1^4\) Even as they reproduced these practices, then, the transcendental figures in this book simultaneously expressed discomfort with the term “coterie” in so far as they aligned it with precisely the sorts of insular market tendencies their values stood to correct. Through universal education, for example, Mann hoped to subordinate local economic, religious, or political self-interests to what he saw as higher duties to state and nation. Similarly, Fuller’s and Peabody’s own vigorous pedagogical critiques of what Fuller termed “coterei [sic] criticism” suggest that women’s self-consciousness
of its ideological dynamics could lead them to less dogmatic (and more “transcendental”) practices, and to visions of free markets they aligned with self-culture and self-expansion. In examining their reform commitments, then, this book tracks instabilities in how these figures construct themselves as architects of American print culture, reading their enterprises as stages that play out moments of specific national, racial, class, and gender definition at times challenging and at others rendering invisible formations within Unitarian self-culture.

Although, as the national center for belles lettres publishing, Boston would not come into its own until the 1850s, antebellum New England was at the forefront of educational reform. As such, the region is ideal for examining the intimate relationship between popular education, literary production, and dissemination in the period. Print enterprises such as the American Annals of Education, the Common School Journal, and a thriving schoolbook industry had established Boston as a veritable “hub” (to use Oliver Wendell Holmes’s formulation) of literary-pedagogical activity. By 1840, 82 percent of the region’s white children were enrolled in some form of schooling, and the white adult literacy rate had reached 90 percent. As a result, New England faced a more extensive set of reform concerns than many of its regional counterparts, who lagged behind substantially in even these two basic areas.\footnote{The transcendentalists themselves were deeply committed to education—so much so, in fact, that the transcendental movement “might just as fairly be defined as an educational demonstration” as a literary, philosophical, or religious one.\footnote{Mark Vásquez argues that, in antebellum America, self-culture seemed to democratize traditional forms of authority, putting the tasks of personal and social reform into the hands of the individual, even as it functioned as a social control mechanism because it advocated indi-}}

In a sense, their literary ambitions benefited from the still-amorphous relation between “schooling” and “education” at the time; even as New England witnessed the growth of the tax-supported, centralized, and bureaucratized school systems that would dominate the second half of the century, most Americans still sought education in voluntary associations and private institutions encouraging self-improvement through reading and writing, library membership, lyceum attendance, participation in book clubs or literary societies, and other acts constituting an individual’s “pursuit of knowledge under difficulties.”\footnote{As the four enterprises examined in this book attest, educational reform could function in competing ways: while it could be progressive, seeking to create institutions or remold them anew, it also could be conservative, merely nostalgic, or restorative.\footnote{Mark Vásquez argues that, in antebellum America, self-culture seemed to democratize traditional forms of authority, putting the tasks of personal and social reform into the hands of the individual, even as it functioned as a social control mechanism because it advocated indi-}
vidual responsibility for social ills and thus helped maintain the status quo. In espousing the ends of self-culture, popular literature both “encouraged and controlled the interpretive authority of the reader,” enacting “psychological, didactic exercises . . . under the guise of ‘self-culture’ and autonomy,” even as “real authority was still located in the preacher, the teacher, and the writer” peddling their messages through it.19 If some literary reformers, therefore, aimed to obliterate the old ways in favor of the new, others also saw reform as a means to help preserve social order, to combat emerging trends they believed threatened deeply cherished values and institutions, or to seek what stability they could in a culture in flux.

I use the term “literary reformers” to indicate the ways in which these writers aimed not merely at social reform through literature but also at the reform of literature. In this sense, I build upon what María Carla Sánchez has described as a “would-be literary revolution” attempting to “alter the institutions, systems, and processes that order our lives, and to alter them profoundly, in the here and now” by reforming the written word.20 But whereas Sánchez examines fiction’s transformative role in social reform, I am interested in a wide array of literary practices—such as authoring, editing, publishing, and disseminating print texts—brought together under the aegis of modern, democratic education. Positing education as an essential feature of this circle’s literary efforts, Moral Enterprise suggests the way that New England’s “culture of pedagogy” (Ginsberg, 47) invigorates authorial production in the age of reform. Education, in other words, became a means for writers to reconcile deeply held democratic sentiments about the purpose of authorship with concerns over a literary market that fostered all manner of competition from other texts, as well as the ever-changing demands of a growing reading public. Even as other transcendentalists participated in abolition or utopianism, the men and women in this study dedicated their reformist energies to the printed page; seeking to use educational literature to alter the patterns of production, circulation, and consumption that constituted American print culture, they thus hoped to reform the dynamics of the literary market itself.

Moral Enterprise first and foremost asserts that, by the 1840s, literary reformers like Mann, Hawthorne, Peabody, and Fuller had come to see great potential in educational literature, believing it might be an entry point into, and a means to tame, what Mann called the “Alexandrian library” of American print culture. Writing to Elizabeth Peabody about The School Library, Mann recommends Catherine Maria Sedgwick as an author with “her eye fixed on the true point” of the enterprise, declaring, “Such stories as hers
would make be a fire to consume the Alexandrian library of our bookshops.”

In comparing the nation’s bookshops to the great library at Alexandria, he envisions textual abundance as the distinguishing feature of American life, a modern wonder surpassing the ancient seven. In his invocation of consuming fire, however, he articulates unease with, and a desire to destroy, these vast numbers of books circulating in the marketplace. In the antebellum decades, new print and paper-making innovations—including the use of the cylinder press, the production of cheap paper, and the rise of paperback books, as well as improvements in marketing—reduced the cost of books, while new avenues of distribution—including cheaper, more reliable postal routes and new railroad lines crisscrossing the countryside—completely altered the scale of the print landscape. It was, as literary historians have variously characterized it, a “liminal” time in the market’s development; a period catering to a multiplicity of “little publics” both courted and cultivated by publishers actively segmenting audiences by age, gender, and genre; and a time before the cultural consolidations of the late nineteenth century, when numerous factors, including the shift in publishing from the “cottage industry” of the early decades to the corporate powerhouses of mid-century, helped foster a more homogenous print culture.

Of course, Mann was not the first to air his ambivalence toward the “silent revolution,” as Emerson called these incipient stirrings of the mass market. A few decades earlier, Washington Irving had fretted at the prospect of a world overrun with books, in which new print technologies “made every one a writer, and enabled every mind to pour itself into print, and diffuse itself over the whole intellectual world.” He saw “alarming” consequences for what he called the “stream of literature . . . swollen into a torrent—augmented into a river—expanded into a sea,” and, anticipating Mann’s own formulation, he complained that a “few centuries since, five or six hundred manuscripts constituted a great library; but what would you say to libraries, such as actually exist, containing three or four hundred thousand volumes; legions of authors at the same time busy; and the press going on with fearfully increasing activity, to double and quadruple the number?” Yet these comments must have seemed positively quaint from the perspective of the 1850s, when Samuel Goodrich, the wildly successful children’s author, editor, and publisher, estimated that the consumption of books manufactured in the United States was “not far from seventeen millions of dollars annually,” and that the nation’s periodical press circulated another “six millions of copies, and five hundreds of millions of separate numbers!” Although he championed this proliferation, at the same time he too could not help thinking back with nostalgia to his
childhood, when books were “scarce” and “read respectfully,” and when “even the young approached a book with reverence, and a newspaper with awe.” Faced with this new age of abundance, he could not help but exclaim: “How the world has changed!”

Fueling this explosive growth was fervor for educational reading that caused schoolbooks to multiply unchecked, infecting the market with the same sorts of excesses that reformers were decrying elsewhere. William Alcott, editor of the American Annals of Education and cousin to transcendentalist pedagogue Bronson Alcott, worried, for example, that schemes such as school libraries were becoming the “hobby of the day.” As a result, there “were one or two classes or occupations of men especially,” presumably writers and publishers, “who stood waiting, with eager expectation,” although he was not ready to claim that there was yet anyone who should do so “solely with the view of putting money in their own pockets.” Beyond similar complaints by Horace Mann (discussed in chapter 1), educational reformers of all stripes expressed concern for the bewildering variety of schoolbooks in New England. One such editorialist declares: “Some, it is well known, regard the multiplicity of school books among us as a serious evil. . . . We will only say that if it be an evil at all, the evil must be seriously felt in Massachusetts. For in no State, perhaps, in the Union, is there a greater or more perplexing variety.” Indeed, the market for such books was large, to say the least; Goodrich declared the explosion of schoolbooks “a feature of the era,” estimating that, by 1840, the value of schoolbooks accounted for 36 percent of all publishing business, or 2 million dollars out of 5.5 million. By mid-century, the nation was producing more schoolbooks every year than the entire continent of Europe.

The diversity of what constituted a “schoolbook” in the first place only exacerbated anxieties. In the nineteenth century, “schoolbook” was a catch-all phrase that included primers and spellers, readers, arithmetics, histories, biographies, natural histories, geographies, and even fiction, genres that could be meant for use inside or outside the classroom, as well as by children or adults alike. In short, it seemed as if any book whose aims were educational might be arguably categorized as a “schoolbook.” In fact, many publications did stake their claims to such a definition. In assessing trends in periodicals across New England, one editorial observes that the “Religious Magazine, the Mercantile Journal, and perhaps a few other papers of this city, frequently contain important articles in the department of education,” and that most of the “business papers of Boston and other places, though they are still behind in this matter, are yielding to the popular demand, and slowly coming up to
the great cause of human education and improvement.” Even *The Lady's Book*, which seemed on the whole “to be going over to the side of fashion and frivolity,” contained a “solid article occasionally.”

Peabody’s circle sought to deal with this “Alexandrian library” in different, though interrelated, ways. For Mann, the answer to the corruptions of an industry affecting even educational books lay in the promise of institutional publishing. He hoped, as his letter to Peabody about *The School Library* suggests, to transform the market through public–private hybrid enterprises that promoted certain literary texts (like Sedgwick’s) to specific markets (such as schoolchildren) and inculcated proper values (domestic and religious), what he calls in one lecture a “purer current of thought at the fountain” to “wash the channels clean.” Peabody envisioned teachers like herself as best qualified to arbitrate literary-pedagogical merit, going so far as to suggest to Mann that his library series would be better served by a convention of schoolteachers voting upon each of its contributions (*Letters*, 199). Conversely, Hawthorne and Fuller sought to capitalize on the generic diversity of antebellum educational literature, claiming for fiction, on the one hand, and the periodical, on the other, the power to educate New England’s reading masses, even as they sought to transform these genres from within. While Hawthorne sought to drink of the same “fountain” as Mann in casting children’s fiction as a means to purify successive generations of young minds, Fuller saw great possibilities in the periodical forms already thought to be the democratizing force in American education.

In this context, *Moral Enterprise* traces the way New England literary reformers embraced education as a marketable literary commodity that might compete in and revolutionize the crowded marketplace. In doing so, it builds upon the work of Lawrence Buell, Sheila Post-Lauria, Sarah Wadsworth, and others in refusing to condemn literary commercialization without first “investigating [its] causes and consequences—positive as well as negative.”

As more than one scholar has suggested, literary commodities always retain value exceeding that which the market assigns to them. Thus, while authors and publishers used education to sell texts, they also saw their book as edifying influences raising the sentiments of those consuming them. An editorial in the *American Annals of Education*, for instance, employs the analogy of “Emily,” daughter, sister, and “supporter of every benevolent project with which she is acquainted,” to expound, ostensibly, upon the role of siblings in family education, but also to point with equal vehemence to its own literary commodity as a vehicle of instruction. The very “pattern of industry and every Christian virtue,” Emily is, in this construction, an edifying influence pre-
cisely because she is an ideal consumer, someone who “buys and reads good books, and lends or reads them to others; subscribes for and distributes all sorts of newspapers and magazines which she believes useful.”

In challenging commercialization as reduction of worth to cash-value or a form of artistic debasement, therefore, this book considers how antebellum literary-pedagogical enterprises had for their aims aspirations more grand than merely monetary profit. In chapter 3, for instance, I address Elizabeth Peabody’s decision, as the publisher and copyright holder of William Ellery Channing’s *Emancipation* (1840), to allow multiple editions of the text to circulate without regard for sales of its first edition. In this way, she hoped to capitalize upon the “popular tide” of interest in Channing’s work, promoting what she called his “dearest end—to serve the Antislavery cause,” even if it meant she had to take a financial loss. Certainly, in other instances the commodification of education encompassed financial considerations. In her 3 March 1838 letter to Horace Mann soliciting employment for Hawthorne, to take another example, Peabody marries monetary returns with moral purpose. Claiming Hawthorne “had in his mind one great moral enterprise . . . to make an attempt at creating a new literature for the young—as he has a deep dislike to the character of the shoals of books poured out from the press,” she links his entrance into children’s literature with a desire for market reform (*Letters*, 200). Concerned for the quality of antebellum juvenile writing, she decries books “poured out,” like Irving’s “sea of literature,” into the world in unregulated volumes. In calling them “shoals,” furthermore, Peabody implies these books’ poor character; like an ocean vast but shallow, their diffusion is wide and far-reaching, but of little intellectual or moral depth.

Likewise, as she rhapsodizes over the “moral enterprise” of juvenile literature, Peabody’s language slips between moral and economic incentive with ease. Asking Mann to read “‘the Gentle Boy’—& ‘little Annie’s Ramble’ & ‘the Gray Champion’& ‘the Maypole of Merry Mount,’” she tells him,

you will I think see indications of a genius for such an enterprise that could not fail to make a fortune at last that would satisfy so very moderate desires as his. . . . He has deep views—thinks society in this country is only to be controlled in its fountain of youth. . . . He says that were he embarked in this undertaking he should feel as if he had a right to live—he desired no higher vocation—he considered it the highest. (*Letters*, 200; emphasis in original)

Equating Hawthorne’s “genius” for children’s literature, as the highest vocation to which a writer might aspire, with inevitable financial success, that
is, the “fortune” he “could not fail to make,” Peabody is nonetheless quick to assert that Hawthorne holds only “very moderate desires” for financial remuneration. In this case, the matter is not merely about money; Hawthorne seeks to use children’s literature to build a following among a new audience, so that he can, as Peabody puts it here, “control” society in its “fountain of youth.” In other words, he desires not only to capitalize upon the reputation earned as these children grow into adults who buy books, but also to regulate the market’s future by altering the habits of its youngest consumers.

While this book confines itself to the United States, it nonetheless acknowledges the international dimensions of the market with which these literary reformers wrangled; in building upon the work of scholars such as Michael Winship and Meredith McGill, it gestures to the influence of the transatlantic trade in these “moral enterprises.”34 American transcendentalism was, of course, by definition transatlantic, as evidenced by its European Romantic inspirations, by its sympathy for French and German literature, and by the efforts of those like Peabody and Fuller, who, through the former’s foreign circulating library and the latter’s translations in The Dial, sought to introduce foreign thought into the mainstream American market. Fuller, in fact, considered it the “great object” of her life to introduce into the United States the “works of those great geniuses . . . which might give the young who are soon to constitute the state, a higher standard in thought and action than would be demanded of them by their own time. I have hoped that, by being thus raised above their native sphere, they would become its instructors and the faithful stewards of its best riches, not its tools or slaves.”35 In this way, her essay on “American Literature” (1846) is the culmination of Fuller’s commitment to the idea of the professional author as educator, suggesting a program of national identity formation via market reformation in which a new influx of continental literature might wean Americans from their provincial dependence on, and the “excessive influence” of, British literary and cultural forms (“American Literature,” 123). Encouraging a younger generation of Americans (those who will “soon . . . constitute the state”) to strive beyond national borders in the interests of better understanding their “native sphere,” literary reformers like Fuller promoted a cosmopolitan nationalism that was one of the important legacies of New England transcendentalism.36

But, as Fuller’s concerns about England suggest, efforts to foster an American national print culture were inevitably international, and even the most dyed-in-the-wool variety of American exceptionalism had to confront the problem of British influence. The literary nationalism described in chap-
Chapter 1, for instance, reveals the manner in which Mann’s “moral enterprise” both rejects and embraces England, simultaneously excoriating its influences on American book production while favoring the homogenous national and racial identity that country represents. Similarly, chapter 2 examines Hawthorne’s foray into the self-consciously nationalist genre of children’s literature, demonstrating the solace he finds in images of authorship ranging from English colonists such as Cotton Mather in the seventeenth century to “classic” British authors such as Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth. Because all attempts to define the American experience are “embedded in—and frequently strain against—a transatlantic literary culture,” thus nativist no less than cosmopolitan nationalisms had to negotiate the complexities of the transatlantic trade.

In tracking their “moral enterprises” within antebellum culture’s “Alexandrian library,” chapters 1 and 2 trace the way in which Mann and Hawthorne both sought to cultivate a distinctly “American” literature as a means to nurture self-restraint in a democratic society, and to create responsible consumers who would exercise caution in their purchasing habits. To that end, they hoped to reduce Americans’ consumption of literary texts to what Mann called “a few good books” (“On District School Libraries,” 275), a small number of exceptionally produced and yet widely disseminated texts, including his School Library, and, in Hawthorne’s opinion, Grandfather’s Chair and Biographical Stories for Children. Making his case, Mann argues that, through a library so constituted, “the faculty of the school will be enlarged. It will be made to extend its enlightening influences to the old as well as to the young. . . . Hence the schoolhouse will be not only a nursery for children, but a place of intelligent resort for men” (“On District School Libraries,” 290). But if his School Library takes as its schoolhouse entire communities of readers, targeting both “nursery” and “resort” through specialized series adapted to children, on the one hand, and adults, on the other, Hawthorne’s own children’s books aim to grow “nursery” readers into adults who will then seek “intelligent resort” in his fiction rather than in the other works flooding the industry. Sharing what Mann calls “unmitigated anxiety” over the direction of the market, then, he too embraced popular media championed as part of the age’s liberalizing spirit while at the same time using them as “defense or barrier” against those unwanted “propensities” he hoped to curtail in the reading public.

Although they shared their male counterparts’ dissatisfaction with the state of antebellum print culture, Peabody and Fuller harbored more expansive senses of the possibilities of self-culture. Chapters 3 and 4 thus investi-
gate the way in which the “moral enterprise” of education had as much to do with hopes of negotiating gender boundaries—or the “crowd of books,” as Fuller describes them in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), committed to delineating in exacting detail “Woman’s ‘Sphere’”—as with controlling the circulation of printed texts. Examining their enterprises as searches for what Peabody called “contact with the world,” and what Fuller termed a desire become a “citizen of the world,” these chapters trace their efforts to foster “extensive” practices at a time when other literary reformers encouraged “intensive” ones—careful, continuous reading of a select few texts, like the Bible, held over from times when books were scarce and expensive commodities. In other words, while some pleaded for frugality of reading in the face of antebellum culture’s abundance, Fuller and Peabody encouraged a greater liberality of reading bound up in the promise of female intellectual development transcending arbitrary constructions of gender. Eschewing the “literary domestic,” the nineteenth-century phenomenon whereby women writers’ public visibility was premised upon their celebrating women’s confinement to private life, they used education, broadly considered, to find their place in the marketplace.

Attempting to combine pedagogical and material/economic emphases in order to investigate multiple facets of antebellum educational authorship, the book’s chapters range from studies in the history of the book to transcendentalist pedagogy; after all, transcendentalism itself was very much a response to material and economic conditions in antebellum New England. As a result, the book’s chapters shift focus in accordance with the shape of critical discourse surrounding the figures surveyed. For instance, while there is no shortage of scholarly treatises on Mann as educator (despite what his biographer calls the “relative dearth of philosophical content in his writings,” and a career notable as much for its impatience with theoretical debate as for its practical achievements in systematizing public education), critics have tended to dismiss Fuller’s school teaching as little more than money making. Therefore, I pay great attention to how literary economics shaped Mann’s educational enterprise (and vice versa), while taking seriously the pedagogical investments leading someone like Fuller to seek her living in educational venues from teaching to editorship. Throughout, however, I attempt to think broadly about “literature” as a social field, as well as to consider the meanings of its commercialization as writers, editors, and booksellers like Mann, Hawthorne, Peabody, and Fuller helped institutionalize it across various professional practices.
The dates of this study, roughly the period 1835–45, are significant not only because they saw the rise of the nineteenth-century print revolution, but also because of the growth of New England transcendentalism, bound up as it was in a variety of social and economic reform impulses. In the 1850s, as Anne Rose argues, such interests would be overshadowed by abolition, as well as by the feeling that urban industrial capitalism “was here to stay.” What was once a sense of urgency would settle into “deflated hopes and cheerful acquiescence, suppressed doubts and self-congratulation” as the transcendentalists themselves began to change from reformers to “quite respectable citizens.”

In the early 1840s, however, there still seemed the possibility that the direction of America’s social and economic development might be negotiable. As Robert Milder has suggested, what appears in retrospect as “the onrush of the nation toward laissez-faire capitalism seemed to the actors themselves a moment of cultural self-definition . . . with the balance tipped markedly but not irrevocably toward materialism.” As the 1840s progressed, each of the writers in Peabody’s circle moved on to endeavors beyond the scope of this study: Mann would resign his secretaryship in 1848 to re-enter politics, Hawthorne would return again to adult fiction, Peabody’s varied investments would draw her away from the day-to-day operations of her bookstore, and Fuller would join the ranks of professional writers at the New York Tribune, first as a literary editor and then as a foreign correspondent. But each of these subsequent endeavors had roots in earlier attempts to justify authorship, to educate democratic tastes, and to effect literary market reform.

Finally, it is true that the transcendental enterprises surveyed in this book initially appear to be what one might term “boutique” by virtue of their intransigence, modest sales figures, or limited market share; still, one must not undervalue the importance of such endeavors in antebellum America. While much work has been done on the major commercial enterprises (such as Harper & Brothers in New York or Ticknor and Fields in Boston) that would come to dominate the market by mid-century, relatively little attention has been paid to the smaller, less commercialized entities that were in fact the norm in the period’s early decades. This book addresses this critical gap, using Peabody’s circle to consider four distinct facets of book history: institutional publishing (Mann), authorship (Hawthorne), book lending and selling (Peabody), and editorship (Fuller). Examining the manner in which these industry facets worked together, it depicts transcendentalist literary enterprise as something more than a set of religious or philosophical inquiries divorced from the material realities of the trade, and demonstrates the way it encom-
passed a kind of market ethic grappling with the limitations of literary production and dissemination in New England.

In the process, this book seeks to reinvigorate transcendentalist studies by treating Peabody’s circle as literary-pedagogical vanguards even as, critically speaking, the transcendentalists themselves have been brought down, by both canonical revisionism and studies in the history of the book, from their centrality in earlier accounts of the literary marketplace. Antebellum readers were, indeed, more likely to come into contact with transcendentalism by accident or in piecemeal than by direct purchase, although the same could be said for many texts in an age when personal exchange, library borrowing, and periodical reprints constituted the fabric of everyday reading. In examining this circle’s practices at a time when the “business” of business was not, invariably or inevitably, to maximize profits to stakeholders above all else (a sensibility the transcendentalists excoriated, as Emerson did when he railed in “Self-Reliance” against that “joint-stock company” willing to sacrifice the all-sacred “liberty and culture” of its “shareholder” for the “better securing of his bread to each”), it demonstrates that the transcendentalists, like so many other of what Peabody termed “small dealers,” sought to earn a sufficient living commensurate with ethical practice, while simultaneously setting an example for others to follow. In this sense, the transcendental literary reformers in this book are important precisely because they exist as regional manifestations of a larger antebellum phenomenon: the attempt at local, moral, and ethical enterprise that was still the heart of the literary industry even as it wished to project these models upon larger, truly national markets.