C O D A

“The Sun is but a Morning Star”

Many of the thorny issues we identify as unique to our own pedagogical moment, such as standardized textbooks, the rise of new media in the classroom, or even “No Child Left Behind,” have analogs in the experiences of the nineteenth-century American transcendentalist circle. Figures such as Horace Mann, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Elizabeth Peabody, and Margaret Fuller were deeply interested in the principles, practices, and problems of democratic education, aspiring to cultivate a literature leaving no child—or adult, for that matter—behind. While modern schools in the United States must be staffed by systematically trained and institutionally sanctioned teachers, in the unregulated, decentralized world of antebellum America, schools were not infrequently filled with aspiring authors, literary men and women who sought the financial stability of teaching while simultaneously claiming it as moral grounds for the pursuit of greater literary fame. In their wish to combine communal good with individual benefit, these transcendentalists are manifestations of the impulse uniting the antebellum author to its modern educator counterpart: the fervent desire to make a living by making a difference.

In the absence of codified pathways to publication or institutional means of support (such as university presses, or state-sanctioned textbook publishers, to name but two), however, antebellum educator-authors relied by necessity upon coterie practices to achieve their literary ambitions. Once again,
I use “coterie” with caution, since the transcendentalists themselves often excoriated the term; I invoke it not to summon the stigma of “self-serving insularity” they rejected, but rather to delineate writers whose associations acted as de facto “protective or defensive measures” against alienating economic circumstances.\(^1\) In this book, therefore, I have positioned Peabody’s circle and its investments (both cultural and financial) in education as an ethical alternative to literary business-as-usual, even as coterie practices constituted the substance of an antebellum print culture that emphasized heartfelt social obligations as a means to earn a living in a free, and increasingly impersonal, market.

When, in the midst of *Biographical Stories*, for instance, Hawthorne mentions a “new book, called THE FLOWER PEOPLE, in which the snowdrops, the violets, the columbines, the roses, and all that lovely tribe, are represented as telling their secrets to a little girl” (*CE*, 6:250–51), he engages in a kind of loving tribalism, to use his own metaphor. Hawthorne intends both to self-promote (by capitalizing on Mary Peabody Mann’s reputation in local circles) and to teach nature’s secrets (or, at least, bourgeois morality in the garb of nature) to a blooming generation of readers. Puffing Mann’s popular children’s book *The Flower People* (1842), he declares its power to stimulate children’s imaginations, to open their minds’ eyes as it were, despite all impediments, such as his protagonist Edward’s debilitating blindness: “The flowers talked sweetly, as flowers should; and Edward almost fancied that he could behold their bloom, and smell their fragrant breath” (251). Recreating for Edward the experience of family reading—his father recounts the collection’s titular biographies, while his adopted sister Emily repeats the stories she had read in Mann’s book—the scene embraces bourgeois educational practices understood as exceeding, though never quite effacing, the insular concerns of class, party, or region. In other words, just as Mary Peabody Mann uses the imagined space of the domestic garden to introduce little girls to a cosmopolitan world, so too does Hawthorne use the home as the starting point for equally fanciful flights.\(^2\) Yet, even as Peabody’s circle understood such ideological formations as a transcendental value system rising above class investments, their literary-pedagogical enterprises were nonetheless ineluctably linked to the development of bourgeois identity.\(^3\)

Obviously, not all educational practices are equal, and one might easily excoriate the transcendentalists’ unknowing complicity in consolidating bourgeois consciousness, or, to take another instance, reject someone like Bronson Alcott’s preference for corporal punishment, with his insistence on having his students whip *him* to teach them sympathy and discipline (did it
really hurt them more than it hurt him?). But while granting the historical specificity of transcendentalist education, one might just as easily recognize the way its proponents used education to expand the market for literature, or recuperate some useful lessons from these enterprises, such as the importance of ethical character in liberal society, the value of pluralism, and the necessity of distrusting social, political, or religious dogma. Additionally, one might embrace the transcendentalists’ belief that all education must become self-learning to have any lasting effect, or their faith in what Robert Milder calls “revolution-by-consciousness,” the idea that changing the world first begins by changing minds.\(^4\)

While others may have argued more passionately for the value of transcendental pedagogy in today’s classrooms, I am content to contribute an anecdote to the cause of revisiting the transcendentalists’ investments.\(^5\) Take New York state’s recent standardized test controversy, in which a passage administered as part of the state’s eighth-grade reading comprehension exam left some students scratching their heads, test skeptics crying foul, the state’s education department recanting (announcing it would strike the section from students’ scores), and the excerpt’s original author both denouncing the educational publishing industry and yet defending the sale of his work to them. Adapted quite loosely from one of Daniel Pinkwater’s children’s novels by Pearson PLC, the world’s largest educational publisher, “The Hare and the Pineapple” concerns a race between these titular characters, with various forest animals weighing in on the pineapple’s prospects, convinced, as a moose says, that he must have a “trick up his sleeve” to win. He doesn’t. Although all the animals cheer him on, the pineapple never moves from the starting line and the hare wins the race easily. The animals then eat the pineapple, and the moral of the story, as stated by an owl, is: “Pineapples don’t have sleeves.” Following this story, the exam asks students several multiple-choice questions, including why the animals ate the pineapple and which animal in the story is the “wisest.” Children, parents, and even teachers were confused.\(^6\)

Amidst outcry against the exam, there is, at least, this silver lining: students’ responses to the test might be taken to validate the pedagogical investments of the transcendentalists more than 170 years later. Some students thought that the animals could have eaten the pineapple because they were hungry. Although, according to the exam, this answer is incorrect, the story never says they weren’t, and pineapples, after all, are tasty. Others wondered whether the “wisest” question was a trick, perhaps intuiting that while the owl is, conventionally, the “wisest” of animals, the story subverts this possibility.\(^7\) After all, declaring “Pineapples don’t have sleeves” hardly constitutes
wisdom, especially when the owl mistakenly cheers for the pineapple along with the other animals. Maria Tatar compares the students’ reaction to “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” claiming, “It’s a wonderful case, with all these children pointing at the emperor. . . . That no adults seem to have noticed this is really interesting.” To this analysis, I would add another analogy: Alcott’s *Conversations with Children*. Like Peabody’s defense of the Temple School amidst its headmaster’s foibles, we too might find encouragement in the way in which the children’s responses bolster the truth of transcendental pedagogy, or to use Peabody’s own language, in the way in which the test “so truly roused their moral principles as to enable them to hold out and beat [Pearson] in an argument upon special cases in which [it] concluded wrongly.”

What the controversy exposes, then, is that children are not clean slates onto which individuals or institutions can transfer their characters, but rather that they bring their own insights and investments to the conversation. In this age of teaching-to-the-test, not unlike the nineteenth century’s world of rote memorization, it should remind us, as Fuller told her students in Providence, to “despise” the idea of the mind as a “blank sheet of paper” (Allen, “School Journal,” 1:16).

Pedagogical implications aside, what interests me most about the controversy is how the specter of the “sell out” emerging from it reproduces an enduring obsession of the romantic literary-educator. In his published response to the debacle, Pinkwater cites this email from an eighth-grader: “Listen, I love your work, but seriously? Selling out to the state test?” On the one hand, Hawthorne himself—who described his own fanciful children’s fiction as the “Child’s Budget of Miscellaneous Nonsense,” just as Pinkwater declares himself an “advocate of nonsense,”—could not have wished for a more ideal child-reader. This reader’s sentimental investment in the literary text demands that the author take “seriously” his own humorous writing, and obscures while simultaneously enabling that writing’s commodity status, since someone had to invest in the book by purchasing it before the child could learn to love it. On the other hand, the child articulates so damning a criticism that Pinkwater feels the need to defend himself, claiming to have told him or her: “You bet I sold out. . . . You’d do the same thing if you were a writer, and didn’t know where your next pineapple was coming from.” In their exchange, both reader and author position “selling out” as an unabashed cash-in, prompted by economic necessity and, in a sense, beneath the dignity of “serious” literature. The exchange also presents us with additional complexities since, in both the student’s and the author’s formations, education becomes a form of “selling out”—the child blames the “state test,” while
Pinkwater faults educational publishing companies like Pearson for editing “all the pleasure” out of texts (presumably, under the guise of better educating children).  

What so distresses authors like Pinkwater in the twenty-first century, no less than romantics like Margaret Fuller in the nineteenth, is the reality that “selling out” might precipitate, as Fuller calls it, “mutilation” by editors or publishers entitled to do what they want with their newly acquired texts. “I would gladly sell some part of my mind for lucre,” Fuller informs Peabody in a letter on her prospects for teaching and writing, “but I will not sell my soul . . . I am not willing to have what I write mutilated” (Memoirs, 1:168). If such denunciations about pressure to “sell her soul” seem a tad melodramatic by modern standards, Fuller’s fears of “mutilation,” at least, were well-founded. Practices of censorship were rampant in the antebellum literary industry; editors felt no compunction in altering authors’ texts without their consent—as James Russell Lowell did when he famously removed the last sentence from an installment of Thoreau’s Maine Woods that he found too pantheistic. (Thoreau was so furious that he withdrew the rest of the text from Lowell’s Atlantic Monthly).  

These concerns are more relevant than ever, if “The Hare and the Pineapple” is any indication of modern educational publishing practices. Pinkwater describes his excerpt as “edited out of any resemblance to what I wrote . . . edited to where not a single word of it was mine, just the name [on the story].” Among the changes made by Pearson was their decision to substitute for Pinkwater’s original eggplant a pineapple, altering in the process the story’s moral: “Don’t bet on an eggplant.” One wonders what educational purpose such a change serves. Are eggplants (like tomatoes, to quote a line from the movie Elf [2003]) just “too vulnerable” for children?  

In responding to the controversy, Pinkwater paints a grim picture of modern educational publishing. He calls companies like Pearson “money grubbing,” claiming that they “overcharge for this stuff and sell it over and over again and underpay the poor authors they buy it off of,” adding, “Publishing in general is not a moral industry, and specialized publishing like this where they have a captive audience, and God knows what kind of longstanding relationships, might be less moral yet.” Having purchased the rights to the story over a decade ago for a small sum, Pearson has reused the passage in other states’ tests since 2007, and its contract with New York state alone will earn it $32 million over five years. Pinkwater’s preoccupation with the morality of publishing and his complaint about “captive audience[s]”—referring as much to authors at the whim of the few companies controlling the nation’s educa-
tional markets as to the schools and children they target—recall antebellum reformers’ own laments (like Mann’s assault on the self-interested motives of educational publishers), although it is important to note that their cries were directed at the laissez-faire practices of a private industry seemingly loosened from traditional institutions and social bonds. Thus, while Pinkwater depicts Pearson as embodying an industry in moral decline, whose “dirty money” only gets “dirtier” as government control tightens and standardized tests’ stakes increase, the experiences of Mann, Hawthorne, Peabody, and Fuller should dispel for us this myth of decline; the publishing industry, educational or otherwise, is no “dirtier” than it ever was.\(^16\)

Antebellum literary reformers answered these vexing problems by becoming market intermediaries themselves—some, like Fuller, as editors; others, like Peabody, as booksellers; and still others, like Mann, as superintendents and advisory board members—in the hopes that individual character might reshape the practices of market culture, transforming it from within. But if, given the institutionalization of professional authorship, the consolidation of publishing houses, and the “reprivatization” of social authorship practices, today’s industry makes such avenues seem less feasible, these reformers encourage us to dream of alternative arrangements, to harness new media, as they once did, and, at the very least, to determine for ourselves when vision might trump revenue, as Richard Henry Dana Jr. did when *The School Library*’s “school-master gone crazy” approached him about adapting *Two Years Before the Mast*.\(^17\) Additionally, they raise compelling questions about earning one’s living in an industry that, to this day, uneasily balances both pedagogical and economic incentives. How might one respond to publishers who use “making a difference” as a way to reduce author costs, as Mann did when he confessed to Dana that his compensation would be “small,” or as modern companies do when they tell writers, “A lot of authors are contributing these things [for free] because it’s for the betterment of our children”?\(^18\) Conversely, does payment justify editorial doctoring in the name of didactic ends, as Mann intended for Dana Jr.’s text, and as Pearson did with Pinkwater’s story? Is it, in fact, “mutilation” for editors and publishers to wantonly adapt literary texts to accommodate perceived audiences, or is it merely the failure of their changes to reach that supposed audience effectively that is the problem? And who should get to make these freighted decisions? There are, of course, no easy answers, as both Fuller’s authorial comments on “mutilation,” and Peabody’s disagreement with Mann over the role of “the teachers” and “school committee men” in selecting books for *The School Library*, suggest (*Letters*, 199).
I conclude this book with these anecdotes not only because they dramatize issues persisting in our own day, but also because the lens of education provides a useful means for re-imagining the transcendentalist movement itself. Indeed, its various educational enterprises invite further study, offering new contexts for transcendentalism and literary genre; children’s literature, for example, represents a frontier beyond the nonfiction forms usually associated with the circle. To view their careers in this way thus overturns longstanding assumptions about transcendentalists’ aversion to writing fiction, helping to render visible once again the children’s literature that is, along with its concern for childhood sensibility, one of transcendentalism’s legacies. Beyond this, these considerations suggest a different canon than the Emerson-Fuller-Thoreau one that now predominates. While the Hawthorne and Mary Peabody Mann pairing I discuss earlier accords with the constellation this book outlines, another formulation might place Hawthorne’s more fanciful works, *A Wonder-Book* (1852) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), in conversation with other transcendental children’s authors. What might one glean in reading him once again the children’s literature that is, along with its concern for childhood sensibility, one of transcendentalism’s legacies. Beyond this, these considerations suggest a different canon than the Emerson-Fuller-Thoreau one that now predominates. While the Hawthorne and Mary Peabody Mann pairing I discuss earlier accords with the constellation this book outlines, another formulation might place Hawthorne’s more fanciful works, *A Wonder-Book* (1852) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), in conversation with other transcendental children’s authors. What might we gain in juxtaposing him against Caroline Sturgis Tappan, whose whimsical *Rainbows for Children* (1848) was, along with *A Wonder-Book*, a great favorite of William James, and whose *Magician’s Show Box* (1856) was issued by Hawthorne’s same publisher, Ticknor and Fields? Similarly, what might we gain in juxtaposing him against Christopher Pearse Cranch (arguably the nation’s first children’s novelist), whose *Last of the Huggermuggers* (1856), about a boy’s adventures as a cast-away among giants, and its sequel, *Koboltozo* (1857), were composed in the same fashion as Hawthorne’s juvenile texts, with the father testing his stories upon his children as he wrote them? At the very least, such couplings enrich our understanding of American juvenile literature’s shift from the moralistic to the fantastic by positioning Hawthorne within a network of transcendentalists equally engaged in metamorphosing the genre.

So deeply rooted in the transcendental circle was this fascination with children’s literature that even intellectuals such as Margaret Fuller listed it among their authorial ambitions. She once informed Elizabeth Peabody of a hope to translate Tieck’s “Little Red Riding Hood for children,” adding, “If it could be adorned with illustrations, like those in [Carovè’s] the ‘Story without an End,’ it would make a beautiful little book. . . . There is much meaning that children could not take in; but, as they would never discover this till able to receive the whole, the book corresponds exactly with my notions of what a child’s book should be” (*Memoirs*, 1:169). Fuller’s theory of what a “child’s book should be” is obviously fertile ground, as is her interest in
Austin’s translation (London, 1833) of Friedrich Wilhelm Carové’s “Kinderleben oder das Märchen ohne Ende” [The Story without an End] (1830). She doubted whether the book “could be done in Boston” (Memoirs, 1:169), but, given the popularity of German literature among its liberal circles, the city was perhaps one of the few markets in which such an edition would be sure to find an audience.\textsuperscript{22} And, although she never produced this translation, Fuller maintained her investment in children’s literature, reviewing juvenile books (including Hawthorne’s works and at least one translation of German stories for children) in both The Dial and the New York Tribune.\textsuperscript{23}

Furthermore, Fuller’s desire for a “beautiful little book” encourages us to reconsider transcendental attitudes toward the material experience of reading. Of course, illustrations were, from the beginning, a market necessity in the book industry as a whole, and not merely in children’s books. Hawthorne, for one, attributed disappointing sales of the first edition of Grandfather’s Chair in part to a failure to procure his desired illustrations, while Cranch described his own “bantling” edition, for which he drew the sketches, as the sort of “typographic dandyism and display” that “infantine America loves.” But the belief that “infantine America” required the visual as a precondition for intellectual engagement had also been part and parcel of Anglo-American early educational pedagogies since at least Locke in the late seventeenth century, and certainly of the Romantic and Pestalozzian theories of childhood development invigorating antebellum America. Speaking against contemporary juvenile literature’s heavy-handed didacticism, Fuller observed that Americans had become “so fond of instruction, that we forget development,” that is, so preoccupied with forcing moral lessons into the experience of childhood reading that we often neglect that the child must be allowed to “stretch its limbs” on its own terms, in accordance with the “nature in which it must find its root.” Similarly, “beautiful” editions might help “infantine America” in yet another way, allowing its imagined national community to grow, to stretch its “infantine” limbs, as it were, both by providing new reading materials from cultures other than its British antecedents and also by enabling the shared material and aesthetic pleasures of reading itself.\textsuperscript{24}

Finally, such enterprises offer new prospects for studying the educational imperatives influencing the antebellum literary market beyond the transcendental circle. Because those who wrote, published, or disseminated literature for money did so “without entirely abandoning the wellspring of social inspiration,” pedagogical enterprises such as the ones described in this book continued to dominate the market well into the last decades of the nine-
teenth century. Education suffused market exchanges, for instance allowing the industry to promote itself in terms of sociability—such as when publishers pitched their commodities to “friends of education.” By mid-century, schoolbooks comprised 30 to 40 percent of all books published in the nation. In the decades beyond, education remained a perennial theme of publishers’ series; these series not only rose in number, but also constituted a greater percentage of all series published. Even those firms whose successes we associate with belles lettres, understood as cultivating an “autonomous world of art and pleasure” divorced from cultural or political action, earned a substantial portion of their business from educational texts. Therefore, this book positions Peabody’s circle as vanguards and representatives of wider industry trends so that, in successive studies, we might investigate how pedagogy invigorated other writers and literary circles, as well as other genres, in antebellum America. After all, this “sun is but a morning star.”