Women of the Transcendentalist Club

“This book fills a gap in the literature on American Transcendentalism. Women Transcendentalists have been studied, and even biographies written about some of them, but until now, no one has done what Dr Hutchinson has accomplished: to paint short, biographical portraits of thirteen Transcendentalist women in the same volume. The reader can either read about each woman individually, or compare two or more women in the volume. But that’s not all. Dr Hutchinson has also written about the ways that these women were linked to Transcendentalist values and activities. Transcendentalists lacked a firm set of doctrines or values that linked them to the same movement. But most of these Transcendentalist women affirmed some of the same ideas: self-culture, education, abolitionism, and writing for publication. These women had another thing in common: most lived substantial parts of their lives in poverty, yet they attained levels of formal education that set them apart from the vast majority of Americans of the time.”

—William Ashcraft
Truman State University, USA

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By

Dawn Hutchinson

Cambridge
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Just as Transcendentalism defies definition, the women described in this book defy categorization. As Lydia Maria Child explained, "If a man is a nonconformist to established creeds and opinions, and expresses his dissent in a manner ever so slightly peculiar, he is called a transcendentalist. It is indeed amusing to see how easily one may acquire this title."[1] Certainly Transcendentalists encouraged a certain amount of ambiguity. Transcendentalism was a spiritual movement during the early 1800s. Although inspired by German Romanticism, one of the goals of Transcendentalists was to create a uniquely American movement. Transcendentalists did not intellectualize religion; they wrote about how they felt about their spiritual experiences. So, Transcendentalist writers wrote about how humans are self-reliant, about how humans are inherently good, about self-culture, about how human institutions and politics have the potential for corruption, how insight and intuition are beneficial, how independent thought is important, how religious experience is personal, and how nature should be appreciated and not altered by humankind. Of course, this is a very brief definition that will be slowly unpacked as this book unwinds. There were lots of writers, artists, musicians, and people who had differing opinions about Transcendentalism. This was a complex movement with many moving parts.

The editors of *The Dial*, a Transcendentalist publication, sought to offer a forum for emerging American poets and writers that encouraged them to push the boundaries of tradition. Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson wanted to address transcendence in nature, while Henry David Thoreau focused on self-reliance. They are familiar names in American history, but Elizabeth Peabody, Edmonia Highgate and others in this volume deserve to be more familiar as well. These women contributed much to the writing and activities of the Transcendentalist movement in other ways. While many books have been written about Transcendentalism, a collection of the biographies of the women in the movement is lacking. This volume intends to fill that void.

The "Transcendentalist Club" or "Hedge's Club" was a group that met occasionally to discuss what became known as Transcendentalism at the

time. Henry Hedge originally convened the club in his home in 1836, though other members hosted from time to time in their homes in Medford, Concord, or Boston.[2] Membership varied; at times there were ten people at meetings, other times there were up to thirty people. The Transcendentalists met to share ideas. Although they did not agree upon a universal set of beliefs that could be called "Transcendentalism," they did begin to formulate some ideals that became important to them. Some Transcendentalists associated with this club included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Orestes Brownson, Theodore Parker, John Sullivan Dwight, Caleb Stetson, Richard Staigg, Joseph Podbielski, Charles Kraitstir, Ephraim Peabody, Sarah and George Ripley, Sarah and James Freeman Clarke, Elizabeth and Sophia Peabody, Jones Very, Charles Foley, Henry Bellows, William Adams, William Ellery Channing, George Bancroft, Shobal Clevenger, Samuel Ward, Margaret Fuller, Christopher Cranch, Edward Taylor, Elizabeth Hoar, Convers Francis, and Bronson Alcott.[3] The movement grew beyond this club to include more people who were associated with some of the same ideas. Many of these members were local Unitarian ministers, some of whom became well-known for their work in the abolition movement and for other writing and activism.

While the Transcendentalist women in these chapters were friends or acquaintances of one another, they did not necessarily agree intellectually. As mentioned above, the central themes of the Transcendentalist movement varied. The members of this movement certainly had some ideas in common, but some of their notions diverged at times. Perry Miller, a historian of American religions, argued that many Transcendentalists were rebelling against traditional Unitarianism at the time.[4] Many of the male Transcendentalist writers attended Harvard University, a bastion of Unitarianism. Margaret Fuller made full use of the Harvard library—she was one of the few women granted full privileges there. Transcendentalists protested the slow march of progress taking place in American society. They did not believe that progress should be accepted for the sake of progress. These writers were searching for an emotional response to life, rather than a purely intellectual reaction.[5] The Transcendentalist writers were also known for encouraging self-reliance and a rugged individualism, as is most commonly seen in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Also, in several Transcendentalist writers, one can see that personal experience is valued over objective facts.

An important addition to Transcendentalist ideals was self-culture, as encouraged by Reverend Ellery Channing. The idea of self-culture prompted an individual to pursue self-improvement through reflection. The following

chapters show that women in the movement were particularly drawn to this aspect of Transcendentalism. Many of these Transcendentalists taught themselves multiple languages, read literature and shared books with one another. Importantly, they reflected on the process of their self-education and saw it as a spiritual journey. Many of these writers also shaped later American ideas about environmentalism and conservationism.[6]

Also, due to the revolutionary nature of the Transcendentalists, women were encouraged not only to participate, but to become leaders, though this was not necessarily a multicultural venture.[7] While many of the women in this volume were abolitionists, not all of them were in favor of racial equality. This volume does include three black Transcendentalist women, Edmonia Highgate, Pauline Hopkins, and Charlotte Forten Grimke. All three of these activists were inspired by earlier Transcendentalist writers, and some of their texts were published in alternate formats, like periodicals.[8] All three of these women were encouraged to become leaders in their communities, and activism became an important part of that leadership.

Transcendentalists certainly challenged the established order of society, which included education, religion, politics, and gender norms. A few women in these pages were deeply embedded in the educational system in nineteenth-century America, like Elizabeth Peabody and Charlotte Forten Grimke. They each challenged the system in unique ways. Several Transcendentalist writers were concerned with expanding religious beliefs; a few of the women in these chapters took on this challenge. Many Transcendentalists were politically active; Margaret Fuller wrote about prison reform for women, while both Abigail and Louisa May Alcott were active in the suffrage movement. Several of the members were abolitionists, though not all of them were. There were many women who were active in the Transcendentalist movement; these chapters only represent the most vocal of them. Women were included in the ranks of Transcendentalism from the beginning of the movement, though not always equally. While Margaret Fuller is sometimes regarded as "America's first feminist," not all of Transcendentalist women would be considered feminists by today's standards. These women all contributed to the Transcendentalist movement in some way, which is why they have each been included.

Chapters one and two focus on the Peabody sisters. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody had several notable achievements, but two of them stand out: her bookstore publishing house and her kindergarten curriculum. Sophia Peabody Hawthorne was a notable artist; her paintings were well received during her lifetime. She also did the illustrations for her husband, Nathaniel

Hawthorn's, books. Chapters three and four focus on Abigail and Louisa May Alcott. Abigail Alcott was married to Bronson Alcott. She was a social worker in Boston and was an active suffragist. Louisa May Alcott, Abigail's and Bronson's daughter, was a professional writer and social activist. Chapter five describes Margaret Fuller, editor of *The Dial*, and the New York *Tribune*'s first literary critic and, later, a foreign correspondent. Chapter six depicts Sophia Ripley, who was a co-founder at the Transcendentalist Brook Farm, and became a teacher there. Chapter seven elaborates on Sarah Freeman Clarke, who was the daughter of a prominent Unitarian family, and a talented painter. Her work was displayed at the Boston Athenaeum.

In chapter eight the focus is on Mary Moody Emerson, the aunt of Ralph Waldo Emerson. As a writer and mentor, she greatly influenced many of the members as well as the ideas of the movement. Pauline Hopkins, in chapter nine, was a writer, singer, actor and historian, from a long line of New England black families. Hopkins was a social activist that also challenged racism through her writing. Likewise, Edmonia Goodelle Highgate, in chapter ten, educator and activist, came from a long line of black activists. As an educator, she chose some difficult postings in the south, then spoke out against racism openly and honestly. Chapter 11 describes Julia Ward Howe, a social activist and writer; she is most known for writing "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Charlotte Forten, another black educator and reformer is introduced in chapter 12. Her writing gives some insight into issues of race for black teachers of that time. Finally, the reader meets Lydia Maria Child in chapter 13. She was an activist and writer, best known for writing *Juvenile Miscellany, Frugal Housewives, Philothea*, and *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans.*

In the following chapters, there is a biography for each person and then an exploration of that person's connection to the Transcendentalist movement. In many cases, readers will find that Transcendentalists were interested in metaphysics, as far as the relationship between a person's soul and beyond.[9] Transcendentalist concepts associated with women in the movement particularly, include self-culture, social reform, a romanticized view of nature, an emotional response to their experiences, and an emphasis on self-reliance. Quite a few of the women in this volume were also interested in ignoring or stretching society's strict gender norms. While there are certainly patterns, such as self-culture and social engagement, Transcendentalists certainly did not like to be painted with one brush. Individuality was a badge of honor. Personal religious experience and spiritual growth was a trademark of Transcendentalism. This leads back to Lydia Maria Child's

complaint that any nonconformist could be called a Transcendentalist. Assembling the biographies together in this volume narrows the definition of Transcendentalism.

In viewing these women's biographies together, one can see that, while Transcendentalists are certainly not all the same, there were some patterns here. For many reasons, women in the movement were drawn particularly to the self-culture aspects of Transcendentalism. It would be easy to say that this is because they did not have the same access to education as their male counterparts. This was certainly true. Yet, this also gave them a certain freedom to explore their own curriculum and to express their interests at their own leisure. For some, this became a lifetime pursuit—some learned multiple languages and read literature – only dreamed of by their male siblings. Some learned languages in order to travel. Importantly, their education gave them access they would not otherwise have had to travel, to further their educations, and to pursue vocations.

While a lot of people think of Transcendentalism as focused on other-worldly pursuits, members were mostly focused on how each person experienced the divine in their own way. The women in the movement were certainly more interested in the social engagement aspect of the movement—how each person could benefit the community. They would have seen this as the social gospel, or how Jesus wanted them to engage with society. So, getting involved with the abolition or suffrage movements could have been seen a religious pursuit for some of these women. Several women in this volume chose to avoid marriage in order to pursue the vocation of their choice, or to have more financial freedom, or the freedom to travel.

Thus, the women in the Transcendentalist movement had a more specialized set of interests than the other members of the movement. Traits that were important to Transcendentalists included: self-reliance, inherent goodness of humans, self-culture, potential corruption of human institutions and politics, the benefits of insight and intuition, the importance of independent thought, the importance of personal religious experience, and the appreciation of nature. Traits of particular interest to Transcendentalist women in the movement included self-culture, social reform, a romanticized view of nature, an emotional response to their experiences, social engagement, and an emphasis on self-reliance.

Finally, this volume is not just about the wives, daughters or sisters of Transcendentalists. This volume is about active members of the

Transcendentalist movement. These women were writers, artists and activists in the movement and contributed to the rich history of Transcendentalism. This volume should attest to the fact that the works of these women deserve to be added to the cannon of Transcendentalism and their names should be remembered along with their male counter-parts, many though they be.

Notes

[1] Lydia Maria Child, from Letter 13, in Letters from New York, Second Series (NY, CS Francis, 1845), 125-30. Found in Jana L. Agersinger and Phyllis Cole's *Toward a Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 1.

[2] Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2005), 339.

[3] Marshall, Miller, etc.

[4] Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 6.

[5] Miller, 7-8.

[6] Susan Cheever, *American Bloomsbury: Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau: Their Lives, Their Loves, Their Work* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 5.

[7] Miller, 12.

[8] See Eric Gardner's *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[9] Agersinger, 3.

CHAPTER 1

ELIZABETH PALMER PEABODY, (1804-1894), EDUCATOR AND PUBLISHER

Elizabeth Peabody, Image #20036607_1, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Harvard University

> *"All art, in its origin, is national and religious. The feeling expressed is of far greater importance than the vehicle in which it is conveyed. The practical portion of early art is conventional: the spiritual is profoundly significant, confined in its range, narrow but exalted. An expression of the infinite by means of the beautiful, inadequate indeed as expression of the deeply interesting, as is all inadequate expression, to those who can read the intention through the uncertain and vague embodiment."*[1] (Elizabeth Palmer Peabody)

Elizabeth and her siblings, Mary, Wellington, George, Nathaniel and Sophia Peabody were raised by their parents, Nathaniel Peabody and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. Mr. Peabody was a farmer and dentist by trade, and he had the benefit of an extensive education that he loved sharing with his children.

Mrs. Palmer Peabody was a teacher. Elizabeth was born in 1804 and given her mother's name; she was the oldest of the three girls. Daughter Elizabeth was such a good student that she was learning multiple languages by her early teens.[2]

Elizabeth took over the other children's education around 1822, and Mary began to help a few years later.[3] Elizabeth moved to Boston to begin a school there, in the hopes that she could eventually engage enough students to bring her family with her. However, her school remained small. While in Boston, she began to study Greek with Ralph Waldo Emerson, which is how she became friends with his family. Emerson encouraged her love of languages, which became a life-long interest.[4] She called Emerson "Waldo," and when their lessons were done, he refused payment. He claimed that she had already known Greek and he had not helped her at all.[5]

In 1823, Elizabeth became governess to the Vaughn family in Hallowell. She found a well-appointed library there, with almost as many volumes as Cambridge University. She was able to practice her Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and Hebrew while working as a governess.[6] Elizabeth continued to correspond with her sisters, wanting to encourage at least one of them to come teach at Hallowell. The following year, Mary came to teach at Hallowell, while Elizabeth moved on to a position nearby at the Gardiner's estate. The two families had intermarried, and Elizabeth's move had been arranged by the women in the families.[7]

Sometime in 1824, Elizabeth became engaged, but her suitor remains a mysterious "L.B." from her letters home. For some reason that remains unclear, Elizabeth decided to return home to Boston mid-engagement. When she made her suitor aware of her plans to return to Boston, he apparently took his own life. Her response to his suicide was to be saddened that "poor L.B. found his way, in such a horrid way, out of this world."[8] She determined that he had not been of sound mind, which was upsetting. However, she did not seem to feel guilty for his response to her apparent rejection of him.

In 1825, Elizabeth and Mary opened their "Brookline" school for girls. One of their students was Dr. Ellery Channing's daughter, Mary. Dr. Channing was a well-known Unitarian minister in the Boston area. While Dr. Channing's daughter was one of her students, Elizabeth began to serve as Channing's unpaid secretary. She felt that his sermons ought to be copied down for posterity.[9] Channing was an advocate of education, which encouraged Elizabeth in her own interest in children's education.

Elizabeth's younger sister, Sophia, suffered from debilitating migraine headaches, which worried their mother. By this time, Mother Elizabeth had already lost two sons and an infant daughter. She was concerned about Sophia's health, so she suggested an extended holiday. As a result of Sophia's illness, two of the sisters, Sophia and Mary, went to Cuba in 1833.[10] Mary had found a governess position there, and the family believed that Sophia would be able to recuperate from her recurring migraines better in the warmer climate. However, without Mary, Elizabeth could not manage enough students on her own in order to pay for the Brookline school room. She closed it, and, instead, began giving lectures on various topics, hoping to draw audiences willing to pay to hear her speak. In addition, she began writing history books; her first set were on Greek history.[11] One result of these lectures was a friendship with Horace Mann. Elizabeth and Mary shared this affection for Mr. Mann. While Mary was gone to Cuba with Sophia, she corresponded with Horace through letters. Mary and Horace were later married.

In 1834, Bronson Alcott asked Elizabeth to assist him in his experimental classroom, the Temple School. Peabody was impressed with Alcott's theories, and agreed to help him assemble children for the school.[12] She also agreed to be his assistant to teach Latin and arithmetic, though she ended up doing a great deal more.[13] Both Bronson and Peabody shared a belief that the child was innately good and had a spiritual nature. The two also agreed that a student ought to contemplate his or her own spiritual nature. They also both believed that Jesus was a good role model and teacher. Alcott favored the Socratic Method, and had Peabody keep a record of the children's responses to the questions that he asked.[14] However, disagreements arose over Alcott's belief that children already possessed their own truth and that the instructor needed to help bring that truth out. There was a controversial lesson on the birth of Christ in which Peabody and many parents believed that Alcott took his teachings too far.[15] The conversations with the children dealt very explicitly with the birth of Jesus and the marriage status of his parents.[16] Peabody left the Temple School after that.

In 1835, Peabody attended a series of lectures that Emerson gave in Boston. She wrote to her friend, Horace Mann, that she had never been so excited about the spirit of a lecture series. She said, "I do not know when I have had such a *thinking* time as the last few weeks."[17] One aspect of Emerson's lectures that caught Elizabeth's imagination was his assertion that spirituality resides in everyone. She explained to Mary that this philosophy could have practical applications for her teaching. She said, "all minds are

to be cherished…[for] we never know but we have a genius to deal with among our pupils."[18]

That same year, Peabody wrote her first Transcendentalist piece of literature, entitled, *Record of a School.* In the pages of her text, Peabody wrote about the efforts of the Alcott school, but she put the pedagogy in spiritual terms. For instance, she explained that children already possessed an intuition of God and an innate goodness. The job of the teacher was to cultivate the intuition and goodness of each student.[19] *Record of a School* held a record of some of Alcott's dialogues with his students, with commentary by Peabody on their relevant pedagogy. Emerson praised the book, calling it, "the only book of facts I ever read" that was as "engaging as a Maria Edgeworth novel."[20]

In 1836, Peabody began her first journal publication, *The Family School.* She hoped that the journal would, "become a weekly visitor to the domestic fireside, as a friend to the mother in her duties, an intelligent counselor to her elder daughters in the moral and intellectual self-culture…and a not unwelcome playfellow to boys and girls."[21] Unfortunately, the journal only lasted for two editions, even though she had several friends contributing to it. When she realized that the journal was not going to succeed, she accepted an invitation to spend some time with the Emerson family in Concord.

Peabody arrived at the Emerson household not long after the death of Charles Emerson and the birth of "little Waldo." Emerson's wife Lydia was still adjusting to the demands of a new child, so Elizabeth did her part to help. She had been a friend of Lydia's before she and Waldo had married, so the two were able to talk easily.[22] Peabody enjoyed discussing transcendentalism with Emerson and theosophical ideas with Lydia. She enjoyed the natural setting, and wrote letters home. She and the Emersons discussed others in the new Transcendentalist movement, like Margaret Fuller, who had recently visited the Emersons. Peabody would visit the Concord house two more times in the next few years.[23]

Following her first visit to the Emerson's house, Peabody was invited to a "Transcendentalist Club" meeting at James Freeman Clark's house in Newton. The conversation that day discussed the progress of society as well as the most effective way to reach the minds of people.[24] "Now, here is a group of like-minded reformers," thought Peabody. At her first meeting, there were nine members present, including Elizabeth Peabody, Margaret Fuller, Sara Clarke, Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, and George Ripley.[25]

Peabody continued to attend the meetings over the next several years, as this group became her closest friends.

By 1840, teaching was no longer a financially feasible option for Peabody, however. Her association with Alcott's school had soured some prospective parents on hiring her. Her lectures offered a limited income. She decided to open a "foreign lending library and bookstore" in Boston. In connection with the bookshop, she also decided to open a publishing house. The library and bookstore were located at 13 West Street in Boston.[26] The building allowed the whole family to move in, which made the venture more financially feasible. Both parents and brother Nat helped out with the business. A cousin in the publishing firm Wiley & Putnam agreed to supply the library with books.[27]

While there were other lending libraries in Boston, Peabody's was unique in two respects: Elizabeth supplied books and newspapers in various languages; and hers was a co-ed library.[28] The combined characteristics gave Peabody's bookshop the Transcendentalist quality that she desired. People frequented her shop not only to borrow books, but to sit and read or visit. Her foreign lending library consisted of German authors such as Goethe, Hegel, Kant, and Schleiermacher; English authors such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle; French authors like Cousin and Constant; philosophical works in Greek; math and history in Latin; she even had the Swedish mystic Swedenborg.[29] She built her library a little at a time until she amassed a notable foreign library. Meanwhile, she also began to publish the manuscripts that interested her. She published a few of Emerson's manuscripts, a few of Hawthorne's, some of the issues of the *Dial*, and even some of Thoreau's essays. She also worked with Elizabeth Hoar and Emerson, and occasionally asked for feedback from Hedge on her own translations of texts that she would then publish.

During her library years in the 1840s, Peabody also revisited her interest in history. She determined that she could apply a color-coded timeline developed by Joseph Bem to teaching history. Bem's charts showed historical events on a grid, assigning each nation a color. Peabody thought that the benefit of such a system was that the student could see all of the events at once, learning chronologically.[30] She had already written several history books, and thus saw the value of the charts. She traveled the country for a few years trying to sell the charts to public schools, but the venture was largely unsuccessful.[31] However, working on this venture reignited in Peabody a passion for education. She was ready to reconsider the teaching profession.

Elizabeth Peabody and William Ellery Channing had been meeting about once a week for nearly twenty years by 1850, when she considered going back to teaching. Educating children was a frequent topic of conversation, since teaching had brought them together. Elizabeth had once taught Channing's only daughter. The two Unitarians agreed that children are essentially good. As they both began leaning toward Transcendentalism, one can see a more spiritual bent to what they expected from the child. Peabody explained that humans are like God, which is why humans have the ability to act morally.[32] She worried about harsh criticism of a child. She said, "scripture encourages, but criticism breaks & scatters & palsies the ability to love generously."[33] Peabody began to work with Charles Kraitsir, a Hungarian linguist and a boarder in the Peabody house. As the two worked together, she learned language techniques that were clearly applicable for teaching foreign languages to children.[34] However, as the two began teaching together, Peabody realized that Kraitir's techniques could have broader applications that could be used for teaching younger students a wider range of subjects in their developmental years. In 1851, she leased the house on West Street to her brother Nathaniel.[35]

In 1859, Peabody met Margarethe Schurz, a woman who ran a German-language kindergarten in Wisconsin. Schurz was a German immigrant who had founded a kindergarten based on the philosophy of Friedrich Froebel.[36] After observing Schurz's methods and learning more about Froebel's philosophy, Peabody decided to found her own kindergarten in Boston. Peabody began publishing articles about the methods of the kindergarten in the *Christian Examiner* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. In 1863, Elizabeth and her sister Mary published a book on the subject, *Moral Culture of Infancy, and Kindergarten Guide*.[37] This book discusses the development of a young child from years three to seven, as well as Froebel's six gifts, which were objects meant to educate children about colors and movement.

Since Peabody's kindergarten required children to grow plants and to keep animals, she needed a lot of space. There were part-time French and gymnastic teachers, in addition to the two full-time assistant teachers. The first kindergarten at 15 Pickney Street in Boston proved to be too small, so she moved her young students to 24½ Winter Street in 1861 with thirty new students.[38] By the end of the year, the children learned to print, to draw, and more than half had learned to read. However, Peabody considered an important component of the kindergarten system to be play. Peabody explained, "What I mean to say, is that the Kindergarten plan as long as it lasts is *play*, it puts off the time of work. This must come some time or other or the child will never be good for much."[39]

In 1867, Peabody travelled to Europe, visiting kindergartens. In Dresden, she met the famous Louise Froebel and Madame Marquart to discuss the Froebel methods.[40] She returned to Boston, determined to revise her methods and to use one of her schools as a training ground. The Krieges' school became the training ground for the Froebelian kindergarten methods, as revised in the second edition of her book.[41] In her sixty-sixth year, Peabody accepted an invitation to speak at a meeting of the Principal's Association of Chicago on the topic of kindergartens.[42] She made a tour of it, also speaking at a teacher's convention in Wisconsin.

In 1871, the United State Commissioner of Education, John Eaton, asked Peabody to come to Washington as a consultant on early childhood education. There was a debate brewing over Froebel's kindergarten. The Senate ordered the printing of 20,000 copies of Peabody's 1870 report "Kindergarten Culture," as well as an 1872 Bureau of Education essay, entitled "The Kindergarten." Peabody was concerned that the other experts were focused too much on early childhood reading. It was clear to her that preschool and kindergarten education were two quite different experiences. Other experts were touting "American" versions of the kindergarten, which looked very much to Peabody like preschool reading programs.[43]

Peabody was fascinated with the development of a child's mind, and she made this her life's work. Her Transcendentalist beliefs certainly played a part in what she believed about education, and her friends greatly encouraged her to pursue her passion for education throughout her life. She once explained that a child's imagination "is spontaneous—[it is] the self-activity of the mind. The understanding grows by sense and the intuitional perception of particulars and the laws of the material universe, and therefore proceeds by analysis. The development and conduct of the understanding is education."[44]Her understanding of the development of sense and intuition had a lot to do with her emphasis on "play" in her kindergartens.

In 1879, Peabody gathered with some remaining Transcendentalist friends for Alcott's Concord School of Philosophy. She did not give any of the talks, but she participated in the discussions. Alcott, Emerson, Torand, Sanborn, Channing, and Wasson were all part of the lecture series that summer.[45] Peabody stayed with her brother-in-law, Nathaniel Hawthorne for the summer. Sophia had passed away a few years previously. The philosophy courses offered during Alcott's Concord School of Philosophy included lectures on Plato, Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Goethe, Homer, and Milton.[46]

As she got older, Peabody began thinking about leaving a legacy of writing. She set down her *Reminiscences of William Ellery Channing* in 1880. That same year, she wrote a short essay on her reminiscences on Emerson's view of Christianity for James Cabot, who was collecting material for a biography of Emerson that he was writing.[47] In 1884, she wrote an essay entitled, "Principles and Methods of Education." Some of her contributions to the Concord School of Philosophy were published in a collection entitled, *Last Evening with Allston, and Other Papers*, by Daniel Lothrop in 1886. She saw her role mostly as a critic, rather than a prophet. She explained that critics are necessary as intermediaries who interpret "the oracles of the genius."[48]

In her "Principles and Methods of Education" article, Peabody claimed that there were many ways to teach morality in the classroom. She advocated having students read biographies and discussing the consequences of people's choices, along with demonstrating kindness through examples and stories. She also thought that living with students as a home tutor was the best way to act as a living example. She felt that rivalry in the classroom endangered potential for teamwork, and so discouraged it.[49] Elizabeth Peabody understood the education of children to be her calling in life. She felt that society's forward progress depended on the moral education of children; their spiritual progress was her mission in life.[50]

These publishing projects were far from her last hurrah, however. In the 1880s, a spokeswoman from the Paiutes, Sarah Winnemucca, became acquainted with Elizabeth and Mary Peabody. Sarah was the daughter of Chief Winnemucca, chief of the Paiutes of northern Nevada and southeastern Oregon.[51] Sara Winnemucca persuaded the two sisters that the traditional missionary schools, which forced native children to assimilate, were not healthy for Native American children. Peabody explained, "It would be a poor exchange for them to make—to be citizens at the expense of their religion & morality which has [sic] vital relation with their tribal relation—to scatter the Indians among our population—instead of keeping them together—would be like scattering the members of a private family."[52] For these reasons, Elizabeth and her sister Mary advocated for a bi-lingual school. They fought for an "Indian School" that taught in both English and Paiute. They wanted a school that would also teach both "Indian" and Christian values. However, they had a hard time getting funding for their school.[53] Eventually, Congress passed the Dawes Severalty Act, which was supported by many progressive thinkers and reformers, however, part of the Act divided up Native American lands and sent children to boarding schools instead of the recommended "Indian Schools."[54]

In 1888, Peabody moved to the Gordon, a residential hotel in the Jamaica Plain. From the Gordon, she edited her sister Mary's novel *Juanita*, which was based on her experiences in Cuba.[55] Elizabeth lived out her last years at the Gordon, content to receive the occasional visitor and write letters and reminisce. She wrote during this time, "there seems to be but one thing left for me to do on earth since the plans for my life work have come to this [final?] issue—but to record for others' encouragement the history of how the Lord seems to have helped me by involving in my activity the action of so many noble workers & thinkers—with whom He has generously brought me into relation & to this work I seem to be shut up by the failure of my powers to do anything else!"[56] Although she led a very full life, Elizabeth still felt that she needed time to do more.

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody died in her sleep on January 3, 1894. Her funeral was held at the Church of the Disciples. Mrs. Ednah Cheney, a friend from Elizabeth's Concord Philosophy School days, gave the eulogy.[57] Peabody was laid to rest in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Instead of a large headstone, money raised in her honor was used instead to establish an educational foundation called the Elizabeth Peabody House on Charles Street in Boston. This was a way for her memory to live on in the lives of teachers and children.[58]

Peabody's association with Transcendentalism

As is likely clear from her biography, Elizabeth Peabody spent most of her adult life engrossed in the Transcendentalist movement. She was a member of Hedge's Club, otherwise known as the Transcendentalist Club. She was an editor of the *Dial*, and she owned a publishing house where many Transcendentalists published their texts. She was also known for the "social principle," in which the individual progresses through their relationships with others. She was inclusive in her understanding of religion, which also had to do with relationships. She believed that each person had a unique and mystical relationship with God, who was transcendent. Her understanding of self-culture had more to do with her love of education than with anything else. She encouraged everyone to pursue a continuing education. Her lending library and school of philosophy were evidence of this. She shared many characteristics in common with her Transcendentalist friends.

Her friendships with Transcendentalists were many and diverse. She assisted Bronson Alcott in his Temple School; she studied German with Ralph Waldo Emerson and then worked with him on the *Dial.* She was friends with Margaret Fuller, Lucretia Mott, Lydia Maria Child, William

Lloyd Garrison, Catherine Sedgwick, Fanny Kemble, Charles Sumner, S.P. Whipple, Theodore Parker, John Greenleaf Whittier, Charlotte Cushman, Henry James, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry David Thoreau, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, among many others.[59]

Some may argue that Peabody was not a "true" Transcendentalist, since she did not approve of the individualism of Thoreau or the naturalism of Emerson.[60] Most would also argue that she did not share their claim that one found truth through individual experience. However, in the case of the Transcendentalists, scholars have argued that it is best not to be too restrictive in constructing a definition.[61] In their goal to create a uniquely American movement, the various writers, artists and educators defied traditional categories. Limiting Transcendentalism to just these two aspects ignores the experiences of many other artists, philosophers and writers.

One thing that many of the Transcendentalists had in common was their former association with the Unitarian Church. After all, many of them had been ordained at Harvard Divinity School. For many of the Transcendentalists, Unitarianism was not liberal enough to play host to the blossoming American movement. For those in the traditional Unitarian Church, Transcendentalism became the new heresy.[62] The movement defies traditional categories—it is not just a religious or philosophical movement; it is not just an artistic movement; it is not just a social movement or an environmental movement. People who contributed to the movement had many different expressions, which brings us to Peabody's contributions.

While Transcendentalists are often associated with individualism due to the writings of Thoreau, Peabody leaned more toward what she called 'the social principle,' which she believed could be nurtured through education.[63] She introduced the concept of the human soul as unfolding. In this process, she argued that identity formed through human relationships.[64] She explained:

> The relations of human life multiply…and there is found within him a spring of emotion…this is sympathy, the social principle, engaging his feelings for others, whom he seems to have a common nature with himself…so his sense of others' bearing the same relation to the Almighty, gives him a deep feeling of respect for all partakers of human nature…"[65]

Between feelings of sympathy with others and understanding that each person shares a relationship with the divine, Peabody argued that humanity shared a common social experience. She argued that in many societies, women were in charge of moral instruction. Thus, women had a duty to instruct children in morality, paying particular attention to relationships.[66]

While many of her cohorts were content charting new religious and philosophical courses, Elizabeth Peabody was more comfortable with a semi-traditional Unitarian approach. Some aspects of her religious worldview stand out. Because history was so important to her worldview, she overlaid her theology with historicity as well.[67] Not only was her theology millennialist in nature, but she understood humankind to be progressive as evidenced through history. In 1834, she wrote a series of six articles for the *Christian Examiner* on the Hebrew Scriptures that the editor, Andrews Norton, suspended after three. It is possible that he was uncomfortable with her unorthodox line of reasoning.[68] She also used the term "Transcendentalism" in the series, which was frowned upon at that point by traditional Unitarians.[69] Peabody was not alone in her Christian worldview—the Transcendentalist Club had Christian themes in some of their meetings, and some members were practicing Unitarian ministers. She wrote "A Vision," in 1842 about a religious experience. It could be argued that this personal experience led her to religious truths. This article was meant to be included in an issue of *Pioneer*, but a last-minute editorial change had it removed. Peabody included it in her own later published writings.[70]

In a letter written to her sister Sophia on June 23, 1822, Peabody says religion includes:

> poetry, literature, meditation, and noticing a fresh morning breeze…All this is religion; this leaning of the thoughts toward God is prayer and I have felt this sensation in the theater as well as in church; in the hour of social enjoyment as well as in the solitude of the soul. And in fact it is as impossible to lay aside devotional feeling as it is to let off for a season a feeling of friendship for a human being intending to take it up again when convenient.[71]

While raised in a conventionally Unitarian family, Peabody had an inclusively Transcendentalist concept of religion. For her, prayer was part of life; devotion to God was as natural as breathing. Her writing about religion remained centered on Christ, while her personal religious experiences lent a Transcendental shift to her theological understanding.[72]

While she worked with language much of her life, she was aware of its limits when applied to religious experiences. In a letter to Mary Moody Emerson, she explained,

> We have lost the key to language, that great instrument, the means by which the finite mind is to compensate itself, for its being fixed to a point in space

> and compelled to the limitations of the successions we call time…Our logomancy does not coincide with the eternal logos…"[73]

Many of Peabody's contemporaries accused her writing of being dense, though, as noted here, she was aware of the limitations of language. Since humans are finite beings, she claimed that we have a limited ability to express our experience of the divine.

In her *Reminiscences of Dr. Channing* (1880), Elizabeth Peabody revealed much of her own religious beliefs. While her objective was clearly to serve as interpreter of Channing's genius, her perspective shined through clearly. For instance, she described her first impressions of Channing, which apparently stayed with her and influenced her to work with him later. She was struck by his frail nature and arresting gaze and "corresponding voice" that reminded her of the martyr Stephen.

> I was thrilled as never before by the thought of a man communing with God, face to face; and years after, when I heard him read those words of the Psalmist, laying the same emphasis on the prepositions, I recognized how it had given me a sense of the Eternal.[74]

Channing's voice gave Peabody the sense that he had a mystical connection to God. She noted that the sense of this was in his eyes and his voice.[75] This was an important aspect of her impression of religion, because she believed that people could have personal religious experiences. For Peabody, God was not utterly separate from the world; his transcendence was immanent through personal experience.

This understanding of Transcendentalism differed from Peabody's friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson. For Emerson, "God" is Universal Being, of which we are all a part.

> Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, --all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.[76]

Emerson's understanding of the divine had clear eastern influences, while Peabody retained her connections to western Christianity.

Another important difference from her Transcendentalist cohorts was Peabody's interest in "self-culture" versus what she understood to be "egotheism." Peabody shared her mentor Channing's concern with Emerson and Thoreau's individualism, calling it "egotheism."[77] Channing saw Thoreau's

focus on self-reliance or Emerson's interconnection with the divine as pulling away from the social responsibilities of Christianity. Peabody agreed with Channing, and focused much of her own theology on "self-culture," which she believed centered the Christian person to changing minds, and therefore society.[78] This was how education became missionary work for Peabody. She believed that she was spreading self-culture, which would unleash human beings with a moral compass into society.

Peabody's understanding of self-culture absorbed how she chose literature for herself, for her students, and even for her sister, Sophia. In a letter to Sophia, dated June 23, 1822, Elizabeth wrote:

> I hope—oh, I hope from my inmost heart…that the studies in which you are now engaged will be pursued with unremitted industry—because they will strengthen your mind—they will form the best discipline for it… In gazing at nature, you should endeavor to observe with accuracy; and the perception of natural beauty in your mind will excite trains of reflection upon morality and character…[79]

Elizabeth Peabody saw herself as an older sister, but also as a teacher for Sophia. She had been Sophia's mentor since they were children. As such, she felt she had a responsibility for her sister's moral education. In the June 23 and an August letter the same year, Elizabeth sent Sophia reading lists and suggestions in order to keep her on the Unitarian path. She seems to believe that Sophia does not have a religious inclination of her own.

While many historians note that Elizabeth Peabody contributed much to the Transcendentalist cause, they tend to see her as an assistant rather than a Transcendentalist philosopher in her own right. This is largely due to Peabody's own perception of "interpreter rather than genius." Yet, her contributions as editor, publisher, and educator on their own should be seen as major contributions. She edited and published the *Dial* magazine, the major journal for the movement. She edited and published many of the manuscripts for writers in the movement including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, William Ellery Channing, Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and her brother-in-law, Nathaniel Hawthorne. As an educator, she helped get Bronson Alcott's Temple School up and running, and jump-started the kindergarten movement in the United States, working with many experts in the field and publishing several articles on the topic. Her educational philosophy was largely fueled by her Transcendentalist ideology, as previously mentioned. Finally, Elizabeth Peabody should get credit for developing her own theological perspective. While she did not write many treatises about her own understanding of religion other than "A

Vision," her perspective comes out in the works that she interpreted. It is clear that she has not gotten enough credit for her place in the Transcendentalist canon.

Peabody should certainly be considered a Transcendentalist. As a member of the Transcendentalist Club and through her own bookstore, she came into contact with most of the members of the Transcendentalist movement of her time. She contributed to Transcendentalist literature, she was an editor of the *Dial*, and she owned a publishing house where many Transcendentalists published their texts. She was also known for the "social principle," in which the individual progresses through their relationships with others. She believed in a transcendent God and in individual religious experience. She was instrumental in the educational movement of her time, and the understanding of self-culture. She shared many characteristics in common with her Transcendentalist friends.

Notes

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[4] *American National Biography*, 182-183.
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[7] Tharp, 31.
[8] Tharp, 34.
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[33] LaRiviere, 5.
[34] LaRiviere, 6.
[35] MHS, Box 1, MS, N-283, Nathaniel Peabody
[36] LaRiviere, 7-8.
[37] LaRiviere, 8.
[38] Baylor, 85.
[39] Elizabeth Peabody, in Baylor, 86.
[40] Baylor, 93-94.
[41] Baylor 94-95.
[42] Baylor 97.
[43] Bruce A. Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own Terms*. (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1999), 303.
[44] Ronda 307.
[45] Ronda 319.
[46] Ronda 320.
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[48] Peabody quoted from her "Nature—A Prose Poem," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 1 (February 1838, pp. 319-320); by Diane Brown Jones, "Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's Transcendentalist Manifesto," *Studies in the American Renaissance,* (1992, pp. 195-207), 196.
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[59] MHS Research Materials on Elizabeth Peabody and kindergarten, collected by Ruth M. Baylor
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[65] Marshall, 4.
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[69] Marshall, 3.
[70] Jones, 199-200.
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