

PLATONISM IN PRACTICE: THE AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTAL RHETORICS OF
EMERSON, THOREAU, AND ALCOTT

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family –

Chris
Alyssa
Ashley

I seriously could not have done this without your love and support!

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I want to start by giving thanks to my family. Without the support of my family, I would have never completed this dissertation. My loving and supportive husband, Chris – I want to thank you for all those times you helped me – these are countless times and I am beyond appreciative of your comfort and support. My strong and intelligent girls, Alyssa and Ashley – I want to thank the both of you for supporting me and being understanding when I was engulfed in my studies. The ever constant presence of my family was the fuel that kept me going.

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ABSTRACT

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American Transcendentalism has often been noted for sharing characteristics with Platonism. While there has been a substantial amount of research done on the influence of Platonism, I take a different approach by exploring the Platonic nature of the American Transcendentalist beliefs of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Amos Bronson Alcott through the lens of Lloyd Gerson's argument he coins as "Ur-Platonism (UP)," which he details in his book titled, *From Plato to Platonism*. Instead of supporting major shifts in Platonic thought, such as Middle Platonism or Neoplatonism, Gerson argues the framework of Platonism has remained the same. He describes the framework as the UP Pillars of Platonism, with the five antis of Antimaterialism, Antimechanism, Antinominalism, Antirelativism, Antiskepticism representing the pillars. In my research, I situate American Transcendentalism alongside Gerson's UP in order to present an alternate guiding idea in the Platonic tradition.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

American Transcendentalism contributed to the America that we know today. The effect of the leaders and writers of this movement encouraged the new country to rely on itself, and not their European counterparts. The Transcendentalists helped to set the path for equality, free thinking, reliance on oneself, and encouraged the growth of an educated, liberal population. All these attributes have contributed to a mindset of independence and growth, which that is seen in various areas of our society.

The Transcendentalist Movement was unique, but was not necessarily unprecedented. Transcendentalism is akin to past movements that were born out of conflict, wars, oppression, and dependence. In Ancient Greece, Plato lived during a time of political upheaval – a time of instability of oligarchic and democratic governments. In like manner of his teacher Socrates, Plato practiced and taught a new approach to learning, unlike the approach of the Sophists – a sect of costly educators who took advantage of the times of conflict. The Sophists may have encouraged reliance on one's own knowledge, but did not take it a step further by prompting their students to search for the source of absolute truth, which they thought unattainable. Scholars and religious leaders have often looked toward Plato as a supplemental source for clarity and inspiration, and for somewhat of a mystical understanding, as it is seen in the progression of ideas in religious and philosophical movements.

Daniel Walker Howe shares the account of the progression of ideas that originated from the Cambridge Platonists in England and resurfaced in New England, carrying with them a similar mystical approach that characterizes what became known as Transcendentalism. Howe describes the ecclesiastical lineage from the Cambridge Platonists by attributing the Classical

and Scottish influences. Howe explains: “Classical Unitarians fitted their Platonic heritage into a context of eighteenth-century Scottish realism that provided the basic contours for their thought-world. This philosophy had originated in a synthesis of seventeenth-century rationalism with Lockean empiricism” (Howe 475). Transcendentalism branched from Unitarianism, which originated from Calvinism, and Unitarianism largely built their beliefs on empiricism and idealism, but the Transcendentalists adhered to idealism by placing emphasis on the natural world as a confirmation of the deity (484). Howe further explains that:

...the New England Transcendentalists regarded external nature as a gigantic system of analogy. The cosmos taught moral and spiritual principles in the guise of physical ones. The Transcendental artist interpreted the ideal realities behind these physical superficialities. He or she was a combination of poet and priest, the inheritor of the role of the New England clergy and as much as a conduit of divine Revelation as any ancient prophet. (483)

The new America experienced a growth of various ideas of religion and God in general due to the various beliefs that were arriving to the shores of New England, changing drastically compared to the Puritanism of generations prior, and Transcendentalism is an example of the rapidly changing religious and oratorical landscapes of America.

The Transcendentalists helped to bring forth ideas of peace, vibrancy, and “a self-guided soul searching manual” that brought uniqueness to the new “Republic.” The uniqueness of the Transcendentalist Movement is the focus for this argument. It is unique in the sense that this movement went against the norm by advocating a spiritualism that was not found in buildings, but in one’s own soul. For the Transcendentalists, it was undeniable that buildings can hold beauty and traditions have meaning, but they believed that was not where true spiritualism dwelt.

The ideas of independence, which went against the grain of society at that time, is what makes Transcendentalism Platonic.

American Transcendentalism encompassed interconnected areas, as well. While the areas of religion, government, and education seem unrelated, in the Transcendental approach these areas worked very closely together to create a “Republic,” which took on an individualized appearance. Roger Thompson argues in his book *Emerson and The History of Rhetoric* that Emerson’s approach to rhetoric was to solder together the civic with the spiritual. He states, “Emerson’s project in reading Plato was, in part, to find ways for rhetoric to connect truth with civic good. Plato represents that possibility for Emerson, and he uses Plato to theorize a rhetoric that ensures democratic access to transcendence” (Thompson 12). For the Transcendentalists, the new America was ready for a new individualized spiritual and philosophical outlook that would also transcend into society, government, and education.

Oratorical Landscape

Gregory Clark and Michael Halloran discuss in their introduction of *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth Century America – Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric* the rapid transformations that occurred in America during this pivotal time. The landscape shifted from an “oratorical culture” that emphasized community to an “individualistic spirit” that advocated independency and a “public morality of expertise that defined the professional culture” (Clark and Halloran 3). The ability for the common person to own land and create an individual space contributed to an atmosphere of individualism and the ownership of private property “warranted individual claims of natural rights and political autonomy” (11). As Clark and Halloran describe it, the influence of Lockean and Cartesian epistemologies contributed to the shift from a community and institutionalized rhetoric to an individualized rhetoric (11). They,

too, were immigrants, or even first or second generation individuals, and survivalism lead the way to individualism. This transformation from community member to independent individual contributed to the pursuit of autonomy in areas of spirituality, politics, and education.

With this sort of individualistic mindset growing during nineteenth-century America, Clark and Halloran describe Emerson's perspective on spiritual realization and the accessibility to spiritual truths an entirely individual conquest, going from social to individual, from institution to individual – all came back to the individual. Emerson, however, went as far as to suggest that citizens reject histories and traditions all together, and create for themselves a new set of histories and traditions ("American Scholar"). That sort of goal was somewhat out of reach for most individuals, but with the transformative landscape of the nineteenth-century, this type of spirituality/philosophy rose to become a reality in the form of Transcendentalism.

Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller also took on the individualistic spirit that was forming in America, but she elevated it to the political realm as well. She aligned her individualistic beliefs with that of other Transcendentalists, such as Emerson and Thoreau, but believed that politics could serve as a tool to balance inequalities. Clark and Halloran state that moral reform must begin with "self" and "she located that self in relationships that were inflected by inequities of power" (13). Fuller contributed to the Women's Rights Movement in the mid to late nineteenth century, and although "...a woman in a culture dominated by men...", she managed to help broaden the current rhetoric in self-culture politics by placing value on the individual as an activist and helped "to establish a new majority coalition" (13). I will elaborate more on the self-culture that Margaret Fuller helped to establish in the last two chapters.

The ideology of individualism carried further into politics in other ways, too. Messages the nation's leaders delivered to the populace tended to value individualistic aspects more than a

collective group. For example, Clark and Halloran point out that Andrew Jackson won the presidency over John Quincy Adams because he represented himself as one of the citizens by relying on rhetoric they could identify thus creating “a version of themselves” (14). Kenneth Burke, after the World Wars, coined this type of rhetorical speech as the theory of identification. Identifying with the members of the populace as an individual, and projecting a message that he was a mirror reflection of them, along with his charisma, is what put Jackson in the presidency. People were moved by the tone of individualism, which reflected the transformations in American culture that were taking place. I will go into further detail the theory of identification and its place in politics in the chapter on Thoreau.

Individualism surfaced in the universities as well, especially in the form of expertise and professionalism. Becoming an expert in a particular area was an individualistic approach and was unique because before the increase in the societal transformations, a graduate from a university was expected to be master of all disciplines, including the classics and the sciences. One example that Clark and Halloran share is when the President of Yale University, Timothy Dwight, was searching to fill the chair of chemistry and natural philosophy at Yale in 1801, “he selected a twenty-two-year-old law student with little specific training in science named Benjamin Silliman” (18). It was expected that “all educated persons to be fully qualified in all subjects of the arts curriculum” (19). Although core curriculum continued to be broad based, it began to undergo a change as universities began to favor specializations, which allowed for electives to be substituted in place of some of the core curriculum courses (43). I will discuss the value placed on individualistic form of education more in the chapter on Alcott.

As in politics and education, an oratorical change took place in the ministry as well. An individualistic form of ministry increased as the beliefs started to change rapidly, branching out

in new denominations that could not fill their pastoral spots quick enough with educated clergy, and instead installed those without ecumenical degrees. Conservative, orthodox clergy expressed great concern. They were fearful of these uneducated ministers who used the pulpit to deliver messages over social issues, rather than allowing traditional Christian messages to create an organic change. One of the ministers that I will discuss as a part of the conservative orthodoxy is Austin Phelps, who was a minister during the nineteenth century trying to grapple with the changes of an individualized and professionalized ministry and hold on to community-based oratory. Changes in the ministry will be analyzed in the chapter on Emerson, primarily because he was trained for the ministry.

An individualistic society began to emerge quickly in many areas, which made the environment ripe for Transcendentalism to rise. Transcendentalism was based on the individual, not the social community or ranks of formality, and the Platonic nature of the individualism rests in the characteristics that are outlined in Gerson's Ur-Platonism (UP).

Importance

This dissertation will consider just how "Platonic" American Transcendentalism actually was by considering several of its major practitioner's rhetoric in terms of several characteristics of Platonism developed by Gerson. This discussion will help us to understand, first, how thoroughly Platonism transferred to the shores of the New World, and, second, how a uniquely American Platonism/Transcendentalism contributed to an "Irenic" rhetoric that helped shape the identity of America for many decades to come. The Irenic rhetoric will be brought into the discussion more in the concluding chapter, where I will tie the past with the present.

Transcendentalism is Platonic in the sense that it corresponds to the argument that Lloyd Gerson makes in his book titled, *From Plato to Platonism*. Gerson shares his position by first

explaining the two different stems of Platonism: developmentalists and unitarians (not to be confused with the religious sect). The developmentalists believe that Platonism has changed through the years and “developed” and was categorized into “Middle Platonism” and “Neoplatonism.” The unitarians maintain the belief that there have not been any significant changes to Platonism and that it holds true to the original dialogues. Gerson explains that it is quite evident that there have been changes, but the structure has remained the same. I argue that the Transcendentalist Movement is indeed a form of Platonism because it has remained true to what Gerson calls the five antis, which Gerson calls UP. The antis are: antimaterialism, antimechanism, antinominalism, antirelativism, and antiskepticism. The commitment to UP is what makes Platonism, well Platonism. Gerson says of the two approaches:

Developmentalism is true—almost too obviously true. Every dialogue contains evidence of development within the Academy regarding the elements of the positive construct. These developments concern technical terminology, conceptual distinctions, methodological experiments, and specific arguments addressing one or more concrete problems. There are perhaps substantive developments, too, for example, concerning matters like the unity of the virtues, the possibility of incontinence, the embodied and disembodied partitioning of the soul, and the exact nature of knowledge and its intelligible objects. Unitarianism is as true as developmentalism. But the unity is that of UP, not a unity in any of the areas just mentioned. Platonism was always open to development within this unified framework. (91)

Although issues and conflicts are reflective of time periods, Gerson argues the framework of Platonism has remained the same. From Gerson’s standpoint, Platonism is unified structure that with developing ideas.

Gerson describes this framework as a “big tent.” He states, “...Platonism is a big tent and that within that tent are found parties disputing numerous issues” (Gerson 23). This “tent” is “Ur-Platonism (UP),” and the description of the five pillars (antis) are 1) Antimaterialism – the idea that there is more to existence than just the visible; 2) Antimechanism – an idea very similar to antimaterialism, but differs because it rejects the idea that there are only certain explanations available to explain the “natural order;” 3) Antinominalism – the idea that it is inaccurate to believe that the “only things that exist are individuals;” 4) Antirelativism – the denial that “man is the measure of all things;” 5) Antiskepticism – the idea that knowledge is attainable (11-13). The following chapters will entail how certain Transcendentalists created a movement that parallels with that of Platonism in arguing for disengaging one’s self from societal norms in order to engage in a pure connection with “the One,” which is a term Emerson refers to in his writings and originates from Plotinus’s interpretation. I will go over the different categories of Platonism, Plotinus, “the One,” and how Gerson’s UP is an alternate guiding idea in Platonism below.

To clarify why Gerson’s UP is an alternate guiding idea in the Platonic tradition (like I mention in my abstract), Middle Platonism (first century BCE) and Neoplatonism (third century CE) represent time periods which scholars believe Platonism itself changed. The terms were coined by nineteenth century scholars, and is not reflective of how the ancients thought of themselves (Bonazzi). Plotinus, who is known as the Father of Neoplatonism, would have never considered such a title for himself because he did not believe that he brought any new ideas to Platonism, but that he just interpreted Platonism. Plato believed in the Realms of Forms, and Plotinus for instance interpreted Plato’s ideas, but according to Gerson, did not inflect or change the structure or framework of Platonism. Plotinus is known for inferring from Plato’s Realm of

Forms the idea of “the One,” “the Intellect,” and “the Soul” and all that is in existence is emanated through “the One.” In Plato’s dialogues, the Realm of Forms was the supernatural reflector of all existence, and for Plotinus “the One” was within that Realm. Plato and the followers of Plato have a supernatural and mystic approach to the order of things, unlike the naturalists. Gerson states the UP approach is the opposite of the beliefs held in naturalism, which is a philosophy that favors a scientific approach rather than spiritual or supernatural. The UP's five antis are representative of the arguments that surface against naturalism. Gerson says that instead of significant changes in Platonism, the framework has remained the same, this framework being what he calls UP. Under Gerson’s approach, different interpretations are permissible and are not suggestive of a change in structure (Gerson 19-21).

The following sections in this introduction have been broken down in to “Hermeneutics,” “Language,” and concluding with “Rhetoric as a Societal Bond” in order to understand how individualism and the search for truth was sought after among the Transcendentalists. These sections will serve as a basis to analyze the following chapters. In the “Hermeneutics” section, Augustine of Hippo’s method of seeking truth will be analyzed and compared to that of the Transcendentalists – it is the method of abandonment of oneself in search of truth. The next section will be over “Language,” and the importance Transcendentalists placed on language and its contribution to a successful rhetoric. I will then discuss the concluding parallel in “Rhetoric as a Societal Bond.” These areas will serve as foundational starting points for the upcoming chapters that will focus on the contributions that Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Amos Bronson Alcott made to the identity of the New America.

Hermeneutics

In Transcendentalism, in order to come to an understanding of the Divine a person must completely resign from oneself in order to understand or “transcend” into divine knowledge. Roger Thompson relies on the hermeneutics of resignation in explaining the Transcendental approach to finding truth. To illustrate his argument, Thompson states that Augustine of Hippo believed that in order for one to be connected to the Divine that person needed to resign from oneself and be immersed in the the Word of God.

Roger Thompson explains that “Augustine’s biblical hermeneutics assisted priests in unlocking the power of the Bible...With an understanding of Scripture in hand, the Bible can move on to communicating the truths that have been revealed to him in order to change the heart of the parishioners” (53). William Ellery Channing also echoed these same sentiments when he spoke of the resignation of oneself for the sake of preparing to serve others in society. In his “Likeness to God” sermon he shared with his audience that:

Let the boundless creation fill you with awe and admiration of the energy which sustains it. But remember that God has a nobler work than the outward creation, even the spirit within yourselves; and that it is his purpose to replenish this with his own energy, and to crown it with growing power and triumphs over the material universe...by extending the knowledge and power of Christian truth. It is through such views, that religion raises up the soul, and binds man by ennobling bonds to his Maker. (Channing)

William Ellery Channing was one of the early Transcendentalists, but not as well known as the others of focus in this research.

Before the works of Emerson, Channing, and Augustine, Plato revealed the dynamics of creation through *Timeaus*, who is in a dialogue with others and revealed that “God invented and

gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heaven, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence...and regulate our own vagaries” (Plato). Within the dialogues of *Timeaus*, the concept of duality surfaces. Duality is a vital concept because it is the immergence or connection of the opposites that serve as the ultimate link to the Divine. *Timeaus* explains in further detail in his dialogue that “Mind, the ruling power, persuaded necessity to bring the greater part of created things to perfection...But if a person will truly tell of the way in which the work was accomplished, he must include the other influence of the variable cause as well” (Plato).

Augustine acknowledges the value Greek rhetoric could bring to Christianity, especially Platonism. Augustine sought to apply the methods of creating a “New Republic” and crafting a rhetoric that was “Christianized” for the purpose of furthering the gospel. Augustine warned of false Christian strands that were emerging; the art of deciphering truth from fakery is the foundation of the rhetorical analysis he taught and became a guide to those entering the priesthood. For Augustine, the resignation from oneself and the immersion of God’s presence, opened the channel to a clearer perspective and equipped the priests with the tools needed to reach their audience.

This connection also allowed a person who was not a gifted orator to still move the audience. Because beauty can come from vileness, according to Augustine, the power was not necessarily in beauty, but the divine connection. In the Divine, communication falls into place and “speaks for itself.” Roger Thompson adds to this idea by stating, “...Augustine effectively argues that wisdom is in itself a type of eloquence, even if it is not fully appreciated” (57). Knowledge is the basis for successful eloquence. Eloquence in language is an important aspect of rhetoric, as seen in “Nature,” but authenticity is at the center of this success. In “On Christian

Doctrine” Book IV, Chapter IV, Augustine warns of this by saying, “But we must beware of the man who abounds in eloquent nonsense, and so much the more if the hearer is pleased with what is not worth listening to, and thinks that because the speaker is eloquent what he says must be true” (Augustine 457). For Augustine, the Bible was a code and was written in such a way that required a hermeneutics of resignation in order for one to fully understand the messages. This type of resignation corresponded with the Transcendental approach, and was the backbone in the message of individuality, one that became central in being “American.” For the practitioners of Transcendentalism, searching for truth within the abandonment of oneself allowed the opportunity for those seeking truth to not fall in the trap of becoming subjective while interpreting the text. Steven Mailloux quotes E. D. Hirsch who shares in his text titled, *Objective Interpretation*, that “without a proper theory of correct interpretation, we cannot avoid “subjectivism and relativism” (qtd. in *Rhetorical Power* 6).

Hirsch’s theory of interpretation of texts shares similarities with the Transcendentalist thought on accurate interpretation, but the “text” for the Transcendentalists was nature, whose author is “The One” or what Emerson termed “The Oversoul.” Through the means of an individualized and disciplined exploration of truth, the Transcendentalists believed that one could find true meaning through nature. In his *Objective Interpretation*, Hirsch discusses the difference between meaning and criticism. He argues that the goal of interpretation is to comprehend the meaning of the text— what the author intended the message to be, despite the time era it was written in. Criticism, however, determines how it relates to the present – how it is relative to the reader. The conclusion of his argument is that criticism has been often confused with the true meaning of the text, basically that the two terms, criticism and meaning, have been used interchangeably. He shares his thoughts on the matter by stating, “The object of the

interpretation is textual meaning in and for itself and may be called the *meaning* of the text. The object of criticism, on the other hand, is that meaning in its bearing on something else...and this object may therefore be called the *relevance* of the text” (Hirsch 110). The meaning of the text does not change in the course of time, and we should not try to change its meaning, either. This is interesting in regards to the hermeneutic aspect of Transcendentalism. When “all mean egotism vanishes,” the meaning of the text becomes transparent – the interpretation is objective and not subjective (Emerson, “Nature”).

Steven Mailloux continues in regards to the various types of hermeneutic approaches and focuses on two different types of hermeneutics: hermeneutic realism and hermeneutic idealism. Hermeneutic realism is an approach that stays true to the text and only considers the context of the text. The example above is one of a realist approach. As Mailloux argues, “For hermeneutic realism, texts are the primary source and test of readings; they constrain and ultimately determine interpretations” (5). In contrast, in this approach, readers are often viewed as “...passive, simply acted upon by the words on page” (5). In hermeneutic idealism, the meaning is made and the “interpreter’s mind is active...completely dominant over the text” (6). Mailloux further explains, “In hermeneutic idealism, a text doesn’t constrain its interpretation; rather, communal interpretation creates the text” (6). Plato’s dialogues would fall under hermeneutic idealism – the communal interpretation of texts. However, and although akin to Platonism, I argue Transcendentalism falls in between these two approaches, much like Augustine’s thinking. Augustine viewed the Bible as a code that needed to be translated, and relied fully on the scriptures to discover that code. At the same time, individual and communal interpretation, through a relationship with Christ, was required to navigate through false teachings. With the Transcendentalists, the two approaches play a part, as well. They advocated for a fully immersed

connection through nature to understand God's purpose in a communal effort to strengthen the New America that places value on the individual. This thinking also parallels with Transcendentalism, which I will discuss more in the chapter over the works of Amos Bronson Alcott. In that chapter, I will show how the Transcendentalists viewed the knowledge of children as pure and close to the nature of God. Alcott kept a record in *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* on his interactions with his students at Temple School that he opened in 1834, and this will be the main source of focus in that chapter.

Hermeneutics and analyzation strategies for analyzing texts are important in relation to the wider picture of the role Transcendentalism and how it is reflected in the America we know today. Hermeneutics is closely related to language, or in this case the eloquence and the effectiveness of language, which is imperative in a successful rhetoric. In the next section on "Language," I will discuss the origins, the beauty, and the creativity of language.

Language

The beauty of language is like a puzzle, and for the Transcendentalists, this puzzle was organic. Emerson described language as symbolic of the world; therefore, creativity should flow freely, without human interruption. He likened language to an analogy, just as he did with most everything – side-by-side reflection of something that was more perfect. According to Emerson, language was a symbol of something spiritual. He explained this analogy by stating, "As we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque, until its infancy, when it is all poetry; or all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols. The same symbols are found to make the original elements of all languages" ("Nature"). This organic language that Emerson perceived as the foundation of true communication did not correspond with the current perception of language. It is more of a process of fruition that occurred since the beginning, with continuous

changes. However, for the Transcendentalists, it was not the place of society to set boundaries on language or learning because they believed a small portion of the divine dwelt in people.

Emerson shared his approach by stating, “Hence, good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. This imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind. It is proper creation. It is the working of the Original Cause through the instruments he has already made” (“Nature”). Language, and rhetoric itself, is an organic part of of being human and an abundance of structure, he argues, can hinder growth, even for a new country.

The Transcendentalists are a product of an education system that promoted a mechanical approach to language and rhetoric, which is known as belletrism, the structure of composition that was taught in schools during this time. Belletrism is the:

...German model of higher education in America. The German design valued specialization and well-defined areas of knowledge, and it transformed Blair’s rhetoric in American into a tightly regulated system of expression associated almost exclusively with controlled, proper language, grammar, and practicality, often completely ignoring any discussion of the imaginative powers of the mind. (Thompson 75)

This approach, according to Transcendental thought, was a roadblock for the natural flourishing of communication. Roger Thompson tells his readers that “Emerson’s distaste for [Hugh] Blair might be called a distaste for an educational methodology that stifles the imaginations and and removes the sacredness from rhetorical acts” (78). The study of rhetoric was torn between logic and imagination, with most of the educators during the time siding with logic as the preferred approach. This mechanical outlook on rhetoric is not new. The change in rhetoric can be seen dating back to Peter Ramus. The Puritans were influenced by Ramus as can

be seen in their Plain Style sermons, ones that abandoned the traditional rhetoric that encompassed more of a dialectical approach. Formulistic communication is what was becoming the foundation of the New America, and it can be seen starting with the Puritans.

To add to this mechanical outlook, the Puritans did not advocate a dialectical approach in learning. Different opinions were not welcomed into conversations, and those who voiced their thoughts were often exiled from the community due to heretical allegations. To reference an earlier example of heretical charges, Foggio Bracciolini stated in “The Congregation of the Faithful – The Trial of Jerome of Prague” that even St. Augustine and Jerome had differences in opinion, but there was never a suspicion of heresy (621). Ramus’s mechanical method seeped into society and damaged the growth of rhetoric and academia because he equated the study of rhetoric to just the eloquence of delivering a speech, when in reality rhetoric is much more colorful than that. It is the art of conversing with one another in any area of study, with the purpose of exploring various viewpoints to obtain a holistic understanding. The beauty of proper communication was certainly admired and valued, but not to the point where communication and learning were the results of imitation.

The Puritans prohibited the expression of different opinions that could possibly damage the society they were forming. They believed that one person who strayed from their core beliefs could put their entire community at risk of not being presentable to God. Those in authority used these reasons to implement tortures and banishments in their society. The premises had to originate from an accurate source, but the method in which it was delivered had the effect of boxing in a learner, especially since information was cut to fit a certain format or method. Belletrism is connected to the rhetoric of Ramus because it was a composition of boxing in one’s thoughts. This is the type of thinking that Emerson warned young Americans about when he

spoke of the educational institutions of the time; he stated, "...But they can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create..." ("The American Scholar"). Condensing the delivery of information into a watered down and simplified method is what was mostly seen in early America, and what the Transcendentalists viewed as a brick wall for the growth of America.

Based on the oratorical changes of the time, the Transcendentalists believed that language was best learned through real experience, and not through rote learning techniques. Emerson stated, "I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of today. This is the way to learn grammar" ("The American Scholar"). The development of the whole person was through an education that encourages creativity, original ideas, and language that mirrors a natural development, and not a mechanical one.

Rhetoric as a Societal Bond

The Greek god Kairos, who is known as the youngest son of Zeus and the god of opportunity, appears in modern rhetoric. He holds a balance scale, along with a blade, to indicate balance and precision. He not only has wings on his back, but also on the back of his ankles, to indicate swiftness. Hair hangs over his face so those who approach him can snatch the lock of hair at just the right moment. The back of his head is bald, so when he has embarked in a fleeting moment no one is able to catch him. The term Kairos is used in rhetoric to show that balance and timing are imperative in rhetoric. This balance relates to the composition of our arguments, daily interactions, and the substance and the beauty of rhetoric in general.

The Transcendentalist Movement and Kairos are similar because of the emphasis on timing, creativity, and balance as essential elements in establishing a stronger more independent

thinking America. Mentioning Kairos seems somewhat appropriate because America seized the moment to make an identity for itself. The previous overview of hermeneutics and language serves as the foundation to understanding the Transcendentalist Movement. Through the analysis of the American Romanticism period to now, the swiftness and balance that Kairos portrays are evident. The sentiments of Transcendentalism are echoed in the following quote: “The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature...in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all” (“The American Scholar”).

In the following chapters, journals, speeches, and other written works, I will analyze the rhetorical purpose of Transcendentalism. Hermeneutics, the importance of language and communication, and the use of rhetoric as a societal bond will serve as a background for the UP framework. I will argue points that parallel to the ideas presented in Lloyd Gerson’s *From Plato to Platonism*, and show that Transcendentalism was Platonic in its original form and was the basis of the American Renaissance. For each author – Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott, three works will be analyzed for its elements of Gerson’s UP. Not all elements of the UP will be connected to the works, but only the ones that apply. In doing so, I will show the Platonic nature of the American Transcendentalist Movement.

CHAPTER II

THE EMERSONIAN FOUNDATION OF THE “REPUBLIC”

The first thing we have to say respecting new views here in New England, at the present time, is that they are not new, but the very oldest of thoughts cased in the mold of these new times...What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842.

– Emerson “The Transcendentalist,” 1842

Introduction

The idealism that arose within the Transcendentalist Movement serves as a starting point for this chapter and the upcoming chapters. The idealistic view of the “new world” was a reaction to separate from “the old world,” which still resonated through out New England. Gerson argues in *From Plato to Platonism* that Platonism has developed but maintained the same framework, one that is built on refutation of mainstream ideologies (9-10). The Transcendentalists went against the grain of society, but this was not a new concept at all. It is an age old concept that has taken on various forms since the written works of Plato. Through out the upcoming sections, I will discuss how three of Emerson’s works: “Nature,” “Self Reliance,” and “The American Scholar” build on the five antis to create a Platonism of nineteenth century America, which contributed to the foundation of the New America. As I mentioned in the introduction, I will position Transcendentalism alongside Gerson’s UP to show the consistency of the Platonic framework. According to Gerson, Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism do not reflect different frameworks, and the same holds true for the Platonism of the nineteenth century. I will first start out with an introduction on Emerson, his life, and the parallels of Transcendentalist thought with that of Plato’s.

Emerson was leery of organized and rote religious institutions, and saw this style of worship filled with monotonous and legalistic rituals. As Dorothy Broaddus points out in her introduction “if we believe Emerson, the young men at Harvard proved to be devoted imitators” (9). The belief in God or a Higher Being is the center to the Transcendentalist’s quest for truth, and being able to project a rhetoric that would be receptive would only be possible from a divine power, one that could only be obtained from what would be considered unconventional means. Emerson shared his experience of the “Divine” in “Nature” when he stated, “Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite spaces, — 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 parcel of God.” In this quote, Emerson shared an experience of transcendence with the Divine, where the Transcendentalists believed knowledge originated. The dualistic approach and understanding of the divine and society has its origins in Platonism. This dualistic understanding of one’s environment was meant as an avenue to obtain unity with the divine, something that Emerson saw missing in America.

Emerson came from a Unitarian background and attended the Harvard Divinity School, but while in attendance he began to develop views that did not align with mainstream ideologies. After the death of his wife, Emerson increasingly questioned the mainstream beliefs of New England, and thus traveled to Europe as both an escape and quest for answers to questions that arose during the early part of his life. The traditional understanding of the Divine that was taught during Emerson’s time did not correspond to the tenets of the Transcendental thought, including the religious and educational livelihood of the New America. Roger Thompson argues that:

Emerson uses Plato to unravel the relationship between the mind, the civic body, and language, and in doing so, he conceives of Plato as a “representative man” for American

democracy. Plato, for Emerson, joined philosophy and rhetoric, and Emerson's conception of language, which is at the heart of his transcendentalism, derives, in no small part, from Plato's rhetorical theory. (16)

Emerson's views originated from philosophical and religious roots, but he also extended those beliefs in every facet of society. For the Transcendentalists, knowledge from the divine source was meant to be shared and contributed in society, as what is seen in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave."

The Theory of Forms, which is illustrated in "The Allegory of the Cave" in *The Republic* by Plato, demonstrates Plato's belief that what is seen is a copy of the "perfect." Through the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon, Plato creates an allegory of enlightenment that parallels Emerson's own experience. In the allegory, Socrates shares with Glaucon that there are prisoners bound by chains in a cave who are forced to see only the shadows on the wall that are created by a fire. The shadows are distorted, as is the rest of their existence. One prisoner is freed and walks into the authentic sunlight and sets his eyes on the sun with no cloudiness to obstruct the view. The sun represents true knowledge, and the freed prisoner runs to tell the other prisoners about it; however, the other prisoners do not recognize their fellow prisoner who had been freed - all is distorted because they have yet to connect to the truth (*The Republic*, Book VII). The individualized experience of truth was at the heart of the collective success of the New America, just as it is shown in "The Allegory of the Cave." Individualism was at the center of the Transcendentalist Movement, but not a selfish individualism. As Roger Thompson shows, it contributed to what the Transcendentalists felt was for the good of society (107). Gerson states that Plato's philosophical approach is a refutation of mainstream ideologies, and Emerson echoes a similar message in his essays and speeches.

In “Nature,” Emerson shows the foundation of the the Transcendental experience. The movement was not just a solitary religious experience, but one that was meant to permeate throughout society with the intention of building independent thinkers, which would thus translate into a stronger country. In “Self-Reliance,” Emerson shares the overall idea that one needed to trust themselves when it came to original ideas. He revealed this concept by stating, “...to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another” (“Self-Reliance”). He presents the idea of “Man Thinking” in the “American Scholar” in which he encouraged the utilization of one’s own intellect. Emerson states, “In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking...” (“American Scholar”). The New England society of Emerson’s time was still dependent on Europe, and what is seen in this quote is a call for a country of independent thinkers. Emerson’s works embodied the American ideals of independence and originality, and the Platonic nature can be better understood by applying Gerson’s UP. Before analyzing the parallels, though, it is important to note the change in the oratorical and rhetorical environment of the Transcendentalists.

Oratorical Landscape

The oratorical landscape was changing, and Emerson was a product of this change. Emerson, as noted in the introduction of this chapter, was trained at Harvard for the ministry, but left soon after the passing of his first wife. Emerson’s change corresponded with the nineteenth century lean toward individualism and professionalism. For example, the delivery of sermons was one that took on a more individualized form that exemplified a lifestyle of independence;

elaborate messages based on traditions and delivered by well-educated clergy were becoming less mainstreamed, and replaced with sermons delivered by the “...unlettered preacher, the overemotional revivalist, the self-seeking ‘professional,’ the lopsided esthete, the audience-ignoring technical theologian, or the morally weak orator” (Hirst 94). Although Emerson appreciated beauty and structure and thought the poet the most virtuous person, he believed true beauty and virtue did not come from training at institutions, which he thought were dry and static and relied too much on mimicking the past. Emerson noted in one of his journals dated August 31, 1835, that “...the best sermon would be a quiet, conversational, analysis...to show the chain under the leather; to show the true within the supposed advantage of Christian institutions” (Emerson, “Journals” 302). The delivery of sermons that began developing during this time were quite charismatic, and may not align with the “quiet” that Emerson spoke of, but one aspect that is certain is that messages from the pulpit contributed to the transition in the oratorical landscape because the shift transitioned to the individual, thus changing the rhetoric of sermons.

The structure of sermons were one of the elements of society that significantly changed. I choose to discuss sermons in this section because spirituality played an important role in the lives of American people, as it still does. I also choose this because of Emerson’s past training in ministry; he was a minister whose beliefs changed with the changing secular society. In Russel Hirst’s chapter titled, “The Sermon as Public Discourse: Austin Phelps and the Conservative Homiletic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century America” he describes the changes that were taking place and the reactions to those changes. Austin Phelps, who was a Congregational minister and professor of rhetoric and homiletics, believed that ministers should be educated in the classics and literature and trained in the classical cannon of rhetoric for the persuasion of bringing people to the church. With many beliefs branching out into other denominations and developing so

quickly, there were those who were stepping up to the pulpit who were not formally educated. This alarmed Phelps and other conservative ministers who thought they were not prepared to lead a “flock” and address concerns. As Hirst explains, “...the burgeoning democratic spirit of the new nation, which resulted in so much anti-intellectualism/anti-elitism, brought with it a great deal of prejudice against orthodox, seminary-bred preachers” (“The Sermon as Public Discourse” 82). To those a part of this oratorical change, “sacred oratory” was through God only and not ordained by any educational institution. Those who were a part of the conservative orthodox ministry were more concerned about “uneducated pretenders to the ministry” than the “educated heretics such as the Unitarians” (95).

One other significant change in the sermons is social issues were becoming to be more prominent in the messages. Phelps, along with others, felt that change needed to take place organically, other than it taking place by directly calling out civil injustices and the wrongs in society. Hirst explains what Phelps and others would agree on is:

...preaching should change society organically, not suddenly, disruptively, violently. The moral force of preaching should bear upon the human mind like “atmosphere upon the globe’s surface.” The moral changes it effects should be general, complete, solid, lasting. It should be based on a permanent and progressive moral/intellectual development...”

(88)

Phelps believed that the emergence of these new types of sermons was emotionally driven and counterproductive, and ended up really focusing on the “self.” As Hirst once again points out:

The counterfeit of true ministerial ethos, against which Phelps firmly stood, was the practice of putting oneself at the center of one’s discourse. Despite this and his colleague’s efforts, however, emotionalized preaching and religious movements that

centered on personalities, as well as the increasing professionalization of the Christian ministry, continued to erode the sacred mode of America's oratorical culture.” (98)

How this all relates to Emerson and the Transcendentalists as a whole, are the messages they shared by word of mouth, actions, and in their writings, were centered on self, but not in a self-absorbed way but more of a “truth lives within, and what can we do to find it?” type of approach. Emerson lived during a period of many transitions from the norm, and Transcendentalism was just that – a step away from the norm to advocate for truth that lies within instead to hollow traditions. This new individualism that was taking over the oratorical culture of Emerson's time was a form of survivalism. The Transcendentalists were becoming leery of government, education, and traditional religious practices, and resorted to caring for their “own” in a way they saw fit – which was individualized. The individualized rhetoric that was forming in America changed the ethos of the person, which ultimately changed the ethos of the nation.

Nature

“Nature,” which was Emerson's first book, serves as a reflection of the individualized ideas in Transcendentalism. The connections with nature was a spiritual source line for the Transcendentalists. Emerson accounted this throughout “Nature,” even down to the origins and functions of language. He categorized nature in the following classes – Commodity, Beauty, Language, and Discipline. Nature and humans were connected, while simultaneously serving one another. This was what they perceived as the spiritual connection between nature and humans, and this is what Transcendentalism was – a marriage of duality, which in itself is paradoxical – “Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance” (“Nature”).

Emerson's beliefs he expressed in "Nature" bonds with all of Gerson's pillars of UP. Emerson was the "Plato" of his day, and the message and origins of nature were Platonic in the idea of thinking outside of mainstream ideology. Claudia Schumann correctly points out "The idea that Emerson positively embraced inconsistencies in his thought as part of a dynamic philosophy of life and as benefitting intellectual self-growth was not sitting well with the method-oriented mainstream of Anglo-American analytic philosophy in the 20th century" ("The Self as Onwardness" 31). Duality and unity both surface in "Nature," and for some this may appear to be an inconsistency. However, for Emerson and for the movement of Transcendentalism as a whole, these "inconsistencies" were parts of a puzzle that were linked with one another to form a perfect whole. One set of his writings that give insight into his thoughts are his journals.

Emerson's background was quite different from the beliefs he developed later in life, and some of these changes are detailed in his journals. His journals serve as an important tool to better understand Emerson and his ideas. Emerson's refutational ideas live throughout all of his writings; they all project his thoughts on the imperativeness of nature and humankind's capability to rely on oneself. It is important to mention Emerson's journals during the years prior to his departure and during the time of his departure because we have a glimpse into the changes he was going through at that time.

Before his journey to Europe, Emerson's life was typical for a Harvard School of Divinity graduate of the time; he secured a position as pulpit minister at Boston's First Church, served on the school board, and married Ellen in 1829. After his wife's death in 1831, he sold what he had and took the first ship to Europe on Christmas Day in 1832. He recorded his events, places he had been, cathedrals he visited, people he met, and ideas that accumulated through his

visit. It was during this time that he wrote most of “Nature,” which is why it will be the first work to be analyzed through the lens of UP.

Antimaterialism

Emerson’s journals give insight to how his thoughts paralleled with the foundations of Platonism and will serve as the introduction into the UP’s antimaterialism section of “Nature.” While in Europe, Emerson was surrounded with the beauties of the past. The old buildings were magnificent and spoke of a time that was representative of people whose knowledge and teachings are still read. Although his experience affected him greatly, it did not replace his message of originality. To share one of his entries while in Rome:

In Rome it is not the diameter nor the circumference of the columns, it is not the dimension nor the materials of the temples, which constitutes their chief char. It is the name of Cicero; it is the remembrance of a wise and good man...the influence of human character, the heroes who struggled, the patriots who fell, the wise men who thought...”

(Emerson, “Journals”102)

When he arrived in Rome, he remarked, “Go and see it, whoever you are. It is the wealth of the civilized world. It is a contribution from all ages and nations of what is most rich and rare. He who has not seen it does not know what beautiful stones there are in the planet...” (78). The ruins represent a society that was a copy of the perfect. Though, “Rome all is ruinous,” there is beauty in those ruins.

When he arrived to the Lombardy region, he was impressed by the Milan Cathedral – the only one that was comparable to the St. Peter’s in Rome. He commented, too, that one of the most striking observances to an American is that even the poorest of citizens have good houses in which to live. One of the benefits of travel is seeing other cultures in comparison to one’s own

– in that we all maybe different, we are still very similar. With this comparison/contrast line of reasoning, he commented about the architecture:

Architecture – shall I speak what I think? – sees to me ever an imitation. Accustomed to look at our American churches as imitative, I cannot get it out my head that these which I now see are only more splendid and successful imitations also...I am perplexed with my inveterate littleness. (Emerson, “Journals” 146)

His journal entries reveal the importance of discovery and self-reflection, and lead in to the Gerson’s UP pillars. “Nature” is an important and complex text. Emerson emphasized that “A life in harmony with nature, the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text. By degrees we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book” (“Nature”). The idea of Gerson’s antimaterialism is that there is more to existence than just the visible. This is one of the main messages in “Nature” – the connection to the unseen is essential to obtaining knowledge and living to our truest selves. Being able to “see” fully was a necessity for Emerson, both physically and spiritually.

Louisa Thomas crafts an interesting argument concerning Emerson and his vision in her article, “Emerson’s Eye.” She opens her article by sharing that Emerson nearly lost his eye sight in 1825 due to tuberculosis, and then adds that this was not only a physical necessity for Emerson, but a spiritual one as well. She states:

Emerson believed his eyes were not only the primary bridge between self and the external world, but that sight was also connected to *insight*—the ability to apprehend the true nature of a thing. Such apprehending wasn’t entirely passive: he called the eye “the best of artists” and a “composer.” The eye defined the horizon by which man oriented himself. It gave him perspective; it organized images; it created, for him, the world. (Thomas 826)

Since the Forms were the basis of Emerson's ideas, it stands to reason why sight is important, at least for Emerson. Thomas argues that for Emerson there is indeed more than just the visible because "To Emerson, an idealist, this was why our eyes were so important. He was concerned with the correspondence — or corruption — of things and their ideal forms" (Thomas 827).

Idealism, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, describes Emerson and the Transcendentalist Movement. What was seen were pictures or copies of the perfect form, which means there was more to existence than just the visible. As Emerson exclaimed, "The presence of a higher, namely, of the spiritual element is essential to its perfection. The high and divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy, is that which is found in combination with the human will" ("Nature").

Of course, the vision that Louisa Thomas speaks of is literal and physical. Emerson was obviously very affected by this moment in his life; but to be able to see beyond, in a Transcendental mystical perspective is essential to understanding oneself in relation to nature. In "Nature," the reliance on the measure of the unseen was a part of the grand puzzle. As he stated, "Show us an arc of the curve, and a good mathematician will find out the whole figure. We are always reasoning from the seen to the unseen" ("Nature"). Emerson continued to reveal the antimaterialistic vision that represented his ideas by stating: "...such is the constitution of all things, or such the plastic power of the human eye...This seems partly owing to the eye itself. The eye is the best of artists" ("Nature"). The eye of one's soul is the antimaterialistic heart of Transcendentalism – to fully see the visible with the intention to experience invisible spiritual surroundings supports Gerson's approach to Platonism.

Antimechanism

Emerson's views were antimechanic because he and the Transcendentalists held an unconventional approach to the natural order. For the Transcendentalists, the natural order was an algorithmic set of laws that were connected to their relationship to nature. Emerson held to the idea that nature served people, but it was a reciprocal relationship. As he shared, "Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man" ("Nature"). This profit that Emerson spoke of goes back to nature for an ongoing benefit for the soul and intellect of each individual. As he further stated, "A man is fed, not that he may be fed, but that he may work" ("Nature"). In the introduction, there is a section titled, "Language," but the focus of that section is on how it plays a part in the successful communication of the Transcendentalist Movement; this section will be centered on the origins of language from Emerson's perspective, and how this perspective was of an antimechanical approach.

The organic relationship to nature is the beginning of understanding how the UP works within Transcendentalism. The antimechanic aspect of Gerson's UP is in Emerson's approach to the origins of language. Emerson had a unique belief in how language came about and the role nature played in it. He shared in the opening of his section on "Language," "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture" ("Nature"). For Emerson, words were symbols of something else within nature, something that humans have connected to because "man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects" ("Nature"). The duality present within this chapter is evident of how Emerson saw the imperativeness of a Transcendental connection between humans and nature. He further

interjected that “A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language” (“Nature”). In other words, the substance of our language was dependent on the connection with nature. Emerson was led to believe that everyone had the ability to connect with God through nature. They just had to consciously make that decision, and this was seen in Emerson’s chapter on language. Emerson’s belief in language was purely organic, original, and antimechanic – “we contemplate the fearful extent and multitude of objects; since ‘every object rightly seen, unlocks a new faculty of the soul.’ That which was unconscious truth, becomes, when interpreted and defined in an object, a part of the domain of knowledge-a new weapon in the magazine of power” (“Nature”).

In Emerson’s perspective, the realness and power of nature surfaced in the creation of language, and society itself. Emerson shared that the corruption of language stemmed from civilization. Not only language, but every facet of life was purely connected to nature and was tainted by civilization. The antimechanic belief of the rise of language corresponded to the belief that one should not abandon the influence of nature for the mere accomplishments found in modern society. Individualism could not withstand it’s the perils of civilization without a true connection to nature. Emerson shared that “These facts may suggest the advantage which the country-life possesses for a powerful mind, over the artificial and curtailed life of cities. We know more from nature than we can at will communicate. Its light flows into the mind evermore, and we forget its presence” (“Nature”). The antimechanics found within Emerson’s “Nature” serves to be an allegorical message. It ties with his other messages, even if they are paradoxical on the surface. It all goes back to the spiritual connection with nature. He revealed, “The world is

emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor, of the human mind. The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass” (“Nature”). Viewing the world as a metaphor and allegory gives insight to how Transcendentalism is Platonic. American Transcendentalism is another form of Platonism that has of course changed through time, but still maintained a consistent framework.

Antinominalism

Gerson states in regards to this pillar that “The antinominalist thus allows that two or more individuals can be the same and still be unique individuals” (12). This approach is insightful in regards to “Nature” because this is Emerson’s underlying message in the majority of his works – uniqueness and independence.

The independence of the soul and mind is interconnected to the “tent” metaphor of Gerson’s UP, which makes this antinominalistic idea relatable to Transcendentalism. This “going against the grain of society,” so to speak, was the antinominalism that contributed to the identity of the American culture. The “call to action” that Emerson made for America was essentially a spiritual identity – one that beckons a person to connect to the Oversoul in order to change their whole “being.” Emerson shared, “Culture inverts the vulgar views of nature, and brings the mind to call that apparent, which it uses to call real, and that real, which it uses to call visionary.

Children, it is true, believe in the external world. The belief that it appears only, is an afterthought, but with culture, this faith will as surely arise on the mind as did the first” (“Nature”). For Emerson and the Transcendentalists, nature brought forth the true culture of people to the surface and aided in the creation of their uniqueness.

Uniqueness for the identity of a new country originated with the uniqueness of oneself. Emerson advocated going against the “popular faith” in pursuit of the uniqueness of one’s voice,

which contributed to the uniqueness of their culture. According to Emerson, culture consisted of people who shared commonality, but simultaneously the individuality of each person is the backbone of that culture. Emerson says:

The advantage of the ideal theory over the popular faith, is this, that it presents the world in precisely that view which is most desirable to the mind. It is, in fact, the view which Reason, both speculative and practical, that is, philosophy and virtue, take. For, seen in the light of thought, the world always is phenomenal... (“Nature”)

The authentic phenomenalism of a culture was representative in the individualistic message and contribution that one made, and not the imitation of what others said.

Antirelativism

According Gerson, the UP pillar of antirelativism is the denial that humans are the measure of all things. This follows in line with Emerson’s message in “Nature” because according to the Transcendentalists nature was the measure of all things because it was the source line to the divine. This is also evident in Plato’s theories of the universe and the understanding and perception of human existence through the Theory of Forms.

Sheri Prud’homme suggests in her research that in order for us today to have a better understanding of Emerson we need to understand his Unitarian background. As mentioned, Emerson grew up as a Unitarian and studied to be a Unitarian minister, and was one one for a short time before travelling to Europe. As Prud’homme shows, the Unitarians heeded to the Lockean movement, which held that spiritual connection resided in empirical observations and historical understanding. In the framework of hermeneutics, the Unitarians approached the understanding of the Bible through a historical lens, and for Emerson this approach was dry and resulted in a country of imitators. Prude’homme shares with her readers that “To Emerson and

his contemporaries, the Unitarian outlook was not only inadequate and uninspiring, but a driving force of the ‘universal decay and now almost death of faith in society,’ as Emerson told the graduating class of Harvard in 1838” (qtd. in *Emerson’s Hermeneutic* 230). To bicker about traditions or the authors’ meanings, he believed, only stalled growth and built a stage for legalistic practices that stifled independent thinking. Prud’homme further states, “In Emerson’s view, the Bible was a historic account of people who in their space and time had apprehended divine truth, but for the ‘living generation’ it was a ‘faded wardrobe’... revelation was ongoing and unmediated, a ‘face to face’ encounter it had more to do with ‘poetry’ and ‘insight’ than ‘tradition’ (230). The hermeneutics of nature, as it is outlined through out “Nature,” was for Emerson the source of truth that permits personal growth. Emerson at times may appear to have shunned history and disregarded its importance, but it was not so much that as it was his quest for others to search beyond what was considered “tradition” and learn through an approach that would lead an individual forward and not backward in to the repetitive traditions that were accepted as truth. The line of logic that was held among the Unitarians was stagnant and Emerson’s expressed this in his writings.

Within the tent of Gerson’s pillars, the antirelativism of Emerson’s message in “Nature” lies within his stance on the idea that humans are not the measure of all things; for Emerson, it was nature that was the measure of all things. As Emerson stated:

Nature stretcheth out her arms to embrace man, only let his thoughts be of equal greatness. Willingly does she follow his steps with the rose and the violet, and bend her lines of grandeur and grace to the decoration of her darling child. Only let his thoughts be of equal scope, and the frame will suit the picture. A virtuous man is in unison with her works, and makes the central figure of the visible sphere. (“Nature”)

Prud'homme explains that while Emerson was in France he revealed in his journals that he "...saw the undeniable order, unity, and interconnectedness of all things" (231). There was an order that existed within nature that did not exist among human interaction of self and others, and he witnessed this while at the Jardin des Plantes in France.

Antiskepticism

The pillar of antiskepticism is the idea that knowledge is attainable (Gerson 11-13), and this was very much at the center of the individualistic beliefs of Transcendentalism. Prud'homme states that Emerson perceived all things to be moral, including nature – "He did not mean that Nature would suggest moral concepts or ideas, but that literally nature itself was moral and would emanate Nature's moral law to humankind" (234). Much of his understanding of moral law originated from his understanding of Germaine de Staël von Halstein and Emmanuel Swedenborg and his theory of "correspondence," which held to the idea that the external world and the laws of human nature were continual metaphors, a language of sorts that shed light and knowledge to humankind.

Prud'homme's argument continues to support Emerson's stance on the access of knowledge as she posits that there are four ideas central to Emerson's interpretation of nature – "(1) beauty as an indication of virtue, (2) the capacity of humankind to apprehend nature through the higher faculties of mind and soul, (3) the notion that each part renders the whole, and (4) how the text functions in community" (236). The first central idea comes from a beauty that reflects a form of unison, one that is attained through the "higher faculties of mind and soul," which is the second one. The second central idea is an important key to attainability of knowledge because "it is recovering something innate to children" (237). Transcendentalists, unlike their Puritan forefathers, believed children to have an ability to connect with the Divine and access knowledge

more than adults. The third idea states that each individual contributes to the whole of society, and leading into the fourth, in which the text, which is nature, creates a symbolic moral language for humans to learn from. As Prud'homme shares, "Emerson's human is ultimately an individual inscribed in community, a teaching community of growing souls" (239). The Transcendentalists were convinced that knowledge was completely attainable if only one allowed their soul access to that knowledge because "... all men are capable of being raised by piety or by passion, into their region. And no man touches these divine natures, without becoming, in some degree, himself divine." Therefore, Emerson constructed the Transcendental message that "Every spirit builds itself a house; and beyond its house a world; and beyond its world a heaven. Know then, that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon perfect...therefore, build your own world" ("Nature"). Just as Plato presents the idea of building knowledge through questioning and searching, Emerson encouraged others through his writings and conversations to search for absolute truth.

Self-Reliance

Emerson's essay titled, "Self-Reliance," demonstrates the ideas that Gerson shares concerning Platonism, and how it has changed, while at the same time adhering to the same foundational framework. Of the five pillars in Gerson's UP, antirelativism and antiskepticism will be the pillars of focus for "Self-Reliance." In this essay, Emerson expanded on the necessity of cultivating one's own gifts in order to build a more resilient self and stronger society. In "Self-Reliance," the emphasis was placed on the fruits of solitude, but also how to maintain the balance of being in solitude while also being a productive citizen in society. According to Emerson, the juggle of these two states was a paradox that was indeed obtainable and necessary for self-reliance. In the antirelativism section, I will analyze solitude and the examples Emerson

used to illustrate the imperativeness for people to truly live their own worth, and not that of others. In the antiskepticism section, I will analyze the state of being in solitude while also being in society and maintaining relations with others. Complete solitude is not the advocacy in Emerson's works, but how to maintain a balance.

Antirelativism

Throughout Emerson's writings, themes such as, independence and originality surface. The antirelativism pillar is transparent in "Self-Reliance" because it is a lie to live in measure of society's expectations. Emerson shared, "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude" ("Self-Reliance"). The antirelativism approach is a characteristic of Emerson's ideas and what he understood to be our place and our true function. To be in the world and yet be our own selves is the Transcendental message of individualism, which they understood would result in harmony and unity with others. Here, the duality is not seen as a division, but a tool for unity. Prentiss Clark suggests in his article that:

Again and again Emerson registers this immediate, live intimacy in which we exist, suggesting not simply a classic Romantic sense of oneness with the world (and oneness perceived lost), but an awareness (and "forget[fullness]," as "Self-Reliance" points out) of our "shar[ing] the life by which things exist," and so our "several stake in the joy and the suffering of the whole. (325)

Speaking from within is worth more than outward performances to appease others – which is an imitation. Emerson states, "Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, — and our first thought is

rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment” (“Self-Reliance”). Well-known individuals throughout history did not cultivate a habit of imitation, but cultivated a habit of self-reliance – relying on one’s own ideas. Emerson shared this sentiment when he stated, “...that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till” (“Self-Reliance”). Emerson believed imitation was surviving within one’s comfort zone, and it was certainly not a growing one. Imitation was common place among the young adults of Emerson’s time, but that way of living did not contribute to growth. It was a “deliverance which does not deliver” and one that does not instill a true pride within the citizen, so ‘Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string’ (“Self-Reliance”).

The pureness, originality, and trust that dwells within children were what adults lacked, and is what the Transcendentalists looked for. Adults, Emerson believed, have been formed to a mold, one which society designated, but children have yet to form knowledge of these societal molds. Emerson, speaking about the perception of children, stated, “The nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner, and would disdain as much as a lord to do or say aught to conciliate one, is the healthy attitude of human nature” (“Self-Reliance”). The thoughts that originate from children are untainted with society’s expectations, and traditions tend to hold on to those uniform expectations. They act as roadblocks for one’s own development, and thus the development of a successful country. For Emerson, traditions held a strong connection to the old, to Europe, and to a way of life that prevented a New America from flourishing.

Holding to solitude is the ingredient to a prosperous soul, Emerson thought. Prosperity, not in the monetary sense, but in a fulfillment that would suffice in self-production and self-

worth. The hurdle is often self-trust. Emerson saw that a person who fully trusted oneself was more fulfilled and others saw a real person, not one made out of imitation. For Emerson, imitating was like wearing a mask; the true self was shielded due to a lack of self trust, and others did not have an opportunity to actually know the true person. Emerson said “...under all these screens I have difficulty to detect the precise man you are. And, of course, so much force is withdrawn from your proper life. But do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself” (“Self-Reliance”). For the Transcendentalists, finding your own selves was a reflection of the divine within, and that was found through one’s own work through solitude.

Solitude is characteristic of Transcendentalism, but the idea should not be mistaken as a selfish individualism that is so often associated with the individualism of this time. It is Platonic in the sense that it rejects conformity, and conformity is an accepted way of life – mimicking what society expects. As Emerson states, “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world.” (“Self-Reliance”). Emerson believed that through solitude one could find their true self, a true individual not conformed through societal expectations. Solitude is a component of individualism, but does not mean an exclusion from the world. Prentiss Clark shows this by stating:

One hears in these exhortations what Emerson confronts both in New England’s religious institutions and also, more broadly, in American society: a certain deadness to intimacy—an ossified falling-away from the relations in which persons exist (relations to Nature, God, self, and fellow persons)—leaving individuals in sterile alienation from the world, and impoverishing human life in all its forms. (333)

The perfect individualism was individualism achieved in solitude within society, not physically removed from society. To be physically removed from society would hinder the growth of America, and go completely against Emerson's message. His message of solitude is explained as follows: "All men have my blood, and I have all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it. But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation" ("Self-Reliance"). This isolation led to an unbroken connection that was linked to attainable knowledge, which I detail in the next section.

Antiskepticism

Emerson believed that knowledge was within reach, but a person had to know that and conjure up the internal God-given self-reliance that was already there. The antiskepticism pillar in "Self-Reliance" is the center of Emerson's argument. At times, it may seem that Emerson is a little agitated in his writings, and in "Self-Reliance" this is certainly seen. Perhaps the agitation stems from the growing impatience on Emerson's part to see people not reaching their full potential, and knowing they were able. He was not just placing this stunted outlook on others, but himself as well. Claudia Schumann shares in her article that Emerson was also including himself in his own assessment of people by using the first person plural, "we" in "Self-Reliance. She tells her readers:

In this sense, Emerson's crushing sentencing of his fellow men must be seen to include himself as well. When he speaks about «the forced smile which we put on in company where we do not feel at ease, in answer to conversation which does not interest us» (CW 2: 55), he includes himself in the «we» and expresses his *own* shame... ("The Self as Onwardness")

As it is seen here when Emerson stated, “We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other. Our age yields no great and perfect persons. We want men and women who shall renovate life and our social state, but we see that most natures are insolvent, cannot satisfy their own wants...” (“Self-Reliance”). Emerson was speaking for the country and was including himself in the accusations of closed-mindedness and stagnation in his cultural moment.

This close-mindedness also branched into the misconception of prayers, and Emerson shared this frustration in “Self-Reliance.” Emerson explained that prayer is not just a “small talk” with God in which the person asks for certain things. He stated, “Prayer that craves a particular commodity, — any thing less than all good, — is vicious. Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul” (“Self-Reliance”). Prayer was the continuous connection, the “ceaseless prayer” of the New Testament, that would allow a person the full unveiled knowledge that connects to the antiskepticism pillar. According to Emerson, this misconception was one of the leading contributors to a stagnate society. He went on further to say, “But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism and not unity in nature and consciousness. As soon as the man is at one with God, he will not beg. He will then see prayer in all action” (“Self-Reliance”). An uninterrupted connection, with what Emerson call the Oversoul, was the path to knowledge and allowed the person the ability to trust their innate gifts.

Another aspect of reaching a self-cultivated knowledge was avoiding the reliance on other societies and cultures. Emerson had an interesting approach when it came to travelling, and on the surface it might come across that he is against exploration. That was not the case at all, and he shared that “I have no churlish objection to the circumnavigation of the globe, for the purposes of art, of study...” (“Self-Reliance”). This stance on travelling corresponds to the

antiskepticism pillar in that exploration of complete knowledge was not attainable if mimicking other people; this concept goes hand in hand with solitude. He states that:

The soul is no traveller; the wise man stays at home, and when his necessities, his duties, on any occasion call him from his house, or into foreign lands, he is at home still, and shall make men sensible by the expression of his countenance, that he goes the missionary of wisdom and virtue, and visits cities and men like a sovereign, and not like an interloper or a valet. (“Self-Reliance”)

To consider other cultures as molds contributed to stagnation, according to Emerson. The flourishing of self, which was linked to true knowledge, would resonate through out all facets of society. Emerson affirmed that “It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views” (“Self-Reliance”).

The American Scholar

In “The American Scholar,” Emerson shared the “branching out” growth idea to the select graduates of the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard in 1837. Looking to the wisdom of the past was “noble,” but creating one’s own ideas was far better. Language was a form of expression, and in “The American Scholar” Emerson showed that expression and creation were the basis of a successful rhetoric. Emerson shared with the upcoming generation of the time that “There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair” (“The American Scholar”). Emerson stressed that creativity and the

cultivation of new ideas ought to be the foundation for the new curriculum in educational institutions.

Antimechanism

The antimechanical pillar lies within his message of steering away from the prescribed path of what was expected for individuals of this era. According to Emerson, education should not consist of rote and repetitive actions and traditions, but a creation of ideas. The path Emerson and the Transcendentalists took was that of a cultivation of self-trust that did not rely on books of the past, but a text of the present that would lead into the future – the text being nature, but the cultivation of ideas being through self-direction. This is not to say that Emerson was completely opposed of books, but was lead to believe that there was a dependency on books that hindered the cultivation of new ideas, which was a missing ingredient for intellectual progress. Emerson instructed the graduates by stating, “Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truths? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act. Let the grandeur of justice shine in his affairs” (“The American Scholar”). Emerson viewed society as a unified body in which each member had a role, and the role of the intellect was stunted due to lack of confidence. The books the students read in schools and colleges were primarily from Europe, which hence created a form of dependency on Europe. Emerson called for an antimechanical shift in thought. The message of self-direction, not relying on traditions of other past, but what is innately within was a bit of a different message during this Calvinistic time. Speaking on the overreliance of the past, Emerson says, “Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst...They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates” (“The American Scholar”).

Emerson's journal keeping is an example of how he created his own intellectual outlet by recording his observations. His many journal entries are examples of his version of "genius creates." Joseph Eugene Mullin shows in his article, "Ralph Waldo Emerson: From Illusion to Power," that the basis of Emerson's writings is from his journals. For example, for his essay, "Intellect," he "...indexed some ninety entries, with a *précis* of each" (569). As Mullin elaborates further to tell his readers that Emerson's journals are records of his observations and from those observations he strung together his thoughts in to lectures and then in to published essays (569-570). Mullin quotes Harold Bloom by stating, "Bloom goes so far as to say Emerson 'is our rhetoric,' the way we naturally express ourselves, in a mood not of distinguishing but of identifying, of unifying" (qtd. in "From Illusion to Power"). Expression and creation are at the stem of identifying a new American path, one that does not mimic the past, but "Each age, it is found, must write its own books..." ("The American Scholar").

Emerson's philosophical approach is similar to that of Plato in that he "...refines this to a philosophy of witness..." (Mullin 573). To witness and experience life holds more value than classroom walls because "Life is a dictionary." Emerson stated, "I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech" ("The American Scholar"). Experience, and a record of that experience, was the beginning of a new way of learning that would lead into a self-directed and self-learned generation. This is much like Plato when he shows Socrates candidly admitting to ignorance when he was in search for answers. Emerson wanted to see the upcoming generation search for answers on their own and not their historical texts.

Antiskepticism

The entirety of Emerson's message was encouraging the graduating class of Harvard in 1837 to learn on their own devices, and not that of the past. To put thoughts into action reaped the best benefits. Action was a tool that Emerson spoke of in "The American Scholar," and was the avenue in forming one's own knowledge and creative ideas. One's own actions are an essential characteristic in Gerson's antiskepticism pillar. A person's skepticism, one that originates out of a lack of self confidence, is a hinderance to growth. According to Emerson, knowledge was within reach, and it required the moving forward action of each generation.

The progressiveness of the Transcendentalists is a staple of American thought. Mullin reiterates that "The fabric of our work, of our day too, shows how power has failed or succeeded in being concentrated, so that people themselves become emblems of their effort to realize spirit...This power is capacity to do, for life is incomplete until we produce" (580). A creation of libraries to fill with the knowledge of the current generation is what Emerson encouraged the graduates in his speech.

Peter S. Field argues in his article that Emerson took to the stage with his speeches and lectures and views this as a form of democracy. Field describes the lyceum movement as a platform for communication that Emerson, being a former Unitarian minister, was able to use to share his message in a form that his audience could identify with. Field states, "In the more democratic learning situation that characterized lyceum and public lectures Emerson brought culture to the nation by means of an evangelical medium" (473). This form of rhetoric Emerson utilized was the sum of his cultivated intellect put to use. In his "The American Scholar" speech, he offers guidelines for the students to put their ideas in to action. He encouraged them by saying, "The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul...The soul active sees absolute

truth; and utters truth, or creates. In this action, it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence, it is progressive” (“The American Scholar”). Progress did not exist in idle time. What was learned should be shared to create an environment of learners who would realize their potential.

Conclusion

Emerson is a central figure within the Transcendentalists Movement. He set into motion what they perceived as the power of nature – the power that was in their new found land, America, which was an ocean away from countries they were trying to free their identity from. Emerson’s Platonic message came from the individualistic thoughts that existed in America at that time. The immigrants brought to their new land a variety of beliefs - speech, interaction, worship, all transitioned to an individualistic ethos that still remains very much present in America.

Transcendentalism was one branch of several that came about because of the strong individualism of the time. Quakerism was also a non-conformist group, which branched from England and made its way to America. Perhaps the most distinct difference between the two beliefs was the emphasis the Transcendentalists placed on nature. The two movements shared commonalities, though, including the rights of women, opposition to slavery, and trusting the “light with in.” Frederick Tolles spoke of the comparison Emerson and the Quaker leader, George Fox, shared by stating, “Emerson Like George Fox, who rejected priestly authority and bade men look for recourse to ‘that of God in themselves,’ Emerson turned away from churches and placed his emphasis on the self-reliant individual” (145). Emerson responded to Reverend David Greene Haskins when asked to explain his religious beliefs that “I am more of a Quaker

than anything else. I believe in the "still, small voice," and that voice is Christ within" (qtd. in "Emerson and Quakerism" 142).

The purpose of mentioning Quakerism in this conclusion of the chapter over Emerson is two-fold. For one, it is to show that individualism, the trust of oneself over the clergy, and the "still, small voice" existed in multiple areas, with Transcendentalism and Quakerism sharing core individualistic beliefs. The other is to show that the oratorical shift in New England in the nineteenth century began to change drastically and favored the individualistic message. It is a reasonable explanation because of the increase in the number of immigrants who brought with them their own set of beliefs. The Puritanism that helped shaped the colonies was unable to keep up with the growth when their members began to move elsewhere, further away from the centralized square. The original community conceived idea of creating a "New Jerusalem" was short lived because individualized rhetoric became more prominent.

CHAPTER III

HENRY DAVID THOREAU – SOUL OF THE “REPUBLIC”

What youthful philosophers and experimentalists we are! There is not one of my readers who has yet lived a whole human life.

– Henry David Thoreau – *Walden; or Life in the Woods*, 1854

Introduction

Henry David Thoreau’s reference to “...a whole human life” is the essence of his life’s message and a start for this chapter on one of the leading Transcendentalists and naturalists in American history. A “whole human life” implies all aspects of a person’s mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. The spiritual aspect for Thoreau was above all the most crucial to nurture because one’s spirit seeps into all other areas. While the people of the world around him were swiftly going about their business and digging themselves deeper into financial bondage, Thoreau was experiencing a “whole human life” through his communion with nature. Thoreau not only promoted self-care through nature with a religious-like approach, but was also moved with compassion and empathy toward fellow humans and realized the uniqueness and the potential of each individual soul. The completeness of life was an ongoing inward experience that involved a connection with nature and a willingness to be a spiritual “vagabond” of sorts – to be consistently on the move in order to maintain spiritual stability. Being on the move to maintain stability seems like a paradox on the surface; however, Thoreau shows others that it is possible. Going against the expectations and traditions of his time is what makes his message in his writings Platonic and fits under Gerson’s UP umbrella. Following along Gerson’s argument of the consistent Platonic framework, I make not distinction of differences in Platonism, but maintain that the structure has remained the same.

Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817, and lived his life in and around Concord, Massachusetts. He was a Harvard graduate and a learned person in various areas, as is seen in his writings. Thoreau was well-versed in the classics and in other languages, even suggesting that reading the classics in its original language is the preferred method, not considering that the average person most likely did not have this knowledge. At this point, it may seem that Thoreau was a little disconnected from the worker of his day based on his somewhat privileged upbringing, but in other ways he shares his views of equality and justice by being an outspoken abolitionist who spent the night in jail for refusing to pay a poll tax that supported slavery.

His family owned the Thoreau Pencil Company, one that Thoreau contributed greatly by perfecting their products. Thoreau had to return to the pencil company when he was fired from being a school teacher over a dispute with the principal. The pencil company was the one place he could return to because employment plummeted due to the Panic of 1837, which was also the year he graduated from Harvard. Thoreau and other new graduates found themselves in a very unpromising job market, and it remained this way until about the mid 1840s. This economic unrest is perhaps what prompted Thoreau to head out to the woods, to be able to live a life on his own and to be living proof that such a life is indeed possible (Schneider).

In his life, Thoreau “wore many hats.” He owned and operated a school with his brother, and he was a school teacher, a pencil maker, an author, a poet, an essayist, a surveyor, and a life-long naturalist. His writings reflect a soul in search of fulfillment, and message that appears in his bulk of writings – journals, prose, essays, and poetry, suggest that he reached his goal. Thoreau passed away on May 6, 1862, of tuberculosis, a major killer during his time. He lived many years with tuberculosis, contracting the disease in 1835. Thoreau was able to live these amount of years due to his active lifestyle; he walked everywhere, possibly miles a day, and

hiked often in order to observe and soak in nature. While with his mother, he died in the home he grew up in located on Main Street in Concord. Emerson, who was his mentor and close friend, spoke at his funeral and stated, “The country knows not yet, or in the least part, how great a son it has lost. ... His soul was made for the noblest society; he had in a short life exhausted the capabilities of this world; wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, wherever there is beauty, he will find a home” (Schneider).

In this chapter, I will analyze three of Thoreau’s writings: *Walden*, *Civil Disobedience*, and *Walking*. For each text, I will argue that Thoreau’s philosophy corresponds to Gerson’s UP pillars of Platonism. Only the pillars that appear in each text will be analyzed, and I will argue the Platonic nature of each one. It will become more evident in each chapter the connection between Transcendentalism and our modern discourse.

Oratorical Landscape

Nineteenth-century discourse was undergoing many transitions, and one of the areas this is apparent is in the political arena. I choose to speak about the rhetorical landscape through the lens of the oratorical changes in politics in the chapter over Thoreau because he did have a clash with the government due to laws that impeded on his own way of life. Although Edward Everett may not have had any personal attachments with any of the Transcendentalists, he will be analyzed in this section to show the change that was becoming apparent in the rhetorical landscape of nineteenth-century America.

Ronald F. Reid shows the difficulties Edward Everett experienced by being in the midst of a changing society that was transitioning from a community based rhetoric to one that was individualized. Everett was a House Representative in the Whig Party, educator, Unitarian minister, orator, was known as the “Cicero of America,” and was the first person to earn a PhD

in America. Everett represented tradition, one that built strength on the past and patriotism. During the Civil War, he tried to save the Union, but the message did not penetrate through the minds of the individualistic. Reid shares, “Despite Everett’s rhetorical efforts to preserve the Union, the nation rushed toward disunion” (29). Everett is also famously known for delivering the opening speech before Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address; the speech lasted about two hours, and did not leave an impression on the people as Lincoln’s, which took just a fraction of the time. Soon after the dedication speeches, Everett wrote to Lincoln and stated, “I wish that I could flatter myself that I had come as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes” (“Gettysburg Address”).

Everett’s lean toward classicism helped in some ways, but proved to be a challenge in other ways. What tugged at people’s hearts was changing, and therefore the use of epideictic in communication transitioned as well. Messages that catered to personal independence and freedom were more apt to be well-received than messages with a patriotic tone. Reid shares concerning Everett’s background and his own transitions within his career that:

Given his early lack of interest in politics, his youthful career as a “polite preacher,” his literary interests, and his disdain of “party spirit,” it is somewhat amazing that Everett went into politics. Yet he did, and when he did, he brought a rhetorical education that blended belletristic moderation with classical civic humanism. The blend of classical and belletristic education both prepared and failed to prepare Everett for the changing oratorical culture of his times. (40)

Everett’s epideictic in his speeches were in the form of praising the past with a patriotic tone, which may have tugged at the hearts of the genteel population, but not with the average

population. When referencing the past, his examples were heavy with data to the point that the central ideas of his arguments were lost (51).

Messages that geared toward self and the value one can willingly place on their own journey was the rhetoric of the Transcendentalist. The speech Emerson delivered to Thoreau's graduating class of 1837 at Harvard University included epideictic that praised the individual with phrases, such as "Man Thinking" and "self-trust" ("The American Scholar"). Emerson praised the individual by saying:

Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement, is the new importance given to the single person. Everything that tends to insulate the individual—to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state. ("The American Scholar")

Thoreau was deeply moved by Emerson's message to his graduating class because of the use of the epideictic technique of praise and worth given to individuals. The oratorical tone and shift in the epideictic stumped Everett causing careers changes throughout his life. The rhetorical environment continued to be more welcoming to speeches that centered on praising the individual, rather than institutions or traditions.

Another example of the oratorical change that I am including in this chapter on Thoreau is the picturesque rhetoric that emerged during the nineteenth century. S. Michael Halloran observes the "discourse Americans have had with nature and the nineteenth-century fascination with picturesque scenery" (227). A discourse with nature played an important part in the creation of the individual, and this type of praiseworthy rhetoric was demonstrated in *Walden*. In his chapter, Halloran provides several examples of individuals who presented the beauties of nature

by epideictic means through writings, art, or speech. This type of communication of praise served as an important tool in the identity of America, a nation that was in the process of breaking away from Europe to create its own identity. Halloran quotes art historian Barbara Novak's analysis of *Kindred Spirits*, a painting done by Asher Durand depicting William Cullen Bryant and Thomas Cole: "Man can also commune with man through nature...This picture is evidence not only of a singular contemplation after a transcendental model, but of a sharing through communion, of a potential community" (qtd. on 238). Halloran continues by interjecting, "...But note that the potential community represented would be grounded in each individual's communion with the 'wilder image' of an American landscape and thus free of the 'custom and conventionalism' (238). There was a communion depicted between the two friends, but also an individualism with the "wilder image" of the newfound American landscape.

America began to come to terms that there was a difference between the abundance of nature here as opposed to the old buildings and traditions of the "Old World." Halloran provides the example of a sonnet written by William Cullen Bryant to his friend Thomas Cole (depicted in the previously spoken of painting) titled, "To Cole, the Painter, Departing for Europe" that shows the pride the Americans cultivated while forming their new identity through the praise of nature. Parts of the sonnet are as follows: "Thine eyes shall see the light of distant skies/ Yet, Cole! thy heart shall bear to Europe's strand/ A living image of our own bright land/...Lone lakes – savannas where the bison roves/...Fair scenes shall greet thee where thou goest.../Gaze on them, till the tears shall dim thy sigh/But keep that earlier, wilder image bright" (qtd. on 237). Thomas Cole, the one who the sonnet was dedicated to, was a writer as well and defended the American landscape by echoing the same sentiments found in Bryant's sonnet in his "Essay on

American Scenery” by stating, “the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness” (qtd. in Halloran 237).

The individualized epideictic projected in the messages in politics and in nature is evident in Thoreau’s life. Because of the individualized epideictic that started to become more prevalent during this time, Transcendentalists did not take center stage too often; although, when laws crossed boundaries, they took action. The individualized epideictic falls under the characterization of Gerson’s UP Pillars and offers an explanation of the Platonic nature of Thoreau’s works and his life, starting with his experience at Walden Pond.

Walden

Through out the entire work of *Walden*, antimaterialism and antimechanism are central messages that support the UP Pillars. According to Thoreau, materialism contributed to spiritual clutter and hinders true freedom. In the first section of *Walden* titled “Economy,” Thoreau showed that life without the clutter is possible and preferable. He shared with his readers that his message was mostly for poor students who found themselves in a situation where they may not be able to put their degree to use – all others will extract what applies to them. For *Walden*, the UP pillars of focus will be antimaterialism and antimechanism. Antimaterialism because this is what Thoreau is mostly all about. Antimechanism because he took a different approach than others to living. Thoreau was certainly a Plato of his time, and added to the American image a new sort of conversation, one that promoted independence and a reverence to the environment.

Antimaterialism

Thoreau’s message of decluttering and clearing the way for one’s soul to thrive was not a thought that was particularly common at the time. Outer image and the social appearances and the ranks that it took to get to that image was held at a higher esteem. What Thoreau emphasizes

in his message of antimaterialism is essentially soul care, which I will also talk about in the section on antimechanism. He shared, “The wildest scenes had become unaccountably familiar. I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both” (Thoreau, *Walden*). The flourishing of the soul, for Thoreau, is directly to how it is nurtured.

Nourishment of one’s soul is related to a philosophy called biophilia, the innate desire to be close to nature. Judith Saunders argues in her article that Thoreau’s desire to connect to his surroundings was a precursor to what Edward O. Wilson’s coined as biophilia. The method in which Thoreau selected his habitat for those two years is no different than that of other living creatures. Saunders quotes Wilson when she states, “Just as nonhuman animals follow “inborn rules of behavior” to get themselves into the precise environment “for which . . . their anatomy and physiology is particularly well suited,” there is evidence that humans, too, are guided by “a set of ingrained preferences” (qtd. in *Biophilia in Thoreau’s* 2). The “ingrained preferences” were a set of guidelines Thoreau used on his spiritual journey to Walden Pond. He carefully picked out the exact location near the pond and the materials that he would use to build the house. As Saunders also points out, Thoreau observes others, and even the animals and insects, on their method of seeking habitation (3). For those with a special connection to nature, such as Thoreau, meticulous planning is essential to the care of the soul.

In Plato’s dialogues, Socrates speaks of soul wandering and lacking a secure anchor. For Thoreau, the wandering is not a lost kind of wandering, but one that is a soul enrichment. James Ambury speaks of spiritual and psychic stability and soul wandering in his research. He says, “The soul wanders when it pursues what is never the same and is confused because of its contact with it. The soul is affectively bound to change. A properly conditioned soul, on the other hand,

ceases from its wandering when it reorients its focus to the intelligible” (“Dialectical Epimeleia” 87). Expectations became spiritual constraints – Thoreau continuously reminded his readers that little was more and more was less, and all affected the soul. For example, Thoreau’s home for those two years was small according to societal standards, but he considered the land and pond a part of his dwelling. He was convinced he had more than others, not materialistically, but spiritually. He shared with his readers: “I would rather sit in the open air, for no dust gathers on the grass, unless where man has broken ground” (Thoreau, *Walden*). Thoreau was disturbed by the amount of materialism and industry that had taken over people’s lives, ultimately their spiritually lives. As he famously quoted, “We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us” (Thoreau, *Walden*). Saunders comments concerning his opposition to the rise of industrialization:

The sources of Thoreau’s disaffection with the materialism, technophilia, and professionalism dominating mid-nineteenth-century America are many-stranded, inevitably, but his biocentric analysis of the human condition provides a firm foundation for his stalwart rejection of social rewards and encumbrances. (12)

The dependency on industrialization prompted the citizens to take on a false image and monotonous way of life. People were mesmerized by the outer instead of the inner. As Thoreau says, “The most interesting dwellings in this country, as the painter knows, are the most unpretending, humble log huts and cottages of the poor commonly; it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are, and not any peculiarity in their surfaces merely, which makes them *picturesque*...” (*Walden*). Country living was romanticized during Thoreau’s time – life away from the busy and ruckus-filled city life. Journal were in circulation that offered picturesque houses – unattainable for most due to the high prices. Thoreau suggested there was no need to invest in living that would end up costing a person’s life in the long run. He lived on

land owned by Ralph Waldo Emerson, and used second-hand wood and bricks to make a dwelling that was just as good, if not better, than one that would take a lifetime to completely pay for (D'Amore 57). Even the clothing people wore and the fixation that society had on success is why Thoreau warns, “beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes” (Thoreau, *Walden*). The ethos the population was projecting with fashion and property ownership was one of imitation, not an individualized expression of oneself. Thoreau says that “Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I were more favored by the gods than they...” when thinking of his simple, yet rich, life in nature.

In the process of living off the land and being unemployed, those in the Concord area took notice. Often they came to visit him, and Thoreau even stated he had more visitors than when he lived in town. He sort of became a spectacle positioning himself near a pond that townspeople visited. He had visitors, though, and they brought food and conversation, and he sometimes found that it was better to move to the outside of his house to make room for those conversations. For Thoreau, dialectic was an import part of caring for the soul. Although Thoreau cherished his time alone, he was not a misanthrope; he enjoyed conversation and found it necessary for the well-being of his soul. Ambury continues to share in his article that Socratic soul care involves a great deal of dialectic. In the *Republic*, dialectic was the last subject the guardians took to help prepare them for their important jobs. Ambury explains that:

Dialectic converts the soul, where conversion is understood as the soul’s ‘turning around’

The final step in this process, doing away with hypotheses and proceeding to a first principle, is undertaken for the purpose of making the soul secure. One engages in dialectic, therefore, not solely for the purpose of grasping an eternally stable object of

cognition, but also to psychically stabilize oneself and maintain that condition when faced with the threat of wandering. (“Dialectical Epimeleia” 92)

Thoreau’s dialectic not only came from people, but from nature as well. Thoreau spent much time analyzing what was around him and started the process of documenting his findings in a spiritual approach. This was, in a sense, a form of dialectic because communication with nature was essential for the onward movement of one’s soul. Toward the end of his life, he observed New England’s plants and fruits, and aimed to create what Lydia Willsky argues is a “bible” of sorts - an extension of prophetic findings from a Transcendentalist perspective. In Thoreau’s last manuscript, *Wild Fruits*, he documents the botany of New England and the divine aspects of the surroundings that was providing life to its dwellers, with the hopes of revealing what he believed to be the true spiritual life line.

Willsky makes a distinction between an exemplary prophet and an ethical prophet by stating that Thoreau more closely aligns with the former because he is revealing the way to salvation, whereas the latter is a mouthpiece for god (626). The Biblical borders closed when the canon closed, therefore preventing an ongoing “prophetic” conversation. Thoreau’s writings reveal a communion with nature where the goal is to discover truth, making Thoreau’s Transcendental mission dialectical. Willsky goes further to state that the growth of the New England area, which was vastly different than the Puritan setting from a couple of generations prior to Thoreau, allowed an opportunity for multiple beliefs and texts to surface. It might not have been an inviting environment among certain sects, but the flourishing was inevitable due to the growth of people with various beliefs arriving to America and “...no one church mandated to set rules and to govern” (629). The intermingling of “...cultural and intellectual forces had flung open the doors of the closed canon, welcoming aspiring prophets and evangelists to

contribute a line of scripture” (630). All of Thoreau’s writings add up to many lines of what was later referred to as a “scripture” of sorts, but *Wild Fruits*:

.... was unlike any other transcendentalist or alternative scriptural project. Thoreau's "new testament" reads at times like a botany textbook, at times like a landscape painting, and at others like the meditations of a pious ascetic who perceived God to be tactilely present in the world. Thoreau created scripture that was, for lack of a better term, thoroughly *Thoreauvian*, a text that encompassed both his naturalistic and his poetic proclivities. The determination to write *Wild Fruits*, as well as his style of writing it and plans for its publication, all reflect Thoreau's desire to make nature biblical. Further, if he were to be nature's rightful prophet, precedent demanded that he broadcast her revelation. *Wild Fruits* was Thoreau’s gospel. (Willsky 628)

For the Transcendentalists and Thoreau, a dialectical communion with nature was the missing ingredient in the industrialized society. In the introduction of *Wild Fruits*, Bradley Dean says, “Although Thoreau’s claim to be writing scripture in mid-nineteenth century New England may seem surprising, such an activity was in fact the natural consequence of his vocation as a transcendentalist author” (qtd. in Thoreau, *Wild Fruits* xiii). He also further states that Emerson published the “transcendentalist credo” when he published *Nature*. In *Nature*, Emerson asks, “Why should we not enjoy an original relation to the universe?” (qtd. in Thoreau, *Wild Fruits* xiii). With this same type of desire and mission, Thoreau further initiates the mindset of the dangers that materialism can bring upon the soul.

Antimechanism

In a portion of Plato’s writings, wandering may have appeared as something treacherous, as discussed in the *Republic*, but this was a chaotic type of wandering. For Thoreau, wandering

was stabilizing. Being stuck in a monotonous path was damaging to one's soul and individuality. As he stated, "I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves" (Thoreau, *Walden*). Thoreau's antimaterialism parallels with his antimechanism. Thoreau veered toward another direction for unity and control over the soul, which is something that materialism and industrialization did not embrace. As he explains, "Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" (Thoreau, *Walden*). For both Plato and Thoreau, an immortal soul is in constant movement, one that is orderly and tamed as it is depicted in *Phaedrus*.

In *Phaedrus*, the dialogue begins with Phaedrus and Socrates walking in search of a place for Phaedrus to deliver a speech that Lysias delivered earlier that day. They soon find a place underneath a plane tree, and he proceeds with the speech. In his speech, he says that intimacy between two non-lovers is preferred over the intimacy between two lovers because those who are in love are controlled by desires that cause madness and jealousy. Phaedrus was excited to have read the speech to Socrates and wanted feedback from him and demanded a speech from him as well. Socrates delivered a speech that was similar Lysias's, but it was not from the heart and not a reflection of what he truly believed. He told Phaedrus that both speeches were ridiculous and he apologized to the god of love and prayed that Lysias would no longer deliver speeches that tarnished love and were poorly organized. After all, Socrates says that madness, such as

prophecy, is not bad at all. Socrates moves on to deliver a better more precise speech/palinode over love, control, and the immortal soul.

In his second speech he describes the soul of the gods and the soul of the humans. Both the divine and human souls consist of a charioteer with two horses. For the gods, both of the horses are good and there is balance. For the human soul, it is not quite that perfect, because the charioteer is controlling a good horse and another one that is not so good. The bad horse is not settled and possesses a chaotic tendency to move toward materialistic and carnal desires. If a constant movement of balance is not maintained, the bad horse will take control. The immortal soul has a piece of the divine, but is not completely divine, so hence the struggle the human soul endures. He then concludes that organization and balance are vital when delivering a speech, and in this case one is unable to speak of love without giving credit to the soul and its dualistic tendencies.

James Ambury explores the duality of the Socratic soul. He discusses what he calls the “ontological soul:” self-mover and “ethical soul:” self-ruler. In his analysis, he addresses *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*, and the struggle the immortal soul faces. Movement, he argues, is essential and requires the discipline of mastering being a self-ruler. He points out:

Yet while soul is a self-mover, the type of motion it exhibits is not fixed. Although the essence of the soul is to move itself and never cease moving, its type of kinetic determinacy, organized or not, is an open question. Depending on how it orients itself, soul may either move in a manner that is intelligent (consistent, orderly, circular) or move contrary to intelligence (sporadic, chaotic, crooked). In either case, soul will move as it does because it will determine itself as such. If it is to move well, this movement will follow from the determinative function of intelligence. (“Plato’s Conception” 301)

He elaborates that movement creates an “intelligent configuration” that may or may not bring in harmony with ease depending on the self-ruling factor. He says, “In the case of the gods, this harmony is achieved with little effort. The human soul that follows the divine most closely models its own motion on that of the divine. The divine soul therefore serves as a paradigmatic exemplar of how the human soul ought to determine itself” (302). Thoreau’s “intelligent configuration,” was achieved through nature. For the soul is what Socrates described as immortal, and “...he who affirms that self-motion is the very idea and essence of the soul will not be put to confusion. For the body which is moved from without is soulless; but that which is moved from within has a soul, for such is the nature of the soul” (Platon, *Phaedrus*).

According to Thoreau, the inward movement experience of the soul is the essence of a soul working well and in harmony with its surroundings and cultivating its own identity. What goes on inside of a person’s soul is what determines the outward actions, and this idea is exemplified in *Walden*. Thoreau’s distaste of inharmonic living is based on the stagnant lives of the New Englanders. Ambury emphasizes that the soul’s movement is of a kinetic nature and “Because of the weight of the bad horse, the human soul will readily deviate from an orderly kinetic path if the charioteer has failed to train it well” (“Plato’s Conception” 302). Thoreau’s writings reflect an onward path in search of intelligence of the divine.

The purpose of this forward movement of the soul is not only to live in harmony with one self, but to live according to what is ethical. Thoreau’s attempt to live an onward soul fulfilling life also applied to decision making and doing what was right for one’s soul. The immortal soul, if led by the untamed horse, is at risk for making wrong decisions that would damage the soul, therefore leading to a damaging frame of the country and for oneself. In the next section over

Civil Disobedience, I will show how Thoreau called attention to the damaging effects of making the wrong decision and what needs to be done to reverse the wrongs.

Civil Disobedience

“The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?,” Thoreau so candidly stated when describing his position amongst the New Englanders of his time (*Walden*). In this section, I will analyze the antimechanism pillar alongside *Civil Disobedience*. Thoreau’s approach to not adhering to the wrong of society, including the government, was to shun it and not follow it, even if punishment for the action followed. Plato’s, *The Apology*, along with mention of the Socratic Paradox, will be brought into the conversation to demonstrate that a soul filled with wrongdoing is a soul harmful to the progression of oneself and the “republic.”

Antimechanism

Civil Disobedience was written as a reminder that doing right is often going against the norm. For Thoreau, going against the wrong that is condoned in society is the wrench that is needed to prevent further damage and to halt the evil. Thoreau wrote:

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth,—certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is

to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn. (*Civil Disobedience*)

Wrongdoing is detrimental and was the reason Thoreau refused to pay taxes that supported slavery, an institution he was passionately against because it was not only wrong, but it also prevented individual growth. The morality of the government originates from those who make up the government – it becomes the collective intellect and is a representative of the morals they hold. As he stated, “It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a conscience” (Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*).

In much the same way, Socrates in the *Apology of Socrates* advocated for his life against the Athenian government under the conviction that it would be wrong to remain silent (Plato). Socrates was put on trial for not revering the gods and corrupting the youth of Athens. He gave an exclamation in his own defense and proved he was innocent of all the accusations brought against him, but he was still convicted, and warned his accusers that they will suffer more than he.

Socrates announces that his accusers are of two groups: the older accusers and the most recent (Plato, *Apology of Socrates*). He starts with the former group because their accusations have been around longer. He lets it be known that he is not an elaborate speaker or well-learned, but that in fact he “knows nothing” hence the reasoning for his inquisitive nature – to search for answers in forming dialect with those around him. He questioned those who claim to know, but when put under a moment of interrogation, were proven that they really know nothing. Ironically, he found those who were held in high regard in society were often those who were most ignorant, and those esteemed lowest in society were actually the wisest. The ones

questioned were offended by the truth of their ignorance and is the reason for the slander against Socrates.

The second group of accusers, the most recent ones, accused Socrates for denying the deity and corrupting the youth. Socrates questions Meletus, the ring-leader of this second group of accusers, and shows the people of Athens that the accusations hold no weight, and Meletus is truly not concerned about the youth of Athens, and was just putting together a riddle as a trap to use against him. Socrates eloquently advocated for himself, but with no avail. He was put to death and according to his prophesy his younger pupils, such as Plato, came back stronger than he.

Likewise, Thoreau, although not put to death and spent just a night at the jail, gave way to great advocates, such as Martin Luther King Jr. His trip to the shoe shop the morning he was arrested ended with the evening in jail, and some other person paid his back taxes and he was released the next day. His short time there had a profound effect on him, and he took account of those he came in contact with, including his inmate who may have been wrongly jailed.

Questioning the government alongside caring and abiding by the needs of the soul is a method of checking the morality of one's nature. Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith state, "The most important practical concern, then, is this: Injustice damages the soul, and the greatest injustice ruins the soul. Just as no one would wish to damage or ruin their body, even less should anyone run the risk of damaging or ruining their soul" (340). Socrates's refusal to remain silent and his conviction that "an unexamined life is not worth living" supports the pillar of antimechanism, such as Thoreau's refusal to pay taxes because he asserts that "I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government. Let every man make known what kind of

government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it” (*Civil Disobedience*).

According to Thoreau, moving forward is a soulful experience and is based on the conscience. Socrates was inclined to believe that no one did wrong knowingly, that the wrong that was done was out of ignorance. Whether one believes this or not, it is evident that doing wrong when fully aware of the wrongdoing is poison for the soul and individuality. Brickhouse and Smith state again in regards to the the stance Socrates takes on ignorance is that:

Some wrongdoing, then, appears to be the result of simple ignorance. People may be led astray by quite ordinary and simple cognitive errors, perhaps because of improper moral education, perhaps because of some innocent error in calculating the costs and benefits of some course of action, or for some other error of this sort. In response to this sort of error, as Socrates urges in the *Apology* for his own case, if indeed, he has erred in his ways, the right way to correct the bad behavior is to provide appropriate moral education. (348-349)

Thoreau believed that one’s conscience was perhaps the only reliable tool that was available in making decisions between right and wrong. A group of people simply deciding between right and wrong (knowing that a group may not be in unison) very well may come to a decision based on greed and hate, and will go against the conscience of many, but many will still nonetheless follow in fear, and in the process damage the soul. Thoreau spoke of the nature of government by saying:

Can there not be a government in which the majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?—in which majorities decide only those questions to which the

rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. (*Civil Disobedience*)

The Transcendentalists believed that each person was not a property of the government, but was divine because the divine lived within. The soul's citizenship was not manmade or dictated by a governing entity, but was of divinity, and it answered to something higher. The conscience and the soul functioned hand in hand and Thoreau sent a warning by stating, "There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly" (*Civil Disobedience*). According to Transcendentalist thought, humans have a piece of the divine, and therefore when the conscience speaks, it deserves attention.

Walking

Walking was published shortly after Thoreau's death in 1862, and illustrates his thought of organic citizenship to the land and not to any established political path. When speaking of walking, he is not necessarily referring to the exercise as much as he is the experience. Thoreau explains that if one has not gone to the "Holy Land" in their walks, then they have not truly walked. As he stated with an intertwined Christian allusion:

We should go forth on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return-- prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdoms. If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again--if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man--then you are ready for a walk. (Thoreau, *Walking*)

According to Thoreau, the act of walking was a process of decluttering for the soul and opened a balanced path for stability. This essay also contains a message in regards to politics and government and the necessity for societal isolation. For this piece of writing, I will explore how the Gerson's UP pillars of antimechanism and antirelativism create a Platonic approach to the views of indifference and tolerance and to truly live independently.

Antimechanism

Walking fits nicely after the section on *Civil Disobedience* because the message in both stems from the desire to remain secluded and as independent as possible. When Thoreau speaks of seclusion, and sometimes indifference, it is not a reflection of the lack of care concerning government affairs, but more of a stance of just truly remaining separate and independent. To mirror the oratorical change that favored individualism, Thoreau favored a government that stayed out of its citizens' lives. He opened *Walking* by stating, "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil--to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society" (*Walking*).

When the government enforced taxes and laws that caused the citizens to passively support slavery, that crossed a boundary for Thoreau because the government invaded on his personal beliefs, which impeded spiritual growth and individuality of its citizens. Jonathan McKenzie argues in his research that Thoreau, although disengaged from politics, became active when the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was put into place because it violated his rights and conscience. McKenzie explains:

The assertion that the Fugitive Slave Law's primary crime is its interference with the daily life of a free individual strikes many readers as odd, but the remark captures the

essence of Thoreau's temporary engagement with slavery and with politics. Thoreau is alarmed by slavery, to be sure; however his philosophy of minding his own business dictates that the Fugitive Slave Law (and indeed slavery altogether) must necessarily become a matter of *his* business – that is that slavery encroached upon him personally, that for him to take an interest in it, it must violate the liberal individualism he hoped to take for granted. As Thoreau mentions toward the end of the essay, “The remembrance of my country spoils my walk. (430-431)

The speech that McKenzie refers to in the quote above is Thoreau's speech titled “Slavery in Massachusetts.” Thoreau, who was a product of the small realm of those who supported freedom for all, acted in opposition to government sanctions on fugitive slaves. The women in Thoreau's family were actively involved in the antislavery movement and aided the fugitive slaves.

“Slavery in Massachusetts” was delivered on July 4th, 1854 in response to the capture of fugitive slave, Anthony Burns, who was sent back to his owner. The distaste of politics grew greater for Thoreau, which compelled him to ultimately get involved in movements that would change the face of the politics of his time. His actions once again parallel to that of Socrates who would rather die than to remain silent.

The act of walking was so much more than actual physical walking for Thoreau; it was, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, a vital part of the “whole human life” because it was a spiritual walk. It was the vehicle for independent thinking and a source for education for the mind and nutrition for the soul. It was a metaphor for a unique approach to life and is what makes Thoreau's philosophy and Transcendentalism as a whole antimechanical.

Antirelativism

Antirelativism echoes similar characteristics from the previous section over

antimechanism - the main difference is substance and measure. According to Gerson, antirelativism is the denial that “man is the measure of all things” and antimechanism rejects the idea that there are only certain explanations for the “natural order.” The idea of natural order is based on time era and culture, and during Thoreau’s time certain societal avenues constituted “natural order,” which he went against. The concept for Thoreau’s antirelativism, which is a true mirror of Transcendentalism, is that humans were more than society claimed they were. Government, being a manmade institution, crossed boundaries and became evident in backlash movements. Each person held a divine connection and has the right to dictate their own path without the interference of government, according to Transcendentalist belief.

The value Thoreau placed on government was not one in high regard. As he stated in *Civil Disobedience*, he did not wish to do away with government, but to have a better government, one which allowed the individual to follow their conscience and strengthen their soul. The following extended metaphor describes what little value Thoreau placed on politics:

Man and his affairs, church and state and school, trade and commerce, and manufactures and agriculture even politics, the most alarming of them all—I am pleased to see how little space they occupy in the landscape. Politics is but a narrow field, and that still narrower highway yonder leads to it. I sometimes direct the traveler thither. If you would go to the political world, follow the great road – follow that market-man, keep his dust in your eyes, and it will lead you straight to it; for it, too, has its place merely, and does not occupy all space. I pass from it as from a bean field into the forest, and it is forgotten. In one half-hour I can walk off to some portion of the earth's surface where a man does not stand from one year's end to another, and there, consequently, politics are not, for they are but as the cigar-smoke of a man. (*Walking*)

For Thoreau, politics is of little substance and is a “cigar-smoke of a man.” The government served a purpose, but not to dictate the lives of its individuals to the point in which they violate their own conscience. The measure of government is to occupy as little space as possible in order to allow the growth of the individual, which was the true measurement of society.

Conclusion

The “whole life” mentality is representative of a soulful awareness of one’s actions – because actions do indeed affect the livelihood of the soul. Thoreau’s idea of a republic was not one built on man-made patriotic sentiments, but one that was cultivated through its natural elements. These elements served as nourishment for the soul, which made way for a clearer and balanced life and one free from any government or societal restraints. The balance spoken of in *Phaedrus* between the horses is a characteristic of Transcendentalism – a life in society, but not a product of it. Thoreau “grew where he was planted,” and became a symbol of onward movement, both physically and spiritually, during a time when his fellow New Englanders relied on familiar societal stagnations, including relying on the industrialization of the time. Thoreau was concerned for the well-being of the environment and gave it special attention.

Thoreau certainly lives on in the areas of environmentalism and politics. William E. Cain points out that “He was devoted to science and engineering; he was a persistent, painstaking observer of his immediate environment. Thoreau supplemented and enriched this on-the-ground inquiry with a contemplative perusal of many books on travel and exploration (he read 200+ travel narratives), geography, and geology that took him to the farthest reaches of the globe, indeed of the cosmos” (456). The concern for the environmental stability originates in the belief that nature served as a conduit form of communication between the divine and the person. The growing realization of the importance of nature and environment today is something that

Thoreau would certainly approve of if he were alive. In the area of politics, the emphasis that is placed on the individual and their right to dictate their own path had an affect on leaders in the twentieth century. I have mentioned Martin Luther King Jr., but also Gandhi was inspired by Thoreau as well. Cain also adds concerning this inspiration that King and Ghandhi valued *Civil Disobedience* because it gave them “a moral drive and prophetic fire that braced and toughened these men for their radical activities” (453). Cain continues to point out that for Thoreau the drive for freedom was mostly about his own conscience more so than on a community level, as it was for King and Gandhi. However, these men pointed to Thoreau as one of their inspirations. It still holds true, though, that Thoreau’s organic dialectic with nature and his approach to individual freedom still contributes to the foundation of modern discourses.

CHAPTER IV

AMOS BRONSON ALCOTT – THE SPRITUAL INTELLECT OF THE “REPUBLIC”

And the divine Plato has added his testimony, also, in those enduring works, wherein he sought to embalm for posterity, both the wisdom of his master and the genius that was his own.

– Alcott, *Conversations With Children on the Gospels*, 1836

Introduction

This chapter's epigraph is in the introduction of *Conversations With Children on the Gospels*, and reflects a core sentiment held by the Transcendentalism, which is that the divine lives within everyone. The subtitle is interestingly "The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture," with "culture" being the identification of its people – a tapestry of vital human experiences and connections, which ultimately relate to the health of one's soul, according to the Transcendentalists. Amos Bronson Alcott, while faced with hardships in life, especially while rearing a family, honored the knowledge of his "master" while holding true to the "genius that was his own." He embarked through the educational territory, as well as established a utopian community that lived off the land called Fruitlands, which lasted only seven years (both were unsuccessful). Alcott felt the only way possible for the soul to thrive, was through proper nourishment of the body, which included education and diet. His messages, which he so ardently pursued, were not welcomed in his community and it did not survive at that time; however, its remnants survive in education. Alcott's message prompts a reevaluation of Platonism through the lens of Gerson's UP because he went against society's standards in areas of religion, education, diet, and his overall perception of how one's soul is permeated in interconnected facets in society. Following Gerson's UP, I will show that the Platonic structure is intact and the framework has not changed. Gerson's UP allows for development of ideas, and Alcott's ideas and approaches to life and education are certainly characteristics of Platonic development.

Alcott was born on November 29 1799, in Wolcott, Connecticut. He married Abigail (Abba) May, who was the great-great granddaughter of Samuel Sewall, one of the judges who presided in the Salem Witch Trials and the only judge who apologized for his involvement. Amos and Abigail were quite different - Amos being reserved, quiet, and somewhat timid in certain situations, while his wife was outspoken and more on the extraverted side. Although she was supportive of her husband, the two quarreled over finances, which was an ongoing struggle for the Alcott family. They had four daughters, including Louisa May Alcott the author of *Little Women*, and one son who lived only a few days. Alcott blamed the short life of his son on his wife; he was under the belief, like so many others during this time, that the way a woman felt, acted, and their entire disposition while pregnant transferred to the child during pregnancy. This belief somewhat stems from his take on how the outward environment affected a person's soul. In his failed utopian community, Fruitlands, the environment and food (even down to the preparation – no cooking or boiling) was of utmost importance. Richard Francis nicely lays out the purpose of Fruitlands in his book titled *Fruitlands: The Alcott Family and Their Search for Utopia*.

Fruitlands was a major event in the lives of the Alcotts and some of it will be touched on in this introduction, but it will also be focused on again through out the rest of the chapter. This event played an important role (and not necessarily a positive one, either) in the lives of Alcott's daughters. Later in life, Louisa May Alcott wrote a short satire titled "Transcendental Wild Oats" based on the Fruitlands experiment. Richard Francis details the purpose of Fruitlands in his book and the origins of how this utopian community, and other communities similar to this one, sprouted across the New England area at the time. What is unique about Fruitlands is that the members were vegans before the term even came in to

existence. They were opposed to eating animal products – cheese, milk, etc. – and caffeine. Later in the book Francis explains that Alcott believed that the outer environment of a person and what they ingested affected their soul. They believed that the fall of Adam and Even was because they ate the wrong food – food meant a great deal to the members of Fruitlands (Francis 6). Francis states, “The broad impulse behind the American experiments was a reaction to the industrial revolution and the rise of cities, with their consequent social injustice, poverty, and environmental deterioration...” (3). Francis further explains that Fruitlands was not a religious community. However, “its members were influenced by Shaker austerity and its prohibition of sex, its advocacy of women’s rights, and its farming practices” (4). Francis provides an accurate description of Transcendentalism by stating they were startled by the environmental damage that was occurring around them because all phenomena were linked to one another. If the environment was damaged, everyone would suffer (7). Through their perspective, one action or decision would create a domino effect, not only within themselves, but for everyone around them.

The Fruitlands community occurred after the unsuccessful Temple School. However, Alcott continued the rest of his life writing and even opened another school toward the end of his life called the Concord School of Philosophy, which was open for nine summers. He died from a stroke on March 4, 1888, and his services were held at this school. Louisa May Alcott, who took care of her father to the very end, also died of a stroke three days later. For the rest of this chapter, I will discuss Alcott’s intertwined belief of the soul, mind, and environment.

Conversations With Children on the Gospels will be the first reading and the UP pillars of focus will be antimechanism and antiskepticism. The next readings I will analyze will be *Tablets* and *Concord Days*, and for each one I will focus on antimaterialism and antiskepticism.

The Fruitlands experiment was a major event in the Alcotts' lives, so I will discuss this as well and in the conclusion. Before entering the analysis of Alcott's writings, a section over the rhetorical and educational environment and oratorical changes will be discussed first.

Oratorical Landscape

As mentioned in previous chapters, inner knowledge was held in high regard and was an essential belief for the Transcendentalists. The educational environment underwent changes during Alcott's time, especially in comparison to the early nineteenth century in which "learning was for public use rather than for individual gain" (Rouse 116). The turn toward individualized education appeared in colleges that ultimately resulted in degree paths that were tailored more to the students' interests. The rhetoric that was taught began to place more emphasis on "practical uses of rhetoric in business, community, and private life (Johnson 141).

Nan Johnson continues to share in her research "Popular rhetorical education in the late nineteenth century garnered credibility and authority by promoting the importance of rhetorical skills for the general citizen and "private learner" along the same lines as the academic tradition – rhetoric was practical and versatile" (140). Although teaching of rhetorical skills and elocution was mostly reserved for the older students, Alcott taught his students important foundational skills in the form of expression. He encouraged his young pupils to speak what came to mind, no matter the answer he questioned them further on their responses. The method of questioning and Socratic conversations were intended to bolster knowledge the students would be able to benefit from later in life.

To encourage students, despite their age, was the intention of feminist, writer, and teacher, Margaret Fuller. Fuller taught at the Temple School after Elizabeth Peabody left due to heightened notoriety after the publication of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, and

found her “redemption” in nurturing young students by helping them find their voice. After the Temple School closed, she found her place in education at the Greene Street School, where she taught “languages, composition, elocution, history, ethics, poetry, and natural philosophy; many of her students were eighteen- and nineteen-year-old young women, although there were some young men in her classes” (Rouse 121). Despite gender and age, she taught the young women to join conversational circles and ask questions. In a journal, one of her former students, Evelina Metcalf, mentioned that “She wishes to arouse our dormant faculties and break up the film over our mind in order that the rays of the sun might shine upon it” (qtd. in Rouse 122). Another student by the name of Ann Brown stated, “Miss Fuller gave two rules for us...The first is ‘Let nothing pass from you in reading or conversation that you do not understand, without trying to find it out. Second, ‘Let not your age or the shame of being thought ignorant prevent your from asking questions about things and words you do not understand” (qtd. in Rouse 122). Fuller first cultivated these skills at the Temple School, where Alcott taught both young girls and boys, which caused a ripple in the Bostonian population who were already questioning his educational practices.

Alcott’s unorthodox approaches in education gave Fuller the opportunity to expand on similar approaches in her education career. In the concluding chapter, more discussion will be given on how her approaches to education helped to contribute to a “rhetoric of citizenship.” Her mission to educate the young was expressed in her journal when she stated, “Those who would reform the world should begin with the beginning of life” (Rouse 122).

For Alcott, the beginning of life was a pure time frame, which was ripe for molding a student’s mind, especially if that mind was more connected to the divine, as Transcendentalists believed. In the aspect of holding a child’s education in high regard, Alcott shared similar

approaches to education as Quintilian who took special care of the younger students and believed their instruction was the most vital of all. In his Temple School, Alcott put into practice an approach to education that was intended to bolster his students' individualized education and the creation of their own ethos.

Conversations with Children on the Gospels

Alcott's school served as a Transcendentalist emblem of wishful change in the narrative of traditional education, and one that did not survive due to the harsh criticism surrounding the school. Alcott's Temple School crossed boundaries in its Calvinistic society. Larry Carlson discusses the trials Alcott faced when engaging students in Socratic discussions over the gospels and taboo subjects. The Transcendentalist's view of children was quite different by viewing a child's spiritual connection more keen and connected to the divine than an adult's. Carlson quotes Alcott's confidence in his school by stating, "In the preface of his book, Alcott stated that 'the conversations were a natural history of the underpraved spirit, a testimony of unspoiled natures to the spiritual purity of Jesus.'" The book, he felt confident, was "a revelation of the Divinity in the soul of childhood" (qtd. in Carlson 452). The educational method introduced by Alcott may not have been welcomed in 1830s New England, but it is a precursor to methods that are practiced in the modern American educational systems, specifically the Montessori method.

Through the analysis of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, the UP Pillars of focus will be antimechanism and antiskepticism. His method certainly did not follow traditional standards, which is why it aligns with the antimechanical approach. The antiskepticism pillar is applicable here because Alcott's foundational message is that knowledge is attainable, and according to Alcott it very well may be through a child's perspective.

Antimechanism

Alcott's unorthodox approach to teaching was not met kindly and the criticism was destructive to his career and image. As Carlson explains, two editors, Joseph T. Buckingham and Nathan Hale, from *Boston Daily Advertiser* and the *Boston Courier* made their disapproval widely known. Carlson describes the tarnishing trials of Alcott and states, "Joseph T. Buckingham, Hale's counterpart at the *Courier*, denigrated Alcott even more vociferously. He portrayed Alcott as a corrupter of youth and suggested that if Alcott "be either honest or sincere, he must be insane or half-witted, and his friends ought to take care of him without delay" (453-454).

Alcott's intentions were to "To Reproduce Perfect Men," which is the title of the first chapter in Richard Francis's *Fruitlands: The Alcott Family and Their Search for Utopia*. Francis speaks of Alcott's Temple School, and his goal of reproducing "perfect men" resounded in his curriculum. Francis entails the story of the assistance of Elizabeth Peabody and her contribution to *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*. However, before the recording of the conversations, Peabody wrote the *Record*, which was the initial introduction that Boston had to Alcott, including Emerson. Emerson was interested in his perception of a child's intellect and its affect on the spirit, and this sparked a friendship between the two. Emerson was often there for Alcott and helped him and his family financially quite often through out his life. Word of his Temple School project even traveled overseas to an English Transcendentalist, James Pierrepont Greaves, who reached out to Alcott in a letter. This overseas connection resulted in what later became Fruitlands in Harvard, Massachusetts.

Peabody's *Record* was well-received initially around the Boston area, and because of the overall acceptance and interest of those who read it, Alcott wished to add a sequel with a record of the children's conversations. Peabody objected because "She thought that by harping on about

his pupils' perceptiveness, and getting them talked about by the whole city, Alcott was liable to injure "their modesty and unconsciousness (that is, he was making them self-conscious)" (Francis 21). It still nonetheless occurred, with Peabody recording the conversations and on occasion interjecting her thoughts and questions for the children. The conversations were by no means aligned with the educational standards and the subjects were mostly considered taboo. The reasons as to why this falls under the antimechanism UP pillar is that his approach was not only considered odd by most of his contemporaries, but his approach valued a child's intellect more than an adult's.

Armand D'Angour speaks of Plato and his stance on play in his article "Plato and Play: Taking Education Seriously in Ancient Greece." D'Angour explores Plato's perspective on the importance of play in a society. The word for play in ancient Greek was *paidia*, which contains the root word for children *paides*, implying that play was only for children, which D'Angour argues that adults reenact the sort of play they engaged in while they were young; therefore, proper "play" is very important for children. The right "play" will prepare children to interact with the world around them and make them better and more productive citizens. This is an applicable argument because Alcott engaged with his students in what D'Angour would have considered "intellectual play." D'Angour states:

For such purposes, revered musician-poets like Homer, sages like Pythagoras, and philosophers like Heraclitus seemed to offer their wisdom as a form of intellectual play. Even ancient warfare can be viewed—and was so presented by historians in antiquity—as an activity conducted as a form of rule-bound, quasi-ritualistic play. The childhood of young aristocrats, the class to which our sources almost exclusively attest, involved

training for political and military leadership-in such activities as gymnastic competitions and verbal contests. (294)

Alcott's school simply was engaging in "intellectual play" in order to provide an environment in which the children could learn and share in what he believed was pure and divine transcendence. Since children were considered to have a more receptiveness of knowledge, this aided in their growth and gave insight for adults who were hardened by the world around them. It was no wonder that this educational method was so harshly rebuked considering that this approach was being carried out in a Calvinistic society, which had been taught that children were basically not innately good and had to be taught goodness. Instead of a teacher-centered class, it was a student-centered class, something that was unheard of and considered detrimental, especially since it was believed that goodness did not come naturally. Alcott elevated their insight closer to nature, thus closer to the divine. Overall, Transcendentalists tended to value insight over logic, even if it came from the mouths of children. This is in complete opposite of societal standards in Alcott's time.

The emergence of the Transcendentalist Movement in the Calvinistic environment is not only evident within church and family sectors and education, but also in the written public communication. In speaking about the limitations of the modern view of knowledge, Emerson stated in his article titled "Thoughts on Modern Literature" that, "Those who cannot tell what they desire or expect, still sigh and struggle with indefinite thoughts and vast wishes. The very child in the nursery prattles mysticism, and doubts, and philosophizes." Although nearly forty years later, with the message still ringing true, a quite different notion is expressed. Reverend H. W. Beecher, a Congregational minister in Boston, delivered a sermon on "Training Children," and a synopsis of it was recorded in the *Woman's Journal*. He advises his members that

“Obedience is to be taught to all children...Teach the child to obey first, and give him the reason afterward. Let there be early, absolute, unquestioning obedience. One right children have; it is to be broken in like a wild horse...keeping them busy and overlooking the faults of their animal nature, which they will outgrow...” (Beecher). Alcott’s antimechanical approach to education was a transcendental step into a hostile environment, but it left its mark in contemporary education where teachers are expected to provide student-centered environment and value their pupils’ insights, which reflected the shift that was coming about in individualized education.

Antiskepticism

For Alcott, a student-centered class came naturally because he believed that “Children are born with the ability to see beyond, that is to be aware of a larger structure to the world than adults, one that unites all phenomena with each other and with the divinity – but they slowly lose this faculty of perception as they grow older” (*Conversation with Children* 18). Alcott taught his students in the Socratic method format and set up his classroom with the comfort of children in mind and to provide an ease of conversation amongst everyone within the classroom. The desks (which had backs) were positioned in a semicircle with his desk at the head facing a Victorian-style window. This classroom was located in the Masonic Temple building, hence the name Temple School. Peabody included the unique description of his classroom in the *Record*, and even the English Transcendentalists mentioned earlier incorporated this layout in their utopian commune they named the Alcott House in London (Francis 30).

In the letter that English Transcendentalist James Pierrepont Greaves wrote to Alcott he inquired of the progress of his school in a list of twenty-nine questions and wished to hear back from him soon (Francis 31). The admirers across the sea were living out their teachings in a place they named after him. Greaves also regarded children as more valuable sources of divine

communication than adults. In 1837, Greaves published *Three Hundred Maxims for the Consideration of Parents in Relation to the Education of their Children*. In Maxim 21, Greaves states, “Let not the child study your doings, but study the child’s doings with respect to the inner mover” (qtd. in Francis 31). Francis suggests that “It is almost literally the chicken and egg dilemma: Does the child redeem the adult, or adult redeem the child?” (43). Children are typically very candid in their responses and the same was true with Alcott when teaching his students. Teaching the students and not the subjects was the goal with both Alcott and Greaves (33).

The candid responses that came up through what was considered taboo subjects is the reason why Alcott was put under fire by his Boston community. The conversations often prompted children to consider the origins of the soul, temptation, conception, incarnation, the devil, and the acknowledgement of the evil in their own society – the unintentional and candid finger-pointing made some of the Bostonians squirm a bit. In Conversation V, Alcott asked what it meant to be filled with the Holy Ghost. Children responded differently and likened it to more like a pure spirit. He also asked if there were any holy ghosts in Boston and one child said “no:”

Mr. Alcott: Are there any holy ghosts in Boston?

Frank: No very holy ghosts here.

Alexander: Holy ghost means about the same as angel, but not so innocent.

Franklin: The children should turn the hearts of their fathers from idolatry by their goodness.

Mr. Alcott: Are there any idolaters in Boston ?

Augustine: A great many. They worship money. (*Conversations with Children* 44)

He concluded the conversation by reading the verse in which Elizabeth conceived a baby and asked the children what it meant to conceive, and they answered innocently in regards to conception and stated that she simply knew within her soul. This conversation served as a basis for the next couple of conversations in regards to Mary and the conception of Christ. Such conversations Bostonians believed did not belong in the mouths of children, but Alcott pushed onward toward other subjects in which the children provided candid, but interesting, responses.

In Conversations XIX and XX, Alcott speaks to the children about temptation, the devil, and self control. In the first part of the conversation XIX, Alcott is speaking to the children of when Jesus was tempted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. The conversation quickly goes to the composition of the devil – whether he is an entity or lives within. He spoke with the children and some were convinced that if there was not a devil that they would never be inclined to do wrong, but others said that the devil is within. When they spoke of the second temptation, Alcott noticed that some of the children were losing their attention toward the subject, and he decided to move the conversation to another day. In Conversation XX, he picks back up on the conversation of temptation and asked the children what it meant to be tempted. They provided their various answers and then they went on to discuss the differences between

the three different types of temptation while Jesus was in the wilderness – the first one was temptation of the body, the second was one of praise for others, and the third was avarice. The focus in this conversation was self-control when faced with temptation. Alcott ends the conversation with:

There are inexhaustible meanings in it; for it represents that struggle for self-mastery, which the soul is ever making, when faithful to the Divine Law of Perfection, which conscience is proclaiming in every faculty and function of our being. Jesus subordinated the Body, Nature, and Life to this law. He overcame, and put all corporeal things under foot. And so should we strive to do. All Duty lies in striving after the Perfect.

(Conversations with Children 174-175)

The strive for the “perfect” and knowing what that might be through innocence, and what the Transcendentalists were convinced of – divine knowledge of children – is the antiskepticism message within the curriculum of the Temple School. Knowledge was an ongoing source from the Divine and children were the closest receptors - knowledge is implied as a constant movement. Catherine Albanese’s argument in the article titled, *The Kinetic Revolution: Transformation in the Language of the Transcendentalists*, is that the perception of knowledge is kinetic. Albanese states that knowledge and the divine is in constant movement and that the true:

Transcendentalists emphasized the language of nature more than their immediate forebears. But what was new about transcendental language in the context of Brahmin Boston was its style more than its content: it was written in the kinetic. From the churchly side, the Christian God along paraphernalia of word and sacrament joined the camp of motion. From the natural side, water became river, stream, current, ocean, and tide; light became burning flame or or breath; bird or wing; path and journey, sometimes joined to

the Christian pilgrim; horse and rider; bow and arrow, circle and circulation; string of beads, thread, and garment; birth and nurtured growth-all proclaim religion of process inaugurating a future of eternal energy. God, for the Transcendentalists, was motion.

(323)

Albanese focuses her argument on six Transcendentalists and their message of a God in motion. She says that Charles Ripley "... told his community that liberal Christians "had established the kingdom of God, not in the dead past, but in the living present, and insisted on "sweeping away the traditions which obscured the simplicity of truth" (327). For Alcott, children were the living present.

Albanese shares that Alcott presented his stance of a God in motion in three categories: symbolism of birth, education, and light. Alcott viewed birth as the process of a seed planted and nourished by the outside elements, which is why diet and overindulgence were very important for Alcott. For Alcott, education was fluid. Knowledge, straight from the source, was located right there in front of him, and all he had to do was facilitate a conversation for that divine knowledge to surface. Alcott's views were "...the task of education to lead forth the spirit implicit in the child and existing still in much of its original state of innocence. Education thus was an active and moving endeavor, a far cry from the humdrum of the recitation system of the Boston Latin School and Harvard University" (328). Knowledge was very attainable in its purest form from children and Alcott's antiskepticism approach did not hold up in his skeptical Boston community.

In comparison to Albanese's version of a God in motion, so too is the kinetic nature of learning evident in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave." In "Allegory of the Cave" of the *Republic*, Socrates shares with Glaucon the power of learning when in kinetic motion. The prisoners are

tied in a cave to only see the shadows on the wall in front of them produced by the fire behind them. When one prisoner is released and steps out of the cave, he sees the sun, the source of knowledge face-to-face and comes into the knowing of divine knowledge and goes back to where he came from to tell his friends who he had once been imprisoned with the good news of knowledge, but his friends hesitate and think he has gone mad. In Alcott's situation with his students, he helped to shed light in the cave of traditional education, which was full of rote memorization, through conversations that produced organic thoughts. The children had free range with their comments with some guidance from Alcott. The connection between the heart of the children and the "sun" was evident in his classroom.

His nontraditional form of education lives on today with allowing children more of a voice, the set up of the classroom, and the hands on approach, all of which lacked during his time. He remained true to his stance and many of his other beliefs, which are seen in the next two books of focus in this chapter. *Tablets* and *Concord Days*, which he wrote later in life, is a continuation of Alcott's transcendental messages.

Tablets

Tablets was written in 1868, nearly 25 years after Alcott's Fruitlands. Although this book was written well after Alcott's and the English Transcendentalist's utopia, much of his ideas on diet and communion with others remained the same; to add to that, he had practiced veganism before the term was even coined. Although our environments differ, the longing for the life land offers still springs up in our society. Also, too, learning approaches have opened up barriers allowing for more freedom in education, even though so much progress is yet to be made. For this section, and the next one as well, I will focus on aspects of this book that Alcott considers essential for a fulfilling life and speak how it was put to use years prior in Fruitlands and the

Temple School and how a form of his beliefs are being experienced today. The UP pillars of antimaterialism and antiskepticism will be analyzed in this section.

Antimaterialism

The first part of *Tablets* is devoted to nature and diet. Alcott spoke of vegetation as a heavenly extension, and one in which humans should fully take part of in its rawest form. He referred to the healthful beauty of the garden and orchard and celestial benefits of abiding amongst them. Alcott shared, “Our human history neither opens in forests nor in cities, but in gardens and orchards whose mythologies are woven into the faith of our race...” (*Tablets*, 48). In the Fruitlands experiment, its inhabitants did not cook their fruits and vegetables fearing that it would take away from its natural state. For Alcott, the natural state is humanity’s and the earth’s saving grace.

The message of antimaterialism rings throughout *Tablets* because Alcott spoke of nature, food, and soil in a religious tone and emphasized that what we ingest into our bodies and what we surround ourselves with, including the location and house, set the entire success of physical and spiritual growth. For Alcott, humans venturing back to the land is the purest form of education and one that is esteemed of higher value. Alcott, when recalling the decisions a friend made, said, “I have always admired the good sense and fine ambition of a friend of mine, who, on quitting College, with fair prospects of winning respect in any of the learned professions, chose rather to step aside into the quiet retreat of a cottage, and there give himself to the pleasures and duties of cultivating his family and grounds” (*Tablets*, 84). The cultivation of land and the communal living is within very recent history and shares characteristics of messages Alcott included in *Tablets* and what was lived out in the Fruitlands commune.

Alcott followed through his beliefs on maintaining autonomy in his life and living

counterculturally during the American Industrial Revolution. Other back-to-the-land movements were experienced during counterculture movements in the 1960s. Ryan Edgington argues that the back-to-the-land movements then were in reaction to societal woes of the time, which included war and industrialization. The Transcendentalists experienced a similar environment, so surrounding one's life with nature would prepare future generations with the ability to make wiser decisions. While sharing details of the various back-to-the-land movements that occurred in America, he says, "...many of them explained that a uniform consumer and "technocratic" society had disconnected or "divorced" them from the natural world. A contemporary observer explained, "it's as if they walked out onto a city street one day and realized not only that they were lost but that they were culturally unassimilated in a nation of endless congestion and incredibly corroded approaches to life" (283).

For Alcott, the move to simplicity was the answer in search for sanity and individualization. Living off the land would continue to be Alcott's message, and although his experiment did not succeed, its foundations for future ideas and back-to-the-land communes certainly did. Alcott mentioned that "Civilization has a deeper stake in the tillage of the ground than in the other arts, since its roots are fast planted therein, and it thrives only as this flourishes. Omit the garden, degrade this along with the orchard to mere material uses, treat these as of secondary importance, and the State falls fast into worldliness and decay" (Alcott, *Tablets* 84). According to Alcott, the purity of nature is medicine for the body and food for the soul. He said when speaking of nature that:

Nature is virtuous. Imparting sanity and sweetness, it spares from decay, giving life with temperance and a continency that keeps our pleasures chaste and perennial. Nothing short of her flowing atmosphere suffices to refill our urns. Neither books, company,

conversation,—not Genius even, the power present in persons, nature's nature pouring her floods through mind,—not this is enough. Nature is the good Baptist plunging us in her Jordan streams to be purified of our stains, and fulfil all righteousness. (*Tablets* 94)

In a religious sense, the commune way of living was the closest that one could get to the ultimate individualized spiritual achievement. The physical well-being of a person translated into their spiritual well-being, as well. Ryan Edgington spoke of how Huw Williams, founder of Freedom Farm (a commune in Washington during the 1960s), flourished spiritually when engaging in manual labor on the land. He explained that when “...taking out the supermarket middleman and placing the body in direct contact with soil, wood, and water. His newfound union with nature through labor, he said, offered spiritual rewards in everyday tasks such as sawing” (295). The freedom of living with nature nourished the mind, too, and leads into the section over antiskepticism.

Antiskepticism

Alcott prepared the way for educational reform; even though he was unsuccessful with his endeavors to promote immediate change, the change occurred later. In Alcott's Temple School, he had in attendance girls and boys, and one Black student. In a patriarchal society that adhered to societal standards, this was certainly not the norm. He stated in *Tablets*, “A people's freshest literature springs from free soil, tilled by free men. Every man owes primary duty to the soil, and shall be held incapable by coming generations if he neglect planting an orchard at least, if not a family, or book, for their benefit” (Alcott 83). The same approach that he echoed years later in *Tablets*, was pioneered with the establishment of the Temple School. The planting of a garden or orchard was no different than planting a school that offered proper soil through the

means of organic conversations that resulted in the search for true knowledge. Alcott helped to fertilize the soil for future educational endeavors that promoted progressive ideology.

Alcott “rocked the boat” in Boston and it was felt in Concord where he was able to establish his Alcott School of Philosophy, which was in successful operation for eight consecutive summers. In 1897, two sisters, Flora and Mary White, established Miss White’s Homeschool for Children in Concord in response to the mass education movement of the public schools that boxed children into classrooms and limited their motor skills and reduced education down to only the application of pen to paper (Morice 445). With the mix of successful, and even unsuccessful, waves of educational pioneering, Alcott’s efforts made way for the White sisters to establish their boarding school in Concord that was student-centered and offered a place for students to grow into their identities.

In *Tablets*, without using the exact phrasing of the terms, Alcott speaks of identity growth and the necessity of creating one’s own space. It is made a reality when:

Civilization begins with persons, ideas; the garden and orchard showing the place of their occupants in the scale; these dotting the earth with symbols of civility wherever they ornament its face. Thus by mingling his mind with nature, and so transforming the landscape into his essence, Man generates the homestead, and opens a country to civilization and the arts. (*Tablets* 14)

Linda C. Morice quotes bell hooks in her argument that the White sisters wanted to create a “home” and “home” can occur anywhere as long as it is cultivated properly for growth to take place. The White sisters defied social norms by showing that “Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference... “ (hooks qtd. in Morice 439). The sisters wanted to merge

home and school, and in the process redefine learning without the societal barriers. As Morice shows in her research, Concord was known for progressive ideas, and when the sisters' distaste for a "one size fits all" education materialized in to establishing a school, they were confident that Concord was fertile ground.

The Transcendentalist Movement supported this "fluid" concept of home and the creation of one's space, and this is seen in Emerson giving up his career as a minister, Thoreau living on his own near Walden Pond in a commune of sorts, and with Alcott starting a school and a commune. Alcott's lifelong antiskepticism stance on education was not in vain, and helped to establish a school that also adhered to a counterculture approach to education.

Concord Days

Concord Days is somewhat of an extension of *Tablets*; much of the same sentiments and themes are presented in both of these writings. Although similar to *Tablets*, *Concord Days* differs because it is a diary Alcott wrote while living in his Orchard House in Concord. The book was published in 1872, and Alcott highlighted the small and precious moments of life in *Concord Days*, and revealed the vitalness in the grand scheme of life. Certain aspects of life, such as one's house, conversations, letters, family, and children are all part of a grander circle and is what actually enhances and educates humanity, not flimsy institutions that have no real substance.

The UP pillars of antimaterialism and antiskepticism will be discussed. Alcott's antimaterialistic approach emphasizes that material possessions is not what really defines a person, but how one situates themselves in life, their dwelling, and in true conversations. Alcott values personal enrichment through nature and interactions – true interactions were unplanned questions that prompted students to seek answers through dialogue rather than just "finding the

answer.” *Concord Days* is not a traditional diary because Alcott tends to share his thoughts rather than events of the day. Through these thoughts, his readers gain insight on his stance of living a fulfilling life and a glimpse of New England.

Antimaterialism

Alcott said it “flatters” him when his neighbors tell him that his aesthetic abode blends in with its surroundings (*Concord Days*). Alcott’s UP antimaterialism approach lies in his inclination to believe the home is an extension of the people who live there and the nature around it. According to the Transcendentalists, true beauty is only possible if the circumference, if you will, is complete and the place in which a person lives is representative of the people, the surroundings, and even the builder. In this case, the creation of a person’s identity also included where the person lived. Alcott says:

A good architect is both builder and colorist, and should be a good man besides, according to the ancient authorities. Roman Vitruvius claims as much, if not more...he says, "that an architect should be instructed in the precepts of moral philosophy; for he ought to have a great soul, and be bold without arrogance, just, faithful, and totally exempt from avarice. (*Concord Days*)

In his section over “The Age of Bronze and Iron,” he stated he was fortunate to have been able to have worked with his hands throughout his life, a communion with nature rather than an over reliance on industrialization. He said, “I certainly esteem it an inestimable privilege to have been bred to outdoor labors, the use of tools, and to find myself the owner of a garden...” (*Concord Days*).

Additionally, his experience at Fruitlands in which he lived out his beliefs along with others and lived sparingly while working on the land with their hands. Catherine Albanese

quotes in her research that, “In *Conversations on the Gospels*, birth emerged as an important theme. Like the rose seed, Alcott told his young students, “so the seed of a human being is placed in the midst of matter which nourishes it, and it grows and becomes perfected” (Albanese 327). Alcott further states, “Any attempt to simplify and supply one's wants by abstinence and self-help is in the most hopeful direction... ‘Who has the fewest wants,’ said Socrates, ‘is most like God’” (*Concord Days*).

This “kinetic” movement, which is certainly a Transcendental characteristic, is evident in several sections in *Concord Days*. The ongoing search for antimaterialistic avenues of fulfilment stood out in the midst of the American Industrial Revolution in which gains from capitalism and imperialism were taking over, and Alcott’s circle recognized the woes that could come from this and ways it could be remedied.

Antiskepticism

Through out *Concord Days*, Alcott referenced ancient and contemporary philosophers in his descriptions of the New England of his time, which he felt strayed into ways that were morally wrong. He quoted the ancient philosophers, specifically Plato, because of the value he placed on the education of the young. Plato and Alcott viewed children as a key to a better future, and the education of a child being imperative for the healthy growth of society. He stated:

He thought it was a great matter, in the education of youth, to accustom them to take delight in good things; otherwise, he affirmed, pleasures were the bait of evil. Education should be conducted with a serene sweetness, never by force or violence, but by gentleness, accompanied with persuasion and every kind of invitation. His teaching was conducted by conversation or dialogue. (*Concord Days*)

Alcott also spoke of Socrates's acknowledgement of ignorance and that it was by no means a set back, but the key for obtaining knowledge. Alcott had the same approach when he engaged his students in the Socratic Method of learning from questioning and searching and arriving to a conclusion through a top-down style of learning. Learning together through collaboration offers benefits and opens others questions. Alcott said that learning is best done in collaboration: "Letters show pale and poor from inside chambers and halls of learning alone; and whoever will deal directly with ideas, is often abroad to import the stuff of things into his diction, and clothe them in a rhetoric robust and racy, addressing the senses and mind at once" (*Concord Days*). Alcott noted that Socrates was quite brave when asking questions and prompting people who were convinced they already knew to look and second guess themselves. Alcott states:

Affecting perhaps to know less than any, he yet showed those with whom he conversed how little they knew, while professing to know so much, convicting them of being ignorant of their own ignorance, real wisdom beginning in humility and openness to instruction. If he puzzled and perplexed, it was but to reduce their egotism and ignorance, and prepare them for receiving the truths he had to lay open in themselves. (*Concord Days*)

The antiskeptical stance that Alcott and all the Transcendentalists held offered a place of growth and open mindedness. If a person believed they were capable of learning, then they would learn and come to know truth.

Conclusion

Alcott was an important figure during the American Romanticism period. Although not much has been written about him, he contributed to modern education. The emphasis on learning

through collaboration and Socratic conversation in modern American schools is largely because of him. He took up an ancient method of learning through conversations, and although it was not successful at the time, he helped to begin the process. Though he faced challenges and failures, his successes were posthumous and I am sure his family would have been proud. His natural approach to life and outlook on living contributed to the communal movement that took place among the Transcendentalists. Although communal living was the way of life for the Alcott's for some time, he and other Transcendentalists placed worth on the value of innerness and independent thought. The culmination of his message is essentially the search for knowledge with using nature as a conduit, a method that was not practiced in his time.

Alcott's way of life is a reflection of the rise of individualization of the time – in education, religion, philosophy, and diet. Community representation was not as much of a concern as one's individual life. For Alcott, the decisions one made, including the representation of one's living quarters or even over indulgence in food, can damage the identity of a person. One's desired ethos needed to be built on individual decisions that truly reflected their own minds.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

America must continue to have, during these days of human travail, a company of creative dissenters...We must work unceasingly to lift this nation we love to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness.

– Martin Luther King Jr. “The Casualties of the War in Vietnam,” 1967

How is this epigraph related to any of the messages of Transcendentalism? Besides Martin Luther King, Jr. having been influenced by Henry David Thoreau’s peaceful protest of refusing to pay taxes to support slavery; he quote above stresses the idea of inner voice. In his speech, “The Casualties of the War in Vietnam” King expressed the importance of the voice of dissent among people who were seeing wrong committed in society. As mentioned in my chapter on Thoreau, he stated in regards to the unethical actions of his time, “...but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine (*Civil Disobedience*). The importance of human experience over tradition was certainly a message that was seen in Transcendentalism. This movement in New England has its similarities to past movements and contemporary movements.

Transcendentalism was a philosophy with religious and Platonic roots, but yielded a unifying rhetoric that has branched into modern discourses; all of which stand as a guiding idea for Gerson’s UP perspective on Platonism as a “big tent” of disputative issues. The rhetoric of self-identity and reliance would also be under this metaphorical “big tent.” The reliance on oneself is a heralding message among the Transcendentalists, which coincides with individualistic beliefs that began to surface. Emerson’s message centered on relying on the

connection between self and nature, and creating a unique identity from that connection as opposed to putting stock in the teachings of the past. For Thoreau, nature was an essential tool for the future; as he saw it, the industrialization of his time was a decaying element in spirituality and therefore hindered a fulfilling life. Alcott took similar approaches to the care and acknowledgement of oneself and nature; but Alcott places an emphasis on childhood and recognized the importance of a child's perspective and what can be learned from their candid knowledge. Transcendentalism is a rhetoric of self reliance and identity in relation to humanity's natural state, which is the heart of many modern contemporary movements. This type of rhetoric has irenic characteristics because of the reliance on humanistic and individualized values. By recognizing the self as a reliable source, people are more likely to believe in their own worth and abilities and that of others – therefore, this creates an irenic type of communicational bond that is akin to Transcendentalism.

Irenicism is typically associated within Christianity and is a type of peaceful rhetoric used to attempt to bring communion between the different dominations. This same approach to communication, however, can be seen in the Transcendentalist messages of individuality and the cultivation of a self-made identity. Forms of “transcendentalism” are currently seen through means of collaborative communications that are of an irenic nature because the basis of the messages lies in the hopes of a peaceful connection and one that places value on self. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the discovery of all the available means of persuasion in any situation. Following along these lines, the discovery of self adds a vital tool in the exploration of a rhetoric that is not an imitation of others, a true rhetoric of individualized hope.

In the upcoming sections of this concluding chapter, I will show how American Transcendentalism continues on through irenic and idealistic forms, thus creating a unique voice

and identity in contemporary American discourses. I will discuss the past Christian humanism from Erasmus, which is also characterized as irenic. Within the same section, I will show a very close connection between French philosopher, Jean-Jacque Rousseau and his idea on nature. Then I will include a section over the idealism of Immanuel Kant during the Enlightenment period and how his views parallels to that found in Transcendentalism. The sections that follow will focus primarily on how irenicism and idealism form a unique American type of rhetoric, which includes an authentic voice to represent the worthiness of self-reliance. The reliance on self and not the aimless adherence to traditions that offer no more than just mere emptiness, and sometimes harm, to one's soul is the type of rhetoric Transcendentalists would have projected if they were here today. Their presence continues to be known, however, in Gerson's Platonic "big tent" of disputed issues.

The Rhetorics of the Renaissance and Enlightenment

For this section, I will lay out a few areas prior to the time that Transcendentalism rose in America. These areas represent movements that value the innerness of a person, including one's own voice and the purity of their origins. Along with Platonism playing a part in the characteristics of Transcendentalism, there are patterns of the past that serve to better understand some of our most recent history of changing ideas. In this section, I will present ideas held by Erasmus, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant, and the Transcendental characteristic of each.

One such example is Erasmus, and his contributions to the importance of speech and its function as a divine tool used to create harmonious outcomes. With a reliance on oneself, along with the Divine, there are similarities that are found between the philosophies of Transcendentalism and that of Erasmus's and that are witnessed today. Erasmus was a Catholic

clergyman, teacher, and philosopher who encouraged his students to use their voice and ideas to create an irenic ethos.

Bohn Lattin argues in his research that Erasmus's rhetorical system was misplaced under a polemical type of rhetoric within the Classical and Renaissance periods, but that it aligns more with a peaceful and collaborative type of dialogue. His stance stems from the numerous wars in Europe, much of which were based in religious disputes, and his beliefs were derived from Cicero and Quintilian. He believed that verbal attack on one another was demoralizing and contributed to "conceited egos" (Lattin 37). In his teachings, "Erasmus taught his students to share their thoughts with one another in order to foster *concordia*. He wrote that "God has given us speech for this one purpose, to make the relations of men more pleasant" (33). Believing that God gave an important tool, he encouraged his students to build trust in their own decisions and heed their own ideas in disputes. Lattin states, "Erasmus's theology shaped his concept of rhetoric, allowing it to fill an irenic role in society instead of the polemical role. Erasmus believed that speech was given by God to create peaceful relations among humans, not for the achievement of personal glory" (36).

Erasmus was known as a Christian humanist whose ideas sprung up from a religious setting, very much like what is seen in Transcendentalism. Although there are differences among the two ideologies, the use of voice and one's own reason to promote an irenic rhetoric is comparable to American Transcendentalism. It is worthy to point this out because these ideas were considered different than the norm during both eras, but both were akin to Renaissance type of ideas that encouraged people to trust what was within because what was within was considered divine and pure.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a Genevan philosopher and writer, was also persuaded in the pureness of human's natural state. During his time, people were more persuaded in the brute savageness that Thomas Hobbes spoke of in his *Leviathan*; Rousseau spoke a different message that equated human's natural state to a purer state and one that was better. In Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, he discussed his view, which was thought of as ridiculous during his time, that humans were in a better state in their natural state. Rousseau argued that the state of nature of humanity was pure and non-violent, but became tainted when exposed to society. Robinson Woodward-Burns comments on the connection that the Transcendentalists and Rousseau share by stating:

With no sense of past or time, Emerson's feet and mind wandered for hours. In "Country Life," he compares his walks to those of Rousseau. When exiled to a wooded island, Rousseau approached the aimless simplicity of the pre-political savage, meandering daily "without needing to recall the past or encroach upon the future ... without any trace of time's passage." (34)

His views on education also value the inner light the Transcendentalists believed everyone was capable of possessing. In his novel *Emile*, he gives the account of every stage of education that the protagonist goes through in his life (much like Isocrates's and Quintilian's accounts on education), and the significance of each of those stages in preparation for life. Rousseau described an education that prepared a person to be undefiled by society before they face society.

The idealism and morality of Immanuel Kant is significant because he also believed in the power of innerness as opposed to the material world – what a person knows and their thoughts prior to exposure to society's ideas is valid and holds weight. Ralph Waldo Emerson quoted Kant often in his journals and was influenced by his ideas of Transcendental idealism.

Kant believed in a form of Transcendentalism because of the perception of what was around him was a reflection of perfection. That same perception applied to humans, as well, similar to Emerson's "part of parcel of God." The innerness of a person's thoughts are valid and constitute authority.

Gary Dorrien speaks of the idealism of Kant in his article titled, "Naturalism as a Theological Problem: Kant, Idealism, the Chicago School, and Corrington" and argues that liberal theology has always acknowledged that naturalism has a component. He argues that "...but every tradition of liberal theology negotiates some kind of peace with scientific naturalism, and some liberal theologies are fully naturalistic in the sense of the term..." (Dorrien 49). He further states, "Before Kant came along, the march of materialism in philosophy seemed unstoppable. Kant stopped it in its tracks by showing that powers of mind are fundamental to human life" (50). With philosophy and nature being conjoined to one another, according to Kant, morality is attainable and fundamental because there is a moral truth and that truth can be found within ourselves. Freedom plays a part in the equation of moral truth. Kant believed that humans had to have free will in order to gain self trust, which was essential to the transcendental message of self-reliance (Dorrien 51). He explains that Kant "...based religion on morality, not the other way around, because religion is essentially moral and it has no claim to knowledge except by its connection to moral truth. In the realm of faith, Kant argued, something has to happen" (50-51).

Along with Gary Dorrien, Robert Jenson in his chapter in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, discusses Horace Bushnell, who was one of the leading theologians in the nineteenth century. Robert Jenson shares that Bushnell was not only a theologian, but a city planner, public commenter, and an educational theorist (346). Gary Dorrien tells his readers that one day Bushnell realized that he had become an atheist. Bushnell was leery

of the naturalism of Transcendentalism, but realized that “Devoting himself to the good was good in itself, and if he gave himself to it as he understood it, perhaps he would find god on the way. If he had lost god in selfishness and skepticism, perhaps he would find the divine in giving himself to the good” (Dorrien 52). Bushnell discovered that he “...laid a foundation for theology by an analysis of human existence. He found the heart of human life in our involvement with human language and in an organically antecedent society. For him, these two aspects of human existence coincided, his insight into them was attained simultaneously, in the same experience that brought him back to Christianity” (Jenson 346). Although he was a Congregationalist and not a Transcendentalist, he found a connection to an inner voice through nature and unconventional means, and as Dorrien points out, that Bushnell had a Kantian approach to religion in that he “based religion on morality, and not the other way around” (Dorrien 50-51). As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, Kant argued that something had to happen, and for Bushnell and others, that something was searching for inner voice. Dorrien says of Kant:

Kant is the unavoidable figure in modern philosophy and theology because he revolutionized modern thought by thinking rigorously about what it means to have a thought. He redefined the limitations of reason, he made a colossal attempt to unite reason and experience, and he had a place for religion, in moral reason. Kant compelled philosophers to stop conceiving the mind as a passive receptacle, arguing that the mind is active in producing experience out of its transcendental categories. (50)

Through reason based on morality, Kant is a part of the history of ideas that add to the Transcendentalist ideology of nature serving as a conduit to the divine and to oneself. One’s own thoughts are not passive, but an active tool in self reliance and authentic language.

Self Reliance and Authenticity

The history of ideas and the times in which individuality surfaced is relative when speaking in regards to Transcendentalism. Different perspectives and different experiences add an understanding to the big picture, as defined in the previous section. One aspect that is constant between the past and the present is action, whatever that action may be. For example, when Socrates spoke and questioned others it was in search for knowledge that he knew he lacked. For the Transcendentalists, that search also came through conversation and learning from others because that is how empathy was strengthened, but withdrawal also played a significant part in creating an authentic voice. The nonconformity of Transcendentalism is still very much of a force in modern society.

Robinson Woodward-Burns argues in his research that Emerson's withdrawal is how he was able to identify with the other, not imitate the other. Woodward-Burns's argument conjoins Emerson's solitude with his political involvement. His solitude gave him insight and empathy during the Jacksonian political environment. The violation of human rights that existed in slavery, the inhumane treatment of Native Americans, and conversations with the abolitionists allowed Emerson an opportunity to identify with something that he had not gone through. Although Emerson never witnessed slavery, he was able to empathize with the wrong that was being done. Emerson, and the other Transcendentalists, were abolitionists, but conversation served as an important tool for Emerson because this, as Woodward-Burns puts it, allowed him to "imagine," which prompted his empathy. Woodward-Burns states, "Emerson never saw these images, but imagined he had, blending them with his own memories. Emerson used imagination to transcend his limited personal experience...stirring empathy (37).

Woodward-Burns says in his article that “Emerson saw political parties as breeding intellectual conformity and promoting slavery and Indian removal, and argued that entering politics risked complicity in these wrongs” (30). For the Transcendentalists, entering anything without self reflection risked falling into imitation mode, and that was of course ingenuine. Inner voice that aids in self reliance arms the individual with the what is needed during hostility, according to the Transcendentalists. As Woodward-Burns continues to point out that:

Emerson admired these abolitionists for following their anti-slavery principles at great personal risk. Suasionists epitomized self-reliance, acting with conviction against a hostile society. In this era Emerson abandoned quietude but maintained his ideal of self-reliance...Paradoxically, to join others, one first must isolate oneself. (32)

The withdrawal and self reliant themes hold true in regards to Gerson’s framework of the antis and the “big tent” of disputed issues. The issues change of course, but the framework is still in tact, and that is what is seen in this transcendental voice of dissent. That voice being an inner voice and serving as a metaphor for something bigger.

The Metaphor

Metaphors, symbols, and what Alcott often described to his students at the Temple School as emblems, served as motifs of transcendence – it was a reflection of something better and perfected, as it was in Plato’s Theory of Forms. For the Transcendentalist circle, intuition and voice are metaphors of an element of innerness that creates one’s genius, thus leading to self-reliance. This is of importance because the Transcendentalists helped add to the independent thinking that is currently experienced. This raises the question of whether this independence or self-reliance can be taught. Emily Dumler-Winckler touches on this question in her article titled, “Can Genius be Taught? Emerson’s Genius and the Virtues of Modern Science.”

The answer to the question Dumler-Winckler poses in the title of her article is, and she echoes Emerson in particular, no, it cannot be taught, but it can be nurtured. She states, “Genius is the creative action of the soul, specifically of the intellect, that can be fostered by all. Self-trust, in which all the virtues are realized, is its chief virtue” (Dumler-Winckler 272). Emerson, who after all set the mindset for the Transcendentalist Movement, says that genius is a product of self-trust and self-reliance. Genius, then, is a part of that inner voice, and is up to the person to heed that intuition and nurture the self-trust and self-reliance. Dumler-Winckler continues to add that “Self-trust enables the scholar to habitually resist at least four temptations: conformity, consistency, talent, and fame” (275). The first temptation follows in line with Emerson’s messages on imitation, which leads in to a monotonous consistency (275). Emerson warns that “A foolish consistency is a hobgoblin of little minds” (Emerson “Self Reliance”).

Self-reliance has long been ingrained in the American society. America strived to completely break away from European influence, and so a change began to occur. People of different faiths and backgrounds merged together and the one way to maintain an authentic identity, while still being unified as a country, was to nurture self-trust. Rephrasing Emerson, Dumler-Winckler points out that “To cultivate genius requires tending one’s own sacred ‘wild virtue,’ ...Non-conformity is a call not to vulgar exceptionalism, but to exceptional virtue, to self-trust *as* the exception that makes a new rule” (275). Genius cannot be taught in a curriculum or any other standard format because there is no specific formula, but nurturing and forming a self-trust that requires action and creativity because “imitation is suicide” (Emerson, “Self Reliance”). The Transcendentalists were creating a place for their own voice. The inner voice is a metaphor for the authentic genius within, and this metaphorical idea holds true in contemporary society.

The Contemporary Oratorical Landscape

Individualism was a consistent characteristic in Transcendentalism, as it was in the historical examples of humanism explained earlier in this chapter. Transcendentalism held humanistic beliefs because they believed the “inner voice” of a person was of a divine nature. Although individualism was imperative, the need for group representation was overlooked. This individualistic right to freedom of thought and expression began to transition to representing groups of individuals who had been repressed, and that very much represents the current societal landscape. Margaret Fuller took this approach when she became part of the Transcendentalist circle. This section, as already mentioned in Chapters 1 and 4, will be devoted to more elaboration on Fuller’s pioneering actions for a collective individualism that has been carried into modern times.

In Chapter 2, I discussed Fuller’s contributions to education. She had the opportunity to teach at the Temple School before it was closed and was able to immerse herself into an environment that was closely aligned to her beliefs. With the exposure to this desire to educate and build confidence in others, she helped to strengthen a collective identity for other women. Known for contributing to the Women’s Rights Movements of the late nineteenth century, Fuller encouraged these women based on much of the Transcendentalist individualistic belief system.

A term that P. Joy Rouse uses to describe Fuller’s approach to a collective type of individualism is a “rhetoric of citizenship.” In her chapter, “Margaret Fuller: A Rhetoric of Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century America,” she describes Fuller’s position as somewhat of a paradox when she states, “She was certainly not anti-individual; her major writings championed individualism. The paradox is that she claimed the individualist notion of self-culture as a right for marginalized citizens, which ultimately led her to a call for social change” (Rouse 111).

Rouse asserts that “I interpret Fuller’s practice as a rhetoric of citizenship because she was engaged in issues of immediate concern to local communities” (116). She used her position in education to equip the women she taught to create a self-culture that would in turn “carry social and political change” (117).

The self-culture aligned with the Transcendentalist beliefs, but Fuller took it a step further. In the changing societal landscape of her time, she being a woman was able:

... to recognize the situatedness of individuals...Within her historical and cultural context, self-culture (or self-creation, self determination, or self-knowledge, as it was often called) was a practice in invention that allowed women to challenge essentialist beliefs of what a “woman” is, moving them beyond the notion that they were too delicate for or not intellectually capable of civic involvement and cultural activity. (Rouse 119-120)

Thanks to Fuller’s father, Timothy Fuller, she received the education a man would have had, a preparation into law or the ministry; however, her position in society prevented her from further advancement. Despite this holdback for Fuller, she still persevered even in the the midst of groups such as, the Republican Motherhood and True Womanhood (112-113). Fuller was disdained by mention being made of her in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* by Sarah Josepha Hale, who stated that Fuller “threw away the ‘One True Book’ for others...” (qtd. in Rouse 114). Rouse explains that:

Within True Womanhood, then, women who assumed an active public role were transgressing their “fearful obligation” and “solemn responsibility” to be redemptive daughters and mothers. Margaret Fuller and other women like her, such as Fanny Wright, were committing a crime against the family and womanhood, the women’s magazines warned, that would result in “madness or death.” (114)

Through all the odds Fuller faced in her life, she was tremendously successful and her efforts branched out in more areas than education alone. She brought forth the question of what the purpose even was for women to receive an education if they could not “apply their thoughts in their language use and actions...This question provided the political underpinning for the conversations, which Fuller held until 1844” (125). These conversations were known as “conversations for ladies,” which she started after she left the Greene Street School in 1839. From individualistic thought, to education, to political and cultural discussions, and ultimately to a “rhetoric of citizenship,” Fuller’s place is not only in individualism, but also in group identity, is very much a part of modern rhetoric.

Fuller helped to contribute to the momentum of the creation of group identities and added strength and a voice. The beliefs of Transcendentalism, the rhetoric of individualism that became a characterization of America, branched in many areas and projects itself differently in contemporary movements. For Fuller, it went from education to political conversations, and the movements of today have their origins in the political environment. In the article titled, “Face Off – The Ironic, The Irenic, and The Face Between,” Peter Goodrich speaks of the foundations of legal feminism, but here I will only focus on the imagery he uses to illustrate his argument. The author starts by speaking of an analytical essay written by Jean-Luc Nancy over the portrait, *The Gaze of the Portrait*. The essay explores the ways society perceives an image because “...the portrait puts a face to the social world, and gives character to collectivity” (Goodrich 358). The collectivity Goodrich is referring to is legal feminism, which emerged from contrasting portraits of women; similarly, Fuller emerged as a figure among groups who painted women in one certain fashion. Visually, the portrait and essay Goodrich uses as an opening analogy for his

argument of the collective identity of feminism is related to the collective identity of rhetorics today. Quoted below in his article:

Here is how Madame de Montpensier, one of the *precieuses* or precious and precocious literary women of mid-seventeenth century Paris, puts it: ‘We have plenty of [painted] Portraits, but they are simply of singular individuals; now I am undertaking portraits of groups of individuals who live in a similar spirit, in the same fashion. This will be the depiction of what is almost a sort of Republic... (qtd in Goodrich 361)

The republic of individuals with a collective purpose for underrepresented groups is the Transcendentalism of today. Past “portraits,” or even existing “portraits” can be changed to elevate marginalized groups.

The changed oratorical landscape of America consists of multicultural elements, with each collective voice speaking for their own, but conjoined in a synthesis for a unique American voice. During the Transcendentalism era, the arrival of immigrants painted a new “portrait” of America. A new branding of a new type of “Transcendentalism” label or naming would certainly be in place and appropriate in regards to the collective rhetorics that are experienced today.

Transcendentalism is no longer a recognized group per se, but their ideas are still very much alive. Arthur Versluis argues that Transcendentalism can very well be considered “an early form of late-twentieth century and twenty-first-century multiculturalism” because of the blend of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and the mystical variations of these religions constitutes the multiculturalism in Transcendentalism (515). Through conversations and dialogue, the Transcendentalists search for what was true is of the Platonic tradition. Versluis speaks of the ties between Platonism and Transcendentalism by stating:

Platonism is dialogic; so too Transcendentalism was fundamentally dialogic. But dialogue did not exist for its own sake. Rather the purpose of dialogue was to move through conversation toward a deeper understanding of truth. In the Platonic tradition, truth is understood (as in modern science) to be universally applicable; what is true for one human being is true for another. It is not possible, as is commonly said today, to “have one’s own truth”...Truth is one of the three classical *transcendentalia*, those being truth, goodness, and beauty. (517)

In addition, Margaret Fuller stated, “Conversation is my natural element. I need to be called out, and never think alone, without imagining some companion” (qtd in Rouse 125). The motive of dialogue from the Transcendental perspective is that of recovering beauty through universal elements, which adds to the multiculturalism found in Transcendentalism and current group identities. As Versluis adds, “Through their essays, books, journals, and conversations, the Transcendentalists sought to investigate and demonstrate what is true, good, and beautiful” (517). Emerson, Alcott, and Thoreau were in search of something that was true, good, and beautiful; it started from a shared individualistic standpoint and eventually became a shared message; in turn, creating many unique individual and group identity messages that has since created a changed oratorical landscape.

The “Perennial” UP Pillars of Platonism

The beliefs of Transcendentalism are continuing to shape America; it has really never died. Gerson’s UP pillars of Platonism serve as a sustainable foundation in the Platonic tradition. Versluis bridges Platonism and Transcendentalism by commenting on Platonism’s continuous cycle throughout history. He states at length below:

Transcendentalism is in eclipse—that is, not currently visible. But it is perennial. What is perennial never dies; it is perpetually reborn for a new era. This is the meaning of the term “perennialism,” which is another way of describing the Platonic tradition. American Transcendentalism was a direct heir to the ancient Greek and particularly the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition not only in antiquity, but also as it reappeared later, for instance, in the Renaissance Platonism (and Hermeticism) of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola...Certainly one can argue that the era of the American Renaissance is among the most influential and creative periods in American letters, and as such, it is of perennial interest. (518)

The perennial aspect of American Transcendentalism is transparent in the quote I share in the epigraph of this chapter. Martin Luther King, Jr. called for “a company of creative dissenters who would lift this nation we love to a higher destiny.” King echoed the sentiments of social change through the midst of numerous conflicts, most notably in the Civil Right Movement, but in this case the Vietnam War. American Transcendentalism is “perennial,” and, as Versluis states above is another way of describing the “Platonic Tradition.” In King’s case, similar to many others who used their oratorical skills in the advancement of social reform, advocacy is a characteristic of Transcendentalism, which is, “...the shared human journey toward understanding more deeply and realizing for oneself and in one’s work what is true and good and beautiful” (Versluis 518).

One such example of a person who acknowledged that all were on a “shared human journey” was Jane Addams, who was born after the Transcendentalism Movement in 1860. Addams was at the forefront of social change, especially for women and marginalized citizens, all of which she helped through numerous speeches, articles, and the creation of the Hull House

of Chicago in 1911, which was a multicultural center devoted to education, activities, trainings, and other preparatory classes that helped immigrants equip their lives in a new place I will briefly discuss the rhetoric and oratory of Jane Addams, and although she was never a Transcendentalist, she shared their quest of what was “true and good and beautiful,” and is an example of someone who celebrated individuality while maintaining honor for group identity.

Addams was influenced by her study of Greek city-states, where democracy represented more of a social bond than a representation of individualism (Peaden 187). While Addams in her life-long effort to initiate social reform, balanced social and individual needs in her mission that created a better place for immigrants and women. In the chapter titled, “Jane Addams and the Social Rhetoric of Democracy,” Catherine Peaden speaks of the importance Addams placed on active oratory. She includes in her chapter that “Addams arguments in *Twenty Years at the Hull-House* for the “life of action” echo the classical rhetoricians’ insistence that a retired, speculative philosophy is less valuable than an active oratory” (189). Bruce Kimball continues by adding, “Beyond expression, the orator also requires that the philosophy make a difference in the world, that is, have an effect – especially that it enhance virtue by persuading others” (qtd. in Peaden 189). The work that was done at the Hull House has had lasting effects.

Jen Masengarb shares of one of the numerous lasting effects that occurred from Addams’s rhetoric of advocacy. In a video of her speaking at the Hull House and the Art Institute of Chicago, she states that Addams, and others with her, documented the neighborhood around the Hull House on color coded maps in order to have a better understanding of the residents’ access to basic necessities, and this effort promoted lasting changes. She states:

All those things were done to capture that data in a very sophisticated way-- but then also to advocate for change. So new tenement codes resulted out of that in the early 20th

century that provided basic minimums for access to plumbing, a number of people per dwelling, and also better access to light and air. (Masengarb)

Addams won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work to promote social change in 1931. Addams, and others who were like her, initiated work that captured the spirit of the Transcendentalists.

Gerson's version of Platonism is "perennial" in a sense that he brings forth the argument that the framework of Platonism is consistent. With the five antis of antimaterialism, antimechanism, antinominalism, antirelativism, and antiskepticism being the UP Pillars throughout history, Transcendentalism is a movement that represents the constant presence of the Platonic tradition.

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