Reading Utopian Pedagogies: Discovering the Practical Here and Now of Utopian Thinking

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READING UTOPIAN PEDAGOGIES: DISCOVERING THE PRACTICAL HERE AND NOW OF UTOPIAN THINKING

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a way of reading texts for their utopian aims, a term I use to analyze utopian themes and ideas in a text while keeping the focus on practicality. Reading a text for its utopian aims discovers what a text hopes for but always reflects on how those hopes serve the here and now of the author and the reader. The idealistic conclusions of utopian thinking, the utopian visions, only play a role in the utopian aim. This project does not promote the ultimate or extreme ends of utopian visions; instead it analyzes the educational effects of entertaining those visions. Through its hopes, a text contains a utopian energy that has practical results in the present moment. I argue that texts work like teachers, and the naturally hopeful nature of teaching influences that teaching work. Therefore, this thesis claims that we should read texts like they have something to teach us and that what we learn can be used for improvements in the present moment. This learning and progress connects to and complements utopian thinking.

The first chapter of this thesis analyzes Sarah Scott’s didactic utopian novel, *Millenium Hall* (1762), and establishes the foundation for reading for practical utopian aims. I argue that Scott develops a utopian pedagogy that connects abstract, philosophical principles necessary for personal and social moral development with practical illustrations and actions. Scott’s pedagogy is a tour of the utopia of Millenium Hall, which importantly has positive connections to and influences on the exterior world. Scott extends the teaching work of the tour directly to every reader of the text. This analysis informs the method of reading for utopian aims, which is then used for “taking a tour” of the hopes and utopian thinking of William Wordsworth’s *Prelude* (1850) and Henry David Throeau’s *Walden* (1854). The second and third chapters examine these texts' utopian and educational thinking, respectively. This analysis reveals what these texts were hopeful for and why they were hopeful, and it also informs and illustrates the practical here-and-now element of utopian aims.
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“The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough.”
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Introduction

In Sarah Scott’s novel Millenium Hall (1762), the narrator and his traveling companion stumble upon the titular utopian community of women. The founders of this community give the two men a tour and offer biographical accounts of various residents depicting their lives prior to living there. The narrator’s written account of the tour frames the novel, and at the end of his account the narrator writes, “If what I have described, may tempt any one to go and do likewise, I shall think myself fortunate in communicating it. For my part, my thoughts are all engaged in a scheme to imitate them on a smaller scale” (249). The tour of the utopia thus uses a pedagogy that not only teaches values to the learner but also inspires the narrator to want to build his own similar utopia. This connection between utopian pedagogy and practical action is central to the argument of this thesis. Additionally, the offer is extended to every reader of Scott’s text, who, by way of reading, received the same tour of the utopia. Scott therefore deploys a pedagogy to teach and illustrate utopian virtue to the fictional travelers and the reader, extending the practicality into the real world of the reader. Scott’s pedagogical strategy and goals are transparent, and a rigorous analysis of this utopian pedagogy formulates an analytic frame helpful in locating similar pedagogies in other works of literature.

However, this utopian pedagogy framework can be applied to more than traditional utopian literature.¹ This thesis seeks to develop an analytic frame which examines the pedagogical processes of hopeful literature, or texts that hope. Importantly, I am not creating or

¹ By traditional utopian literature, I am referring to stories that fall into the genre of utopian literature that specifically include utopian places like Thomas More’s Utopia (1516), Sir Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis (1627), or the somewhat more recent Island (1962) by Aldous Huxley (to name a very few). These stories, like Millenium Hall, typically contain a traveler’s encounters with a fictional utopian space of a “perfect” or near perfect society.
defining a genre or category for hopeful literature, but rather I simply am using the adjective “hopeful” to contextualize the targeted texts of this thesis’s analytic framework. As far as this thesis is concerned, if a text “entertain[s] expectation[s] of something desired,” it is, at least in part, a hopeful text and applicable to this framework (OED). The analytic frame developed from my reading of the utopian text *Millenium Hall* will be applied to William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* (1850) and Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) to discover their respective utopian pedagogies through a “tour” of their hopeful language, those expressions of entertaining something desired.

This thesis uses a line of utopian thinking that offers an approach to reading texts that are not traditionally utopian but offer practical solutions for developing the author’s *utopian aims*, a term I coin for use in this thesis. Briefly, the term *utopian aims* in this thesis places the future-oriented utopian urge in the present moment, since it is an imagined future used by an individual or individuals to direct their actions or beliefs in the here and now. In this sense, utopian visions (the imagined “perfect place”) generate energy in the form of hope which can then be used to generate progress towards that vision. A utopian aim is therefore a process, not an object. Granted, a utopian aim requires an object—a target or a vision—but, importantly, “aim” is also an action verb. To aim is to pursue and thus generate actions in line with that aim. For Scott, the utopian vision of Millenium Hall generates actions in line with Christian benevolence and virtue; for Wordsworth, the utopian vision of the abilities of the human mind generates inspiration and love in the present; and for Thoreau, the utopian vision of an “uncommon school” generates a

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2 My lack of expertise in mathematics and physics disallows the following terms to be anything other than a footnote: “utopian aims” in my thesis operates like a force vector in physics—it is a force with direction and magnitude; it is not the destination of that force, but the force vector.
collective independence that enriches the lives of everyone in a society. While utopian visions must be discussed, understood, and analyzed to generate the actions or energies of a utopian aim, the utopian visions are ultimately not the intended result of the actions spurred by a text’s hopes. Utopian visions are naturally idealistic and dogmatic if realized, whereas utopian aims are pragmatic and always shifting with its present context. However, the vision plays a role in the aim. The three chapters use the ideas of the three authors to illustrate both what a utopian aim is and how it can be used to read a text.

In each chapter, I discuss how hopeful moments retain their practicality and avoid idealizing; the chapters use utopian thinking in a way that rejects the “no-place” of utopia’s etymological roots. This thesis uses a utopian rubric of Terry Eagleton’s design: he distinguishes “‘good’ utopias” from “‘bad’ utopias” (22). Eagleton chastises a “‘bad’ utopia, which consists simply in a sort of wistful yearning, a ‘wouldn’t it be nice if’ with no basis in the actual … which negates the present in the name of some inconceivably alternative future” (22). My readings do not read hopeful language in this “bad” utopian sense. Instead, this thesis realizes the “good” utopia latent in the human propensity to hope. Eagleton continues, “‘Good’ utopia, by contrast, finds a bridge between present and future in those forces within the present which are potentially able to transform it” (22). This thesis reads these “forces within the present” as an energy that constitutes a utopian aim. Because “good” utopias in this sense must be practical, I analyze the writings by Scott, Wordsworth, and Thoreau for their utopian aims and consequent educational tendencies to reveal an underappreciated but strong interdependence.

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3 Throughout this thesis, I use the term “human,” “humankind,” or other gender-neutral terms despite Wordsworth and Thoreau’s repeated use of “man.” I leave Wordsworth’s and Thoreau’s quotes untampered so as not to dismiss their contemporary biases, misogyny, or patriarchal tendencies. However, when analyzed in my own language, I optimistically read the usage of “man” as referential to humankind.

4 See Fátima Vieira’s “The Concept of Utopia.”
between the philosophies and theories of utopia and education. This method of reading searches for those moments of hope when an author entertains personal or social desires and analyzes the practical, educational implications of those moments. This analysis reveals the Eagletonian “good” of utopian thinking because it reveals a utopian energy that can be used in the here and now to realize a utopian aim.

I apply this lens to examine an inevitable positive feedback loop between utopian aims and educational approaches. Utopian aims generally suggest implicit or explicit moments of hope that energize practicable actions like teaching or learning (or even kindness). Educational approaches are student-targeted strategies and practices that attempt to do teaching work shaping a student’s thinking. This educational work looks different depending on the method or strategy of education (the pedagogy); educational approaches may be an attempt to transfer ideas, provoke critical thinking, challenge assumptions, or otherwise develop student thinking and knowledge. This thesis recognizes that education is a social practice; it is a work between specific individuals grounded in concrete actions to achieve social goals (usually regarding students’ thinking skills and knowledge). Different thinkers define education and its various goals differently, but ultimately the goals of education are hopeful. For example, thinkers like Sarah Scott may modify this definition to include education that shapes virtue in addition to thinking and knowledge. More generally, an author’s moments of hope necessitate a form of imagined progress towards an author’s ideals. A close examination of these moments of hope nearly always suggests a certain desired education of others, whether geared towards thinking, virtues, knowledge, or otherwise. In a word, hope signals or entertains a desired education of oneself or of others. The three authors in this thesis demonstrate strong utopian desires in their respective works, and this paper seeks to “take a tour” of their implicit or explicit “good” utopian
vision and consequent educational principles (or a tour of their educational principles and consequent utopian vision).

I argue that the virtue of hope sustains the utopian imagination and influences our everyday practices—especially when learning is involved. The practice of education necessitates the virtue of hope, and hope for development and progress accompanies the very act of teaching. By looking at the relationship between education and utopia, it becomes clear that Scott, Wordsworth, and Thoreau (whether intentionally or unintentionally) lay down their own pedagogic roadmaps of how to take steps towards realizing their respective utopian aims. By bridging the gap between the idealistic, impractical nature of utopian desire and the practical nature of education, this thesis claims we can arrive closer to understanding the educational work and goals a text hopes to teach the reader and the wider society.

Analyzing the interdependence of utopia and education demonstrates the usefulness and practicality of the utopian urge, or hope. This thesis asks us to examine our understanding of hope and its functions for human beings and human societies. When viewed as David Halpin defines it in his book *Hope and Education* (2003), hope is not a quixotic emotion to be dismissed by serious theory (whether political, moral, educational, or otherwise). Rather, hope is “a way of living prospectively in and engaging purposefully with the past and present … it implicitly involves adopting a critical reflective attitude towards prevailing circumstances” (Halpin, *Hope* 14-5). Thus, humans use hope as an energy to move on from the past (while still “engaging purposefully” with it, as the quote suggests) and to aspire in the present for something in the future. Hope, when understood as an energy humans use to navigate their temporal position, becomes a virtuous tool to be used in the present to generate progress towards the hoper’s aspirations for themselves or society. In this way, education, as a practiced act, is the process that
grounds hope to the present moment and becomes a primary vehicle towards actualizing one’s utopian aims. Not only does hope aid individual progress, but when used by a teacher, author, or other actor of education, hope pushes society towards that actor’s ideals.\(^5\)

Halpin’s *Hope and Education* explores the usefulness of reading expressions of utopian imagination for their inherent pedagogies and other educational implications.\(^6\) His book “offer[s] an analysis of the nature of hope and its utopian counterpart, and … explain[s] their joint significance for the practice of education” (1). While Halpin’s work refers specifically to classroom teaching, this thesis extends his idea to educational tendencies in literature. This project contends that an author’s writing and publishing work is a certain form of teaching work, but author-reader relations replace teacher-student relations, both of which depend on educational strategies. By turning to Sarah Scott’s novel *Millenium Hall* as an example, chapter one looks at how moral education finds itself in this matrix of present-moment pedagogy and future-oriented utopianism and offers the foundational principles of my approach. I argue that Scott was in conversation with John Locke and the Earl of Shaftesbury, early philosophers concerned with education and epistemology. This discourse suggests how teachers and authors contribute progressive momentum to the society-constructing power of custom. Chapters two and three then use this approach to read the utopian aims and pedagogic roadmaps of influential British Romantic and American Transcendental authors William Wordsworth and Henry David Thoreau, respectively.

\(^5\) I recognize that not all teachers, authors, actors of education, and other individuals are hopeful that their work may contribute to “big-picture” progress. However, this thesis stands by its own analysis of practicality, and finds value in even generating a moment of hope that leads to some form of goodness or progress for any individual.

\(^6\) Halpin suggests one example of the utopian imagination’s educational implication is a revived sense of optimism towards teaching that can ignite or re-ignite a love of teaching. It is worth noting that he likewise calls on governments and managers to enact policies and deploy resources in ways that demonstrates students and teachers are genuinely believed in.
Expressions of utopian imagination produce various structures: political, moral, philosophical, and pedagogical blueprints are but a few. However, I agree with Fátima Vieira that utopian thinking does not necessarily result in an explicit or acted on “political agenda” but “must be seen as a manifestation of the wishing nature of man,” which “has an energy of its own, which outlives the blueprint” (20-1). Thus, we should not see utopian thinking as intrinsically paired with its ultimate outcome, but rather we must understand that utopian energy is a valuable and practical element of utopianism when divorced from the assumption that its vision must be realized to its full extent to be useful. The utopian energy is a force in the here and now, despite the imaginative vision being necessarily future-oriented. For utopian thinking to remain practical, it must avoid solidifying into dogma or hegemony. Utopian energy transcends the particulars of time and place and does not depend on the content of the utopian vision. Through his analysis of hope and utopianism, Halpin ingeniously “repoliticizes” the utopian elements of education “in a manner that avoids commitment to any existing universe of fixed, or near-fixed, set of categories” (Hope 8). In the fragmented, postmodern present, this approach offers a way to invigorate utopian and educational studies that not only avoids favoring any one political hegemony but also avoids postmodern hopelessness about the future. I agree with Halpin that we should challenge the postmodernist tendency to dismiss utopian ideas as sins of totalizing and homogenizing. While Halpin’s argument concerns our contemporary education system, issues of contemporary education do not define or play a significant role in my argument. Nevertheless, Halpin’s approach allows readers to interpret utopia as an energy for our already existing, present-tense goals. This moves utopian thought from an imaginary ideal society to a utopia as a hope, a target, and an aim in the present moment. Halpin’s discussion carefully balances how the utopian imagination fuels an “aimed hope” that “entail[s] social objectives” without enforcing
those objectives (*Hope* 2). Ironically, utopian thinking naturally opposes dogmatic hegemony, for without imagined alternate ways of being, we will always be stuck to our current way of thinking. Thus, utopian aims are a pragmatic goal to work towards for teachers, writers, and thinkers alike. Fundamentally, learning is an ongoing process with no end; if learning comes to an end, it ceases to be learning. Likewise, if the “good” utopia loses its ongoing relationship with education and comes to an end, it ceases to be a “good” utopia.

This thesis does not view Romantic and Transcendental ideologies as yearnings for an immature, childlike past or unrealistic expectations for the future. By turning to Wordsworth and Thoreau with an eye towards pedagogy, this thesis is intimately concerned with the here and now. Halpin’s analysis of “ultimate hope” proves useful in demonstrating how utopian imagination has implications in the here and now. He writes that ultimate hope “refracts back to the present, holding up to it the prospect of a better way of life—for oneself, for others, and for society generally—while recognizing that there are likely to be obstacles on the way that will need to be challenged and overcome” (*Halpin, Hope* 26-7). It is essential that both utopian desires and hope in this thesis are read as something with actual effects on the present reality as it legitimizes authors’ various ideas despite how easy it may be to dismiss them as overly idealistic. While beyond the scope of this thesis, my own utopian hope is that these readings bring new life to profound thinkers whose ideas may have been or may become deadened over time by assumptions of impracticability—that these ideas were only dreams and have no empirical implications for the present moment. The context around an author and their ideas is always fading into the past. However, the utopian energies of those ideas will always retain a degree of practicality when appreciated by a reader. Keeping ideas, hopes, and utopian energies alive is an ongoing process, but when viewed as an educational process, we can appreciate the process itself.
as a worthwhile utopian pursuit. All the same, this thesis demands that we accept authors’ ideas as always idiosyncratic and contextual. In order for utopian thinking to be practical, the reader must appreciate how the education work of the author is applicable to the reader’s present.

Utopian thinking, when not critically engaged and rendered practical, slides our thinking into either foolish assumptions or cynical rejection of practicability. While this thesis offers a way of reading for utopian aims that can be applied to a wide variety of texts, Wordsworth’s *Prelude* and Thoreau’s *Walden* are particularly helpful in critically examining utopian hopes for practicality. Wordsworth requests that we engage our inspirations and hopeful thoughts “Not in Utopia” “But in the very world, which is world / Of all of us (11.140-3). Thoreau works painstakingly to engage himself and his reader in the reality of the always present here and now. This thesis discovers the utopian aims of Scott, Wordsworth, and Thoreau; the utopian visions (that are a part of the practical, always present-moment utopian aim) will often appear to depend on foolish assumptions, but each author selected helps maintain this thesis’s goal of present-moment orientated practicality. That being said, the utopian visions of these authors often depend upon all members of society being extremely (or unrealistically) intelligent, kind, loving, creative, and critical. This thesis reads these illusory visions as entertainments of a desire, but these imaginative entertainments create feelings and ideas that are useful and exist in our present world. These resulting feelings are a force in the present and a utopian energy that can lead us to, at a given moment, practice or entertain kindness, love, creativity, or critical and intellectual thinking and therefore contributing to the utopian aim. This thesis does not advocate that we achieve any utopian conclusion. This thesis examines the role that utopian imagination, as a force in the present (especially in regards to education), contributes to goodness and progress in the present.
Strategies for educational reform become apparent when an author expresses, even implicitly, utopian aims and sociocultural critiques, and roadmaps for utopian aims become apparent when an author expresses educational aims. Reading Scott, Wordsworth, and Thoreau’s educational methods and principles alongside their utopian aims reveals fruitful insights into their writings. Although the focus and scope of my thesis lies elsewhere, the analysis of the utopia-education matrix could inform literary criticism. Halpin’s work, which identifies how a certain utopian imagination should be adopted by teachers in the contemporary classroom, hopes to inform contemporary pedagogies or school structures. Likewise, my work uses some of those ideas to analyze the ways that a text’s (explicit or implicit) pedagogy engages the reader in an education that shapes their literary interpretations. By looking at how utopian desire functions in the process and methods of any form of education, we see how authors’ utopian desires shape the educational function of their works. Each text contains evidence of the author’s utopian aims which can be identified by analyzing passages with hopeful language or social critique. If we read a text for its hopes, and thus also the education it hopes to teach to its reader or society, even when those hopes are not explicit, we revive the utopian energy of the text, and the process of the utopian aim continues.

The foundation of this thesis lay in the educational-utopian energy latent in Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*, but it uses that foundation to also discover the educational-utopian energy of *The Prelude* and *Walden*. Even when fictionalized into the hopes of her novel’s characters, Scott believed that her utopian hopes, when paired with strong educational principles, could spur action in any reader regardless of time or place; the act of reading and learning belongs to the here and now of the reader and learner. By reading the utopian alongside the educational, this thesis reveals that Scott’s *Millenium Hall* is not only an early work of utopian and feminist
literature but also experimental in form and didactic strategy; that Wordsworth’s *Prelude* does not wistfully yearn for the past nor does it identify its utopia as a place but as the very source of human propensities like inspiration and hope; and that Thoreau’s *Walden* does not dismiss society, but radically rethinks the purposes of social institutions, especially those that can and should do teaching work to foster and develop individualized collectivism. This thesis welcomes that the three texts are quite different from one another. The three different authors are associated with three different literary movements, write in three different genres, and use three different primary themes. This thesis offers a way of reading texts that does not dismiss the historical contexts under which they were written, but allows readers to engage purposefully with that past and situate its (future-oriented) hopes in the reader’s present.

The first chapter, titled “Illustrating Abstract Love: The Utopian Pedagogy of Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall,*” looks at how Scott’s novel *Millenium Hall* experiments with the didactic form and, through a strategic deployment of a Lockean pedagogy, illustrates the utopian results of harnessing (primarily through education) the power of custom to diffuse virtuous principles. The original cover of *Millenium Hall* notes that the book contains “anecdotes and reflections, as May excite in the Reader proper Sentiments of Humanity, and lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue” (51). This title page indicates the didactic intentions of the story and introduces Scott’s faith in the power of education to “lead the mind” to virtue and humanity. I compare Scott’s pedagogy to eighteenth-century publisher John Newbery, who also subscribed to Locke’s epistemological ideas regarding children’s education. This comparison reveals that Scott uses a children’s-book pedagogy of illustrations (although, unlike Newbery, her illustrations are verbal, not drawn) to educate desired principles to both fictional characters and readers alike. Simply, Scott practices a hopeful teaching that requires both utopian aims and an illustration of those
aims to achieve love and benevolence at a social level and to combat patriarchal customs that lack the sort of social benevolence that Shaftesbury advocates through his concept of universal love.

The second chapter of my thesis, “The Mind’s ‘fabric more divine’: The Utopian ‘How?’ of Wordsworth’s *Prelude,*” analyzes Wordsworth’s *Prelude* through the concluding question of the poem which asks, “how the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth” (14.450-1). I argue that Wordsworth understood the very fabric of the human mind to be of divine power; thus, he puts his hopes in the abilities of the human mind. His utopian aim is widening the very source of those human abilities in the mind. Wordsworth explores how the human mind exercises things like inspiration, and he ultimately develops a pedagogy of inspiration that encourages the individual to appreciate the beauty of their mind by opening it to both internal and external influences. Much of the chapter examines these influences and labels them “teachers and ministers” (as Wordsworth refers to them) because they are practical here and now actors of education. Because of this emphasis on external influences that shape the mind, this chapter projects the aims of the Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Shaftesbury into the heart of the Romantic movement via Wordsworth. Wordsworth’s implied pedagogy reveals certain empiricist elements in line with Locke’s philosophies from my first chapter (and Shaftesbury’s, I would argue, although the chapter does not focus on this). Wordsworth famously asserted, in his poem “My heart leaps up,” that “The Child is father of the Man” (ln. 7); in other words, “the experience of the child … is the foundation upon which adult identity is based” (Halpin, *Romanticism* 41). However, I read the past child-self as only one “teacher or minister” out of an entire network that includes physical spots of time, internal spots of time, Nature, and the vague “Prophets of Nature” (*Prelude* 14.456). Wordsworth places educational hopes in these
teaching and preaching forces; an analysis of these educative forces reveals his utopian aim that more of humanity can develop their minds more beautifully.

Chapter three, “The Uncommon School of Walden: Thoreau’s Utopian Vision,” challenges isolationist perspectives of Henry David Thoreau’s massively influential Walden by reading its careful utopian aim through the text’s hopes and educational approaches. Chapter three argues that Thoreau’s Walden deploys a pedagogy of provocation to achieve wakefulness in himself and his reader that ultimately contributes to his utopian vision of what I refer to as Thoreau’s “Uncommon School.” The Uncommon School is the vision that fuels Thoreau’s utopian aims for both the individual and society and how they should relate to each other. This reading of Walden reveals that Thoreau’s ideal community is not defined by its government or laws but based on a community’s ability to provide access to whatever facilitates learning, culture, provocation, and wakefulness to the present moment. His discussion of the Uncommon School describes the ideal relationship between the individual and society in which everyone is a wholly independent self (or a unique identity) but open to both learning from and teaching one’s neighbors. While utopias are generally understood as ideal communities, cities, or governments, Thoreau’s utopia is necessarily a school; it seeks to retain the wholeness and independence of each individual by making them a student whose self-development and self-awareness defines their wholeness. This chapter thus locates the utopian energy of Walden in its pedagogy of self-development through provocation and wakefulness with its advocacy for the utopian vision of the Uncommon School.

The ideas of each author are idiosyncratic to their personalities and contextual to their time and place; however, their hopes transcend these particulars when read for pedagogic inclinations. This thesis identifies hopes and analyzes (implicit or explicit) educational efforts in
line with those hopes to locate an author’s utopian aim. This way of reading revives certain energies of the text even when the contexts of those texts become difficult to situate in relation to our own present contexts. While transferring the feminist ideas belonging to Scott’s eighteenth-century Bluestocking Society may not fit contemporary twenty-first-century issues, Scott’s hopes can still contribute to the modern feminist cause. Wordsworth’s social concerns are usually associated with the French Revolution, yet obviously his faith in the abilities of the human mind transcends the conflict. And, we can perhaps renew our own spirit or other faculties of mind through our encounter with his poetry and direct inspired honourable toil in the face of our contemporary conflicts. Even though Thoreau’s America belongs to the past, and America’s current landscape makes it impossible for us to physically live like Thoreau did, we can still live with his hopes of building enriched personal lives and relations with our human and non-human neighbors—whether we live in a city apartment, a suburban family house, or otherwise. The project of this thesis thus rests on the obvious truth that we learn from reading, but it adds that through reading for utopian aims we engage with a text’s hopeful energy. This project asks us to both appreciate and more closely examine what and how we learn from a given text and recognize that in learning we may contribute to or realize the author’s utopian aim.

Hope and utopianism have a profound and direct connection to educational practice, and vice versa. By analyzing the human propensity to hope and using it as grounds for an analysis of a text, we can deduce the utopian aims of a text. These gleaned utopian aims are intrinsically paired with certain implied pedagogies that give the utopian aims form in concrete educational practices. That any of these pedagogies should be adopted or rejected is not the point here; rather, this thesis demonstrates that the fruitful analysis of hope reveals the educational relationship between a text and a reader. Additionally, utopian aims can generate inspiration in
the reader’s present that can spur other honorable actions in line with the author’s hopes, whether that be benevolent deeds or mindful labor.

This thesis calls scholars to respect the essential connection between utopia and education and its practical implications, and this thesis hopes teachers (which many scholars working at universities are) can adopt aspects of this framework to rethink the purposes and functions of their own educational approaches. This thesis works as a reminder that the work of scholars and teachers is never useless, personally or socially. The process of learning and education and the process of continuing to believe in a better (wiser, kinder, more informed, or otherwise) future is never a fruitless endeavor. We can learn from Scott, Wordsworth, and Thoreau, that hoping and learning can produce goodness and progress. Professionals in both education and literary studies are utopian aimers. I hope that this thesis’s idea of the “utopian aim” as a here-and-now process might energize writers, teachers, and other thinkers to find optimism and hope in the fact that there is “no end in sight” because the endless process of learning and thinking grants us virtue, inspiration, internal beauty, independence, and appreciation of and wakefulness to the present moment.
Chapter 1

Illustrating Abstract Love: The Utopian Pedagogy of Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*

In her novel, *Millenium Hall* (1762), Sarah Scott imagines a utopian space for her female characters to escape to when they have been oppressed, exploited, and generally mistreated by a patriarchal society. Two male travelers, an unnamed narrator and his young friend Lamont, stumble upon the titular utopian space, Millenium Hall, after an accident in their travels. The rest of the novel consists of them taking a tour of the Hall, talking with the ladies who reside there, and listening to the histories of those ladies. Their histories contrast their unsavory experiences with the world outside of the perfect Millenium Hall with their lives within. In his introduction to the novel, Gary Kelly notes that Scott uses “characters, description, dialogue, allusion, and plot designed to imply a reformative relationship between Millenium Hall and the world outside” (26, emphasis added). I read reformative here as nearly synonymous with educative, although reformatory has connotations of religious virtue, reflective of Scott’s Christianity, rather than the more generalized term education that focuses on improving student/reader thinking more generally. However, despite the differing connotations of religion versus pedagogy, both reformation and education serve utopian aims through the thinking work of an individual.

Through her descriptions of her utopia and her inset narratives (the ladies’ histories) that depict the “world outside,” Scott creates the reformative relationship and places it at the didactic center of *Millenium Hall*. On the original cover of Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*, she notes that the book contains “anecdotes and reflections, as May excite in the Reader proper Sentiments of Humanity, and lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue” (51). Not only does the title page indicate the didactic intentions of the story, but it also introduces Scott’s faith in the power of education.
to “lead the mind” to virtue and humanity. Because of this faith in education and the use of framed character histories, Scott’s utopia is not a utopia that merely looks forward in time with a yearning hope to a better, more perfect society. Instead, Scott’s novel purposefully makes use of a utopian hope that engages with the past, present, and future and inherently involves her readers to do likewise: this type of utopian hope, to echo David Halpin, is “a way of living prospectively in and engaging purposefully with the past and present” (14). Scott’s reformative practice in Millenium Hall aligns with this definition in that it hopes education will lead to an improvement of the reader. Scott’s pedagogy allows and encourages meaningful reflection on history, benevolent thoughts and actions in the present, and a hopeful utopian vision of the future. This matrix is essential to appreciating the practicality of Scott’s experiment which finally culminates in the narrator’s closing remarks: “If what I have described, may tempt any one to go and do likewise, I shall think myself fortunate in communicating it. For my part, my thoughts are all engaged in a scheme to imitate them on a smaller scale” (249). Not only does this concluding statement demonstrate the result of the education work of Millenium Hall, but it also suggests the practicality of such education. That the narrator accepts he will imitate the scheme to his own scale respects that utopian energy transcends the specifics of time and place. In order to uphold and act on the principles he has learned, he must take the utopian energy and apply it “to scale” within his own contexts. Ultimately, by tracking the novel’s teaching experiment and reformative hopes, we come to a better understanding of Scott’s pedagogical strategy and its utopian aims.

This chapter seeks to examine the relationship between Millenium Hall’s pedagogy and its idealistic utopian goals. Ultimately, an examination of this relationship reveals the text’s utopian aims and the practical mode of education that actively reaches towards the desired target. Scott directs the pedagogic ends presented in the aforementioned title page towards both the
reader of *Millenium Hall* and the male travelers of Millenium Hall, suggesting the text’s desired education of its reader and society at large. This chapter pays particular attention to how Scott grounds her pedagogy in Lockean epistemology to justify her educational approach and aims. Comparing Scott’s pedagogy with contemporary publisher John Newbery, who also grounds pedagogy in Lockean epistemology, provides valuable insight into Scott’s novel. Heeding Locke’s advice on children’s education, Newbery used illustrations to help children connect abstract concepts to the material world. In a similar fashion and to serve the same ends, Scott includes physical examples and counter-examples that teach abstract values such as Shaftesburyan universal love to help her adult readers connect her philosophy to the world outside utopian Millenium Hall.7 Because *Millenium Hall* conveys abstract philosophy to its spectators through an imagined utopian space, this paper enters the conversation around *Millenium Hall* as an educational, philosophical, and utopian work. However, Scott recognizes that she has to convey a practical philosophy that connects the abstract ideals to the worldly to “lead the mind to a love of virtue” (Scott 51). Scholars have noted that Scott emphasizes a moral transformation in her readers and the male travelers; however, close reading additionally exposes an argument for a moral transformation of society.8 Ultimately, Scott uses a Lockean-grounded pedagogy of illustrations to achieve (or work towards achieving) utopian goals of universal benevolence.

**The Philosophical Groundwork of Utopia**

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7 By counter-examples, I mean an opposite example that demonstrates the undesirable consequences of a negative action. For instance, if “Love” and its positive effects are exemplified by one of Scott’s characters, the counter-example of “Hate” will also be used to show Hate’s alternatively negative effects.

8 Some of the key scholars who tackle moral transformation include Deborah Weiss, Christine Rees, Nicole Pohl, and Johanna Devereaux, although the notion pops up elsewhere throughout the scholarship of *Millenium Hall*.
Millenium Hall is a philosophical novel that makes a recognizably utopian argument. Within the first couple pages of Millenium Hall, Scott invokes John Locke’s epistemology by referencing tabula rasa: “for the foundation of most of our virtues, or our vices, are laid in that season of life when we are most susceptible of impression, and when on our minds, as on a sheet of white paper, any characters may be engraved” (Scott 53-4). Scott employs this empiricist philosophy early in the novel to serve her utopian argument. While I expand on the novel’s utopian argument in the third section of this chapter, it is worth noting here Christine Rees’s assertion that “it is the business of the utopian imagination to conceive ways of turning [power, property, and privilege that shape human relations] to good account and to ameliorate the conditions that distort and inflict suffering on individual lives” (4). For now, it is sufficient to view the “utopian” elements in Millenium Hall as a social thought experiment that manipulates the relations mentioned by Rees, and that usually define our real-world social environment. Furthermore, by subscribing to tabula rasa epistemology, Scott suggests that the environment shapes the behaviors and attitudes of the individual. This epistemology serves as the groundwork of Scott’s utopia.

Scott subscribes to Locke’s belief in the power of custom, which suggests that individuals’ minds adapt to their customary environments. Recent scholarship on Locke has been concerned with the issue of custom and its influence over the individual. Because Locke believed the child’s blank slate of a mind is malleable, children are particularly susceptible to “cultural transmission” (Grant 611). Sara Henary notes Locke’s belief that “if human beings are not ‘hardwired’ with certain ideas or tainted by original sin, the environment in which they develop will be the exclusive source of ideas and a significant influence on behavior” (186). Thus, the empiricist Locke was concerned with the power of custom as it dictates attitudes and behavior.
Condensing Locke’s argument, Ruth Grant states that “beliefs govern behavior and customs govern beliefs,” thus, customs govern behavior (609). Anticipating my conclusion, this Lockean understanding of customary power is a double-edged sword. On the one side it opens the door for a dystopian world of sin where disgraceful traditions and customs continue to shape the individuals of a society. On the other, Locke’s power of custom opens the more hopeful alternative: that a world full of virtuous customs and people would continue to create virtuous customs and people.

So, when Scott invokes tabula rasa at the beginning of *Millenium Hall*, she acknowledges the power of custom as Locke sees it. British patriarchal culture continues to pass its patriarchal beliefs and behaviors on to the next generation. However, the separatist community of Millenium Hall allows the ladies to construct their own customs, thus harnessing the power of environmental influence and avoiding the influence of the patriarchy. For example, outside the controlled environment of the Hall, the notably debased Lady Sheerness’s “understanding and principles were left to the imperfection of nature corrupted by custom” (Scott 173). Lady Sheerness’s unprincipled behaviors were the consequence of an unprincipled society. That Scott signals the corrupting forces of custom further demonstrates that her utopia draws on Locke’s epistemology. However, Scott contends that if custom can corrupt individuals, it can also redeem them and proliferate customary attitudes and behaviors for the well-being of society, hence the fictional existence of the Hall and the actual existence of Scott’s novel.

Although thoroughly grounded in Lockean epistemology, Scott also seems to borrow utopian ideologies from Locke’s former pupil and critic, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury argued that humans have an innate moral sense and are born with a sense of right and wrong (Barker-Benfield 105). To an extent, this moral epistemology seems to
contradict Locke’s tabula rasa. However, what must be understood here is that Locke himself noted that there are limits to the malleability of persons. Locke saw the child only as “highly malleable” and “open to the influence of custom” (emphasis added, Henary 187). He acknowledged that “the tabula rasa premise must not be carried beyond its proper sphere of applicability” (Henary 187). Locke admitted that there “are relatively constant features of the human condition” and that each tended to have a particular temper (Henary 187). Locke and Shaftesbury agree that individuals have stable aspects of character and temperament (Henary 187-8; Boeker sec. 2). Scott was concerned that the mind was mostly malleable and highly susceptible to the influential forces of custom, not that the mind was under complete subjugation of its environs. Because of this concession, Scott can invoke Locke’s tabula rasa for its applicability in illustrating the power of custom and still subscribe to some aspects of Shaftesbury’s utopian ideologies.

Shaftesbury believed that philosophy should always have a practical element, a view that Scott also shared as evidenced by her title page’s didactic intentions and her narrator’s concluding remarks which will be discussed later. Matching the language on Millenium Hall’s title page, Ruth Boeker notes that, “For Shaftesbury, philosophy is meant … ‘to refine our Spirits, improve our Understandings or mend our Manners’” and that “it should guide our intellectual and moral development” (sec. 2). Shaftesbury notably realizes that the intellectual journey of striving towards moral perfection was just that—a journey. Thus, he adopts a developmental approach to his philosophy that suggests that an individual should undergo the process of “developing a stable moral character” (Boeker sec. 3). This developmental facet of Shaftesbury’s philosophy emphasizes his “view that philosophy is meant to be practical” (Boeker sec. 1). It seems then that both Scott and Shaftesbury understood that philosophy should be
practical and educational. They viewed philosophy as a practical route of development for an individual. However, in *Millenium Hall*, Scott takes this route of development a step further and applies it to an entire society by way of moral enrichment of communities and subcultures.

Boeker’s article articulates the Shaftesburyan developmental model that I argue is in line with Scott’s own developmental model. Boeker demonstrates the developmental dimension of Shaftesbury’s philosophy by analyzing the dialogue between fictitious characters Theocles and Philocles within Shaftesbury’s influential *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711). Boeker dissects Shaftesburyan moral development into five different phases; while the first two deal with the two inner selves (the higher self and the base self) and stability of character, the latter three phases of Boeker’s analysis more closely align with ideas in *Millenium Hall*. Boeker deduces that the third phase of Shaftesburyan philosophical development involves developing “the character of a genuine friend,” which involves a love of humanity, not just love towards specific individuals (sec 2). Shaftesbury’s “genuine friend” ideal is an abstract concept, requiring the “friend of humanity” to think and feel at the metaphysical level (sec. 2). In *Millenium Hall*, Lamont critiques the attitude of working for humanity by suggesting that the ladies seem “to choose to make us all slaves to each other,” to which Mrs. Mancel counters, “No … I would only make you friends. Those who are really such are continually endeavoring to serve and oblige each other; this reciprocal communication of benefits should be universal” (Scott 112). The ladies of Millenium Hall seem to be Christian versions of Shaftesbury’s “genuine friend.” They practice and preach love of humanity in the abstract.

However, for Shaftesbury, it is the elite and more educated Theocles that is able to speak of this universal love; the more ordinary Philocles interestingly worries that “this complex universal sort [of love] was beyond [his] reach” (Boeker sec. 2). Thus, Boeker concludes on
behalf of Shaftesbury that it may be “too demanding to love humanity in the abstract” (sec. 2). Boeker notes that Philocles’s doubt signifies the fourth stage in Shaftesburyan development—that is, to return from universal reflections to “worldly interactions.” Because humans have to operate within their mortal lives, even intellectual elites like Theocles must practice their philosophies within their temporal and corporeal limitations; despite loving humanity in the abstract and universal sense, it still can only be practiced in the here and now of a single actor. Finally, stage five once again brings Theocles and Philocles back to “cosmological reflections on the self of the universe.” Philocles’s doubts following the third stage pose one of the roadblocks to the utopian desire for perfect social benevolence—it is simply too intellectually demanding and abstract to maintain a love for all of humanity. Because Scott understands and accepts that “many people lack the intellectual resources that equip them for highly abstract love of humanity” (Boeker sec 2.), she adopts a pedagogical strategy to assist her readers in making connections to this universal love. Scott needs more individuals to develop the capacity to love in the abstract so that her utopia may adequately function. Thus, Millenium Hall seeks to guide its reader through this difficult intellectual terrain, just as the ladies of the Hall guide the travelers through it.

Like Shaftesbury’s, Scott’s philosophical argument subscribes to attitudes of moral and philosophic development by way of education. In Millenium Hall, the governing ladies establish a schoolhouse for girls. Addressing the outcomes of the schoolgirls’ education, Scott writes, “one can set no bounds to the advantages that may arise from persons of excellent principles, and enlarged understandings …. In every thing their view is to be as beneficial to society as possible” (160). Education of moral principles advances both the individual and the society towards utopian goals of universal social benevolence. This passage locates Scott at the crossroads of
Locke’s epistemology and Shaftesbury’s universal social benevolence; by educating the girls who are still “in that season of life” when “any characters may be engraven” (Scott 53-4), the ladies of the Hall “hope to do extensive good” by making ideas of universal social love easier to develop (160). By educating and “greatly improv[ing]” the “rising generation,” Scott seeks to construct a mass culture of universal love and benevolence (54). Shaftesbury was notably concerned with the “relativity of all morality” present in Locke’s philosophy of customary impressions and influences (Barker-Benfield 107). Scott feared, but also admired, the power that customary forces have over social bodies; thus, she emphasized that we use the developmental power we have over ourselves and our youth for social good. Because custom could corrupt and be corrupted, Scott saw the control of customary forces as a war of moral relativity that needed to be won in favor of the true moral principles of God. To that end, Mrs. Mancel states that “in the Bible, there, independent of the political regulations of particular communities, is to be found the law of the supreme Legislator. There, indeed, is contained the true and invariable law of nations” (Scott 166). While Scott advocates persons to imitate the Christian God’s universal love, Scott and Shaftesbury certainly agree that intellectual and moral development’s ends should be a universal love of humanity.

Deborah Weiss also observes connections between Shaftesbury and Millenium Hall. To Weiss, the scene in which Lamont observes the enclosure that he assumes to be a zoo but is actually the home for the deformed “monsters” align closely with Shaftesbury’s ideas about suffering (478). Lamont notably states that the taming and subjugation of animals “was a triumph of human reason, which could not fail to afford great pleasure” (Scott 71); because Lamont’s attitude later changes (or, Lamont is reformed), this statement offers crucial insight into Scott’s didacticism. Weiss claims that “for Shaftesbury, the act of taking pleasure from the
pain of others was not only inhumane, but also inhuman and incomprehensible. In a system such as his, in which every creature was understood to work for either its own good or the good of a larger whole, a pleasure that did no one any good” was wholly “unnatural” (478). Scott and Shaftesbury share an interest in the social good that comes from humanitarian views. However, Weiss thinks that Scott and Shaftesbury’s similarities on the subject end there; Weiss contends that Scott sees that humanitarianism stems from God, whereas Shaftesbury claims it stems from our innate responses. Weiss concludes that Scott condemns the innate response as emotional and thus unreliable, for without “learned principle …. there is no telling what the results of one’s emotional reaction might be, whether it would be the impassioned pity of a Shaftesbury or the callous pleasure of a Lamont” (479). Lamont’s initial anti-humanitarian remarks and later admiration of love signals that forces worked to engender something in Lamont resembling Shaftesburyan benevolence. Whereas Weiss reads this as indicative of unstable emotional responses, I see Lamont’s shift as a useful illustration of broader social and cultural forces. Before moving to those broader forces, the epistemological dilemma of Lamont’s relationship with and attitudes toward the enclosure must be addressed further. Johanna Devereaux also notices the Shaftesburyan elements of the enclosure episode, although she sees it as evidence of alignment with Shaftesbury’s idea of innate human virtue, whereas Weiss saw Lamont’s initial reaction as contradictory to that innate virtue. In Millenium Hall, Lamont and the narrator enter the enclosure of the “monsters” and the narrator remarks that “instead of feeling the pain one might naturally receive from seeing the human form so disgraced, we were filled with admiration of the human mind, when so nobly exalted by virtue, as it is in the patronesses of these poor creatures” (Scott 74). Devereaux sees this episode as evidence of a “Shaftesburyan re-education” since the travelers’ innate sense of virtue was restored by being
shown “the redemptive power of social benevolence” (63). Thus, we face a dilemma in
understanding this episode: is Lamont’s initial reaction evidence that we cannot rely on our
innate emotional responses, as Weiss argues, or are the travelers’ reactions afterward evidence of
a return to their Shaftesburyan innate virtue, as Devereaux argues?

I contend that Scott’s subscription to Locke’s philosophies on tabula rasa and the power
of custom addresses this dilemma. The travelers came from society outside the Hall; thus, they
enter with minds that the forces of custom have already engraved by patriarchal and sinful
culture; this explains Lamont’s initially heartless response. However, upon being exposed to a
culture of true friendship and universal love of humanity, the travelers begin to develop more
humanitarian attitudes. In other words, the travelers see an example (i.e. illustration) of the
abstract universal love that Shaftesbury advocates and consequently begin to appreciate social
benevolence despite it being an abstract concept. When the enclosure’s wall stood between the
travelers and the “monsters” inside, Lamont could only value the conquest and “triumph of
human reason” (Scott 71). However, once provided a physical and worldly example of abstract
Shaftesburyan social benevolence, Lamont connects humanitarian behaviors with universal
happiness. Thus in this episode, Lamont, as a proxy for the reader, exemplifies Scott’s utopian
pedagogy. Scott offers the reader, as the ladies offer the travelers, evidence and illustration of
universal benevolence which establishes a connection between the worldly and the philosophic.

**Advocacy and Pedagogy**

Scott’s education takes on two dimensions. On the one hand, she must advocate that the
malleable future generations are brought up with sound moral principles of Christian virtue. On
the other hand, she wishes to develop in adult readers a universal love of humanity with a
Shaftesburyan developmental model. To the former, Scott demonstrates the social benefits of
education, particularly for girls. To the latter, Scott adopts a pedagogy similar to that of Newbery’s children’s books by offering illustrations to help people connect their worldly lives to abstract concepts that are important to achieving utopian values. In this section, I start by arguing that Scott advocates moral education of children by illustrating the social benefits. Then, I discuss how Scott seeks to teach and advance her readers towards universal love.

Scott establishes the need for a moral education system to create a more perfect society.

Returning to *Millenium Hall’s* title page’s desire to “lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue” in tandem with Scott’s invocation of tabula rasa, Millenium Hall must make sure that the “characters engraved” on the next generation are proper moral principles. Because of this subscription to tabula rasa, the bookcase at the sponsored school of Millenium Hall contains “excellent treatises of divinity, several little things published for the use of children, and calculated to instill piety and knowledge into their infant minds” (Scott 196). To reemphasize an earlier point, Locke believes the “child is a blank slate with respect to innate ideas or principles” (Henary 185); thus, Scott and the ladies of the Hall deem it crucial that these children are armed with moral principles and not “left to the imperfection of nature corrupted by custom” (Scott 173). The social benefits of this education are evident. The women “bred up at the schools these ladies support are so much esteemed” that young farmers “prefer them to girls of much better fortunes” because of the “manner of their education” (168). Women have a crucial role in the betterment of communities; however, there must be a system in place that does not corrupt their development. Millenium Hall serves as a model space where women can fulfill this essential role separated from the oppressive patriarchal norms and regulations. By constructing this model, Scott hopes to “tempt any one to” imitate the Millenium Hall model, even if it be “on a smaller scale” (Scott 249).
Additionally, the ladies are generating a culture of proper principles through this sort of education. The ladies offer the girls a practical and moral education and consequently promote those values in the surrounding country. Slowly this practice will begin to harness the forces of custom to generate a society that practices more principled livelihoods. Mrs. Mancel asserts that “love, as well as the pleasures of society, is founded in reason, and cannot exist in those minds which are filled with irrational pursuits,” which indicates the importance of engraving, through education, the virtues of love and reason so that the mind does not “fill” with irrationality (Scott 111). Mrs. Mancel continues that proper society “is a state of mutual confidence, reciprocal services, and correspondent affections” (111). Both statements from Mrs. Mancel strongly reflect Shaftesbury’s insistence on social benevolence. Because Scott also subscribes to Lockean philosophy, Scott’s utopia allows the ladies of the Hall to harness the power of custom to maintain the individuals within. However, once the utopian customs are maintained, Millenium Hall situates itself in Shaftesbury’s ideal notion of virtue: social harmony and universal benevolence. Therefore, Scott promotes the education of yet malleable children to inculcate their minds to a love of virtue in hopes of a resulting culture of social benevolence.

When it comes to adults whose minds are likely already “engraved” or “filled” with materialistic and patriarchal customs, Scott offers a Shaftesburyan moral development through an illustrative pedagogy. I compare Scott’s pedagogy here with her original publisher, John Newbery. Both Scott and Newbery ground their pedagogies in Lockean epistemology to achieve similar ends. Newbery notably sought to educate children through illustrations and other interactive, more material means. I argue that Scott’s framing of *Millenium Hall* offers her readers histories and descriptions to educate and, hopefully, reform them. Gillian Brown argues that “Newbery’s didactic books underscore the connection between materiality and abstraction”
Likewise, I argue that Scott’s didactic book connects elements of the real world, familiar to the reader, with an abstract, philosophic utopia.

Comparing Scott’s pedagogy with Locke’s and Newbery’s demonstrates how she establishes a connection between the material and the abstract and compels and allows readers to reflect on the abstract. Newbery uses materiality and illustrations to inculcate moral principles in child readers. As one scholar notes, “illustrations induce the process of examining and judging the links among ideas or between various representations of an idea” (G. Brown 353). Newbery takes this idea further by providing physical toys with his didactic books. In *Pretty Little Pocket Book* (1770), Newbery sells pins and pincushions with each copy of the book. In the book, one of the characters, Jack the Giant Killer, addresses the child-reader and informs them to stick a pin on either the red or black side of the pincushion depending on if they have performed a good action or a wrong action (Klemann 223-4). Heather Klemann writes, “The make-up of this book-toy composite suggests the primacy of the physical and material alongside the linguistic activity of juvenile didactic reading” (224). The story builds a bridge between the fictional world of Jack the Giant Killer and the reader’s real world. Newbery hopes to impart a practical moral lesson by engaging the reader’s imagination and situating a lesson in real life; “Thus Newbery marries Lockean pedagogy and epistemology in his publications” (Klemann 225). Newbery provided moral guidance for children, “but through the accompanying toy, implied that this moral education was readily actionable in the home” (Klemann 225).

Scott parallels this didactic tactic; although she does not supply picture-illustrations or attach a copy of the Bible with *Millenium Hall*, she offers example-illustrations and shows that a Bible can be picked up and read. Klemann concludes that Locke and Newbery utilize their material pedagogy to serve “practical, instructional ends” (227). Klemann points out that Locke
interacts with the reader directly in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), compelling the reader to acknowledge that they can receive his ideas. Thus, readers must acknowledge the physical tool of morality and instruction—the book. Klemann writes that the moments when Locke references the materiality of the book, its ideas “compel the reader not simply to read, but to encounter, observe, and reflect upon the text” (227). While Scott does not refer to the text of *Millenium Hall*, her travelers visit Millenium Hall to learn the same lesson as the reader of Scott’s novel. So, when the traveler Lamont eventually concludes “that [the ladies’] religion must be the true one” (Scott 248), the reader may also arrive at the same conclusion, having also experienced the description of Millenium Hall. Scott takes the materiality a step further, too; in the book’s final pages, she depicts Lamont reading the New Testament (Scott 248). As Weiss notes, “Through their example, the ladies provoke in Lamont an analytical revelation about the connection between one’s philosophy and one’s ethical role in the world” (484). Because the reader sees the fictional character Lamont picking up the Bible, a text that the reader can also acquire and pick up, the reader reflects on their ability also to reform themselves. Thus, the novel furnishes the reader with a reason to advance their understandings of true benevolence and an illustrative model to follow.

Additionally, Scott provides counterexamples to benevolent customs, through the histories of the corrupt, patriarchal outside world, so that her spectators can contrast and further understand the social benevolence of the Hall. In order to ensure a thorough education of the spectators, the ladies do not conceal any part of their lives. Ana Acosta argues that because of “the desire to instruct the reader,” didacticism and utopia intimately rely on transparency (109-10). Under this transparency, the spectators are given a complete tour of the Hall, so its perfection can be seen in its entirety—a truly perfect space can have no secret exploitations or
skeletons in the closet, so to speak (Acosta 112-3). Acosta also notes that *Millenium Hall* “[has] a narrative structure that mirrors the spatial organization of the place in which they are set” (116). She notes the framed structure of Scott’s novel and observes that the male travelers exist in the frame of the novel, and the inset stories of the women make up the interior space of the novel (114). The narrator in *Millenium Hall* notes that he was “curious to know” how the ladies got there, to which Mrs. Maynard replies, “I see no good reason … why I should not comply with your request, as my friends are above wishing to conceal any part of their lives …. If they have any follies they do not desire to hide them” (Scott 76). For the sake of transparency and education, the reader and the travelers are given complete illustrations of the ladies’ lives outside the Hall.

The earlier mentioned enclosure episode offers insight into the didactic nature and transparency of Scott’s framing of the novel. When the narrator observes a “seven or eight” foot hedge, he cannot help but ask what it contained. Acosta convincingly argues that “this opaque enclosure within the Hall can be seen architecturally to recreate the narrative structure, making *Millenium Hall* function as a frame, while the monster’s enclosure becomes the space contained by that frame” (115). Like the inset histories, although interior, Scott’s descriptions lay bare the enclosure and its contents, making it transparent to the travelers and readers. In order that the spectators may wholly and thoroughly contrast the perfection of the matriarchal Hall with the corrupt nature of the patriarchal outside world, Scott and the ladies must reveal their histories in full. The spectators are told about all the woes of the ladies’ pasts: Miss Mancel’s unsavory ultimatum at the hands of the depraved Mr. Hintman; Mrs. Morgan’s forced loveless marriage and the resulting abuse; Lady Mary Jones’s encounters with rakes and a fraudulent proposal. Descriptions and discussions of the utopia interrupt these troubling pasts. Just as Newbery
equipped his didactic books with illustrations or toys to emblemize moral lessons, Scott pairs illustrations of a society lacking a culture of social benevolence with a society built on social benevolence. So, Scott’s pedagogy not only offers spectators evidence and illustrations of universal love, but they are also given clear counterexamples from the more familiar outside world. Rees notes the utopian trope of the travelers experiencing an “alien culture” that they are forced to compare to their familiar ones (216). The travelers and the readers live in a patriarchal, mercantile society and must “re-examine” their understandings and beliefs by exposure to the ideal alternative (Rees 216-7). Thanks to the contrast that the framed distance allows, spectators can learn the benefits of Millenium Hall’s practices and the consequences of not adopting those practices.

Therefore, Scott’s pedagogy fulfills the promise of the title page: Scott offers “A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent: Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants, And such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections, as May excite in the Reader proper Sentiments of Humanity and lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue” (Scott 51). Parallel to Newbery’s pedagogy, Scott entices the reader’s imagination with descriptions of a fictional utopia and then situates the lessons in the ‘real world’ through the descriptions of the Hall and the inset ‘histories’ of the ladies. Not only does this pedagogy tie in Lockean epistemology, but it also marries itself to Shaftesburyan practical philosophy. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Shaftesbury offered a philosophy that encourages the reader to practice love on a universal scale. Hence, Scott’s pedagogy grounds itself in Lockean epistemology but with a Shaftesburyan and utopian hope for the reader to connect abstract universal love with their everyday lives.

The Utopian Goal
This section of the chapter defines the idyllic society that Scott demonstrates and desires to be replicated in the real world. Scott’s utopian goal is mentioned repeatedly throughout the scholarship and is patently evident in both the text itself and indicated on the title page: her goal is to achieve the very things that Millenium Hall practices. True to didactic novels, Scott makes her goals and intentions quite clear. However, I want to look at Scott’s utopian goal regarding education and her overall pedagogy.

As has been mentioned, Scott’s utopian goal is to advance individuals and thus society towards a perfect social benevolence rooted in a universal love of humanity. I agree with Weiss that “Millenium Hall, functioning as a philosophical novel, can be an alternate to the social world and an engagement with it at the same time” (462). Millenium Hall has to exist in the real world to be practical, but it must remain distant to demonstrate the benefits of generating an exclusively benevolent culture. Through the lens and argument I have established, Scott’s overall goal can be understood as a Christian version of Shaftesbury’s ideal social model. However, it is essential to note that Scott has not failed if her goal is not fully achieved. She adopts a developmental, educational, and practical approach to her utopian aims. While Scott wants Christian moral principles to be adopted and realized entirely and wholly in society by its individuals, she assumes her readers and her travelers can likely only “imitate them on a smaller scale” (Scott 249). Shaftesbury understood philosophic understanding as developmental; one was not simply either clear cut philosophic or non-philosophic; rather, everyone is progressively developing their moral codes. So too does Scott adopt this model. A society is not clearly a perfect utopia or a definite dystopia; rather, cultures are always developing their principles. Scott wants to push that development in the right direction. Hence, Scott’s utopia is pedagogic and developmental.
Before looking at the practical elements of Scott’s utopia, it is important to note that her utopia is separate from the corrupt outside world, although not completely isolated from it. Millenium Hall has to be distant from the real world so that Scott may demonstrate the beneficial results of adopting sound moral principles and protecting its women from oppression so they may practice those principles. This distance allows the Hall to demonstrate the constructive and advantageous practice of harnessing the power of custom. Because the Hall is self-sufficient, the ladies can construct a private culture of benevolence and humanity. Accordingly, all children brought up and educated under the influence of this system are naturally inclined towards social benevolence. The Hall’s separation exposes the spectators to the ideal alternatives to the real-world customs. As Devereaux notes, the space of Millenium Hall espouses “real” Christian values as the ideal alternative to the “tyrannical mercantilism” and “fashionable foppery” of the outside, male-centered society (58). Millenium Hall’s enclosure of deformed “monsters” further mirrors the Hall’s seclusion. Hilary Brown argues, “the monsters can be seen in some respects as a contorted mirror image of the ladies themselves. In the outside world, the human dwarves and giants—like single women—are cruelly abused by dominating masters” (473). In the outside world, the monsters “are put on display in the same manner as young girls waiting to be courted. However, at Millenium Hall they are treated with great sensitivity and regain a sense of self-worth” (H. Brown 473). Weiss also claims that “the structure of the enclosure in which the ‘poor wretches’ live can be read as an analogy for the ladies’ estate—a protected enclave, far from the prying eyes and corrupting influence of ‘the world’” (481). Scott’s utopia is distant and isolated enough from society to avoid being corrupted by it; it is enough of a social vacuum that it can practice and proliferate its own benevolent customs.
However, because the novel faces the real-world challenges of economy, poverty, and systemic oppression, some scholars challenge the novel’s ability to represent a utopia. Even so, I argue that because Scott’s utopia concerns itself with practical education and development, it must interact with real-world problems to an extent. As Devereaux notes, Scott agreed with Shaftesbury that social benevolence could not exist in isolation (62). Virtue must be practiced towards the public good. Mrs. Mancel indicates that people’s “happiness consists in fulfilling the design of their maker, in providing for their own greatest felicity, and contributing all that is in their power to the convenience of others” (Scott 112). True to the Shaftesburyan social model, Mrs. Mancel states that a decent society “is a state of mutual confidence, reciprocal services, and correspondent affections” where each person is “contributing all that is in their power to the convenience of others” (Scott 111-2). A true and perfect utopia with no problems to solve could not develop towards anything. Developing a pedagogy or philosophic argument that cannot serve the real world serves no practical purpose. As Devereaux states, “happiness and virtue are, for Mrs. Mancel, grounded in social interaction” (62-3). Scott sees that those benevolent, reciprocal services need to be practiced in the corrupted real world.

While one can argue that this reciprocal social interaction could be practiced in a trouble-free utopia wholly disconnected from the real world, a utopia of that sort would be impossible to replicate in the real world; Scott’s practical utopia needs to be attainable at least to a developmental degree. Millenium Hall has to exist in the real world for Scott’s pedagogy to be practicable by her readers; to Scott, an unpractical moral principle is useless. Weiss also notices this practical element between idyllic escape and real-world engagement. At the start of *Millenium Hall*, the narrator wants to leave his economic endeavors in Jamaica behind him as he anticipates his retirement and isolation from the real-world economy (Scott 54-55). However, his
education at Millenium Hall has shown him to balance utopian aims with real-world engagements. As Weiss states, “utopian desires are transformed into a blueprint for ethical action” (485). The reader, too, is offered this blueprint by reading *Millenium Hall*: “As a result of having heard the stories of the ladies, of having engaged in philosophical conversations, and of having seen the effects of the ladies’ moral philosophy, each man has learned the lesson most necessary to his own improvement” (Weiss 483). That Millenium Hall is not perfectly removed from worldly engagements is a crucial, practical element of the utopia. Hilary Brown notes that Scott’s utopian vision was rooted in her real-life charitable practices (473). Brown argues that Scott’s utopian goal was not meant to be an unachievable “no-place” as some scholars label it; Scott practiced the principles of charity that her novel preached. Like Shaftesbury’s practical model for philosophy, “Scott hoped to promote values which could be applied to the real world” (H. Brown 473). As Rees notes, Millenium Hall “assimilates the utopian genre to the novel of formal realism” (216). Scott practiced the charity her novel preaches within her life’s limitations. Scott’s placement of her utopian imagination on her real-life activities thins the line between the imagined utopia and the real world.

Therefore, Scott creates a utopia that seeks primarily to educate and advocate. Her utopia strives towards abstract goals of universal benevolence but grounds itself in reality. Scott imagines that if each individual could imitate the model of Shaftesbury’s “genuine friendship,” which is a love of humanity on the universal scale, our real-world communities would begin to look more like idyllic Millenium Hall.

**Conclusion**

The thought experiment of *Millenium Hall* illustrates the utopian results of harnessing the power of custom to diffuse virtuous principles. By invoking Locke’s tabula rasa epistemology,
Scott demonstrates that education has the potential to mold the behaviors and attitudes of individuals. Practicing and espousing Christian morals because of an abstract universal love of humanity proliferates those principles within a culture and, consequently, advances society. This moral advancement of society is Scott’s utopian aim in *Millenium Hall*. However, merely exemplifying that society is not enough to achieve it, so Scott created a didactic novel with pedagogical intentions of teaching principles of universal love and Christian benevolence to its readers. Like Shaftesbury, Scott understood that loving humanity at the universal degree was no simple task. So, Scott offers her spectators examples and counterexamples of universal social benevolence. In the enclosure scene and throughout *Millenium Hall*, spectators see the positive results of this abstract love. In the misfortunes of the ladies’ histories, spectators see the negative consequences of patriarchal customs that lack social benevolence. Scott wields a utopian hope that her text can educate readers about why they should and how they can adopt and imitate the virtues and morals of *Millenium Hall*. Never stepping beyond practical pedagogy, Scott hopes that her novel can teach its readers to love humanity. Therefore, Scott adopts a pedagogy of framed illustrations that bridge the gap between the unfamiliar abstract and the familiar realistic.
“But to a sound judgment, the most abstract truth is the most practical.” -Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Our goal is to discover that we have always been where we ought to be.” -Aldous Huxley

Chapter 2

The Mind’s “fabric more divine”: The Utopian “How?” of Wordsworth’s Prelude

William Wordsworth’s poem, The Prelude (1850), meditates and reflects on the development of his singular poetic mind to, as I argue, understand the development of the human mind more generally.9 I argue that Wordsworth’s utopian hopes in The Prelude reveal a dualistic pedagogy that operates simultaneously at two educational extremes: on the one side, he proposes vague, generalized objectives of learning, and on the other he uses the specific, idiosyncratic details of his own development towards those objectives. The utopian target is not identified as a place where the laws, customs, values, and inhabitants have been perfected; instead, the utopian aim of The Prelude is the inspirational and hopeful feelings that make the human mind beautiful and open to development, action, and progress. For Wordsworth, the way to internal truth and power was the way to development and wisdom, progress and beauty; and, the way is found in the question of “how,” not “what.” In a word, the pursuit of truth is what matters; it is insignificant precisely what truth is.10 If the proper way to internal truth and power is understood, followed, and practiced, Wordsworth has faith that the unknown result of that progress will be good, benevolent, and beautiful.

Therefore, my focus is twofold: one, we must examine the complicated network of teachers and ministers (or, external and internal forces and influences on the mind) and their

9 There are three versions of The Prelude: the 1799 version was only two parts (revised to the first two books of the later versions), the 1850 version was published shortly after his death, and the 1805 version was found as a 13-book manuscript much later. All Prelude citations in this chapter come from the 1850 version.

10 This statement of “insignificant” is only in regards to the utopian pedagogy; I do not propose that “what truth is” is insignificant for Wordsworth or myself, rather as a learning objective, the content of “truth” is insignificant.
pedagogy that Wordsworth develops throughout *The Prelude*; and two, I demonstrate that Wordsworth was a practical utopian whose aim was for more of humanity to learn and practice the way of developing the mind and the self by pursuing the invisible powers of the mind.\footnote{I use “teacher” and “minister” mostly interchangeably and parallel; the slight connotative difference being ministers work more with the sublime, morals/principles, and love, whereas teachers deal more with habits, manners, and lessons. I use both to respect this connotative difference, although its bearing on my argument is minimal.}

While the former focus represents an educational approach to understanding the text, the latter represents the analysis of the utopian elements in the text; notably, Wordsworth’s practicality focuses on the present moment and thus fits Terry Eagleton’s definition of a “Good” utopia that always uses utopian thinking to combine the forces of the present with the vision of what could be (22). In this twofold focus, I continue my use of David Halpin’s definition that the ultimate hope of the utopian imagination, when applied to education, is practical in that it “refracts back to the present” and acknowledges the obstacles between the present and that aimed hope (*Hope and Education* 18). The individual, for Halpin and Wordsworth, should not be determined to realize the utopian imagination’s ultimate vision, rather they should use that vision as inspiration and fuel to garner development and progress in the here and now. Thus, as will be demonstrated, Wordsworth pairs his educational hopes and utopian imagination with a humble decision to leave vague the target of those hopes. The very method and pedagogy of mental and spiritual development is all that can be written to a general audience because the target will always be contextual and idiosyncratic.

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth outlines numerous forces that constitute what I refer to as a network of teachers and ministers: basically, these are all the things that impress or engrave certain ideas, values, wisdom, or other lessons onto a human mind. In this way, Wordsworth’s thinking stems from an Enlightenment epistemological tradition of empiricism, although
Wordsworth deepens and complicates empiricism in significant ways. Most scholars note that Wordsworth’s ideas of how the essences of things in nature impress themselves on a passive mind has roots in Lockean *tabula rasa* empiricism. Daniel Stout writes that Wordsworth was “steeped in the Enlightenment legacy of Locke and Hartley” (308); Essaka Joshua claims that the “passivity of sensation is a philosophical tenet shared by Wordsworth and the Empiricists” (516); Kyungwon Shin states that “the sensationalistic aspects in Wordsworth’s poetry” most clearly stem “from the Lockean empirical tradition” (627). Wordsworth’s notions of sensation are very much in conversation with the empiricist tradition; however, I do not argue that Wordsworth was an empiricist or subscribed entirely to Locke’s notions. Instead, I argue that Wordsworth’s empiricist roots have a significant influence on how he understands mental development. When these empiricist roots are connected to notions of education, we see that Wordsworth’s approach to understanding the development of his singular mind extends to a model of the mind more generally. Thus, in *The Prelude*’s hopeful moments of Wordsworth’s inspiration and progress, the poem equally suggests how others may identify and relate to their own development.

Although it must be noted that while I generalize Wordsworth’s developmental model, I also work equally to demonstrate that Wordsworth works to render practical and idiosyncratic those generalizations.

*Wordsworth’s Prelude*, deriving epistemological understanding from Lockean empiricism, extends those educational tenets and assumptions into a hopeful text that attempts to inspire readers to tackle the challenge of finding the way to their own latent power. Usually or most directly, the way involves reflecting on Nature and the past-self to find “higher” principles (“whether of truth or virtue”) of “spiritual love” (3.531-3, 14.188). True to Wordsworth, however, this paper will not explore the meanings and ways that “spiritual love” looks and acts
as a philosophic tenet or generalizable principle. As Richard Eldridge keenly observes, for Wordsworth, “The scandal of philosophy … is that [the] natural development of the mind” is “ignored in favor of the pursuit of overly abstract, narrow, and impoverishing causal explanations of our behavior” (274). These are the grounds on which Wordsworth departs from the empiricist model and constructs his incredibly complicated, often frustrating, poetic model of how the mind develops and how it comes to discover its own power and beauty. W.B. Gallie argues that many do not read The Prelude as philosophical because of Wordsworth’s profound “passion … humanity … [and] conscientious realism,” qualities that “led Wordsworth, whenever his thought reached a certain level of generality, to feel the inadequacies of certain of our categories—both metaphysical and moral” (664). Thus, the dilemma this chapter tackles is how Wordsworth chooses to walk the line between developing a universal model of mental development and keeping that model practical, organic, and always rooted someway in the present moment.

I argue that Wordsworth simultaneously rejected generalizable models and principles because they impoverish organic understandings and praised the usefulness they provide because of their diverse interpretations and iterations. Wordsworth thus constructs an ungeneralizable generality: no singular model or principle can possibly work for every human individual, yet when one autobiographical model is paired in relation to generalized vocabulary like “truth,” “virtue,” and “spiritual love” and directed at a generalized audience, a certain ironically practical pedagogy emerges. This chapter focuses on Wordsworth’s concluding request in The Prelude for the “Prophets of Nature” to teach humankind “how the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth” (14. 446, 450-1). I propose that Wordsworth’s hopes in himself and the “Prophets of Nature” lie in a pedagogy of inspiration: the human capacity to be inspired
constitutes the “divine” “fabric” of the mind Wordsworth trusted faithfully (14.456). Utopian hope and imagination fuel this pedagogy of inspiration that finds beauty in how the mind develops, not the perfect and tempting vision of what it can develop into. Therefore, I develop here a Wordsworthian roadmap to achieving an individualized form of progress, love, and mental development by way of the pursuit of hopeful inspiration, humanity’s latent power.

**The Source of “Glorious Creatures”**

When read for its educational utopian aim, the focus of the *The Prelude’s* teaching method is the source of development, not the outcomes or content of development. Wordsworth’s primary focus was to know how the human mind came to be glorious, divine, beautiful, poetic, imaginative, virtuous, or otherwise in touch with some central truth or power of humankind; his focus is not on what the content of those terms are. Although Wordsworth avoids confining or reducing the what of human’s latent mental powers to terms or principles, he does investigate where lies the source of organic human sensibilities that afford certain mental developments. Thus, *The Prelude’s* utopian aims are not on creating utopia, but rather the text aims as identifying, understanding, and learning where utopian energy comes from and how to cultivate it. It is not a text that asks where utopia is, but where the source of utopian energy is; where does our passion for growth, development, beauty, and other pursuits come from? This source explains “how the mind of man becomes” “more beautiful than the earth” (14.450-1).

Wordsworth discusses this source at length in Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), which provides useful terminology in understanding what elements of the human mind he found so beautiful, and why he places faith in the mind’s ability to become more beautiful than the earth. In the Preface, Wordsworth discusses an “organic sensibility,” which poets are “possessed of more than usual” (6). He famously remarks that the poet “is a man speaking to men: a man, it is
true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind” (13). Of particular importance for my argument is that the poet only has “more” of this sensibility, meaning the rest of humankind has the sensibility, albeit to a lesser degree. The Prelude gears its focus on inspiration, “invigorating thoughts” or the “congenial powers” of the joyous “gentle breeze” and its internalized counterpart, the “correspondent breeze” (1.622, 39, 1, 35). This source of inspiration gave Wordsworth “A cheerful confidence in things to come” (1.59). The Preface on the other hand focuses on how poetry achieves its effects: how the “essential passions of the heart” are communicated; how “the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement” are illustrated (4, 102). I posit that the organic sensibility Wordsworth develops in the Preface is the “divine fabric” of the human mind in which The Prelude places its pedagogical faith. Thus, Wordsworth calls on “Prophets of Nature” to teach “how the mind of man becomes / a thousand times more beautiful than the earth” because he believes that the mind “is itself / Of quality and fabric more divine” (14.450-1, 455-6). R.D. Havens agrees that Wordsworth’s goal was to explore those “stores of power and wisdom hidden in the depths of the subconscious … and to make [them] available to man” (3). Thus, I read The Prelude as a text that not only tries to discover the way to such a latent power of the mind but to teach others the way, an attempt that sources itself in hope of a more general application.

While Wordsworth believed that this sensibility is natural for all humankind, he turns a critical eye towards the utopian question of why more of humankind does not achieve the level of sensibility of poets. Wordsworth notably uses a utopian imagination to ask the question:

Why is this glorious creature to be found
One only in ten thousand? What one is,
Why may not millions be? What bars are thrown
By Nature in the way of such a hope? (13.87-90)

Wordsworth ponders this “glorious creature,” which many scholars read as the poet, but here could suggest anyone with the strong, organic sensibility that makes the mind more in tune with virtues like joy, love, kindness, and other “divine” or “true” principles. Again, however, we must eschew the question of what these “higher” principles are: What traits would constitute this “glorious creature” capable of something Wordsworth only vaguely and sparsely refers to as “Intellectual love” or “spiritual love”? In other words, what are the contents of Nature’s ministry, what is the content of the lesson? Ironically, to remain practical, Wordsworth avoids attempting an answer to this question. Here, I agree with Daniel Stout’s claim that the correspondence between mind and Nature at the heart of Wordsworth’s Prelude “is entirely defined by a model of the human mind whose essential quality is the latency and indirection of its processes” (305). Stout continues that this correspondence is “at the level of form rather than content, and therefore not the correspondence for which we thought we were looking” (306). Thus, it is not the content of the lesson we should concern ourselves with but the form or pedagogy of the lesson operations.

Wordsworth’s pedagogy depends upon his understanding of the frame of the human mind. In the Preface, he writes that the poet understands “the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature” (17). Thus, Wordsworth works to develop and examine a pedagogy that plays to this organic sensibility that runs parallel to the properties of nature. In a word, his pedagogy follows, or at least tries to follow, the method of nature.

Wordsworth’s final stanza of the final book of The Prelude addresses the theme of a practical utopian hope developed by certain forms of learning afforded by humankind’s organic sensibility. Wordsworth concludes:
Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,
Others will love, and we will teach them how;
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, ‘mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of quality and fabric more divine. (14. 432-56)

That “this frame of things … remain unchanged,” despite the “revolutions in the hopes / And fears of men,” gives Wordsworth a source of utopian hope. So long as our minds continue to be human minds, so long as the face of nature continues to contain its essential teachers and ministers, so long as time continues moving forward and we have memories to enjoy or learn from, so long as we have poets and poetry, we can continue to appreciate a beautiful hope in the frame of the human mind.

Wordsworth’s choice of tense and use of educational language suggests the lessons taught by the “Prophets of Nature” onto the organic sensibility of the human mind continues affects present and future listeners. Wordsworth calls on these “Prophets of Nature,” which, as I will expand upon later, is an incredibly loaded phrase referential to an entire network of teachers and ministers; he then acknowledges his role (and perhaps the role of other poets) by stating that “we to them will speak.” That the Prophets of Nature, including Wordsworth, “will speak” launches The Prelude, the Prophets, and Wordsworth himself into future action. Then, Wordsworth outlines the pedagogy by which they will teach and speak: “a lasting inspiration, sanctified / by reason, blest by faith: what we have loved, / Others will love, and we will teach them how;” (emphasis added). Then, after the semicolon, Wordsworth blurs present and future tense in the word “Instruct”; the previous usage of “will speak” and “will teach” pushes the
reading of “instruct” to be read as “will instruct,” (where the “will” was left off for sonic quality). But, the standalone present-tense command to “Instruct” directed at “Prophets of Nature” grounds the command in the present (the author’s or the reader’s). Grammatically, “how the mind of man becomes” is the object of the sentence, or, what will be instructed. Thus, the objective of teaching becomes a lesson in the present for use and development now and later. Wordsworth does not argue that the mind is more beautiful than the earth; that the mind “is itself / Of quality and fabric more divine” only means that it can “[become] / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth.” Instead, Wordsworth calls on the Prophets of Nature to teach the way the mind becomes more beautiful than nature.

The “Prophets of Nature” teach a method, a practicable way. The only bit of knowledge the student-reader, or listener, needs to know is that the mind is of “fabric more divine” than even the earth. The human mind has latent powers drawn out by passions and inspiration thanks to its organic sensibility. That fact, Wordsworth hopes, is enough to inspire the student-reader to the pursuit of virtue, poetry, internal power, and all things beautiful about humanity and its relationship to Nature. Through a pedagogy of idiosyncratic practicality, reason, faith, and the more complicated “Prophets of Nature,” Wordsworth hopes people can make progress towards a sort of inner utopia—a blissful vision that restores and renews the spirit to a variety of positive effects both individual and social. Nevertheless, this utopian hope remains practical thanks to the very nature of the pedagogy Wordsworth develops throughout The Prelude.

**Wordsworth’s Utopian Aims: A Practical Generalization**

The unstable qualities of the feelings, passions, and wisdom experienced by the mind’s encounter with Nature constitute the source of Wordsworth’s utopian aims. Importantly, this source, the marriage of the mind’s fabric and the forces of Nature it encounters, is available to
everyone, not just poets. Wordsworth’s *Prelude* demonstrates a way the human mind develops and prioritizes the source of development over the content of the traits developed. Wordsworth saw that the positive development of an individual mind is a contribution to society. While Wordsworth certainly favored the poetic archetype, Barth notices the Imagination as an external divine “‘the feeding source’ not only for the poet but for us all” (31). The external divine, the power of Imagination, to quote Coleridge is “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (599). The important connection here is that the external powers referred to as the Imagination are capable of generating “sympathies enlarged” (2.175) and accessible to everyone. Thus, the lessons from Nature and consequential development can be had by all. Because of this, Wordsworth must examine the obstacles in the way of Nature’s ministry—whatever the contents of the lesson may be across any given context for any given individual. Wordsworth appreciates the complexity of achieving his utopian aims, and one thing he recognizes as practical is to remove some of the “bars” that constitute the dystopian opposite.

To return to his utopian questions regarding why the “glorious creature” is not found by the millions, Wordsworth notably examines the obstacles that stunt the beautiful form, or pedagogy, of Nature’s influence. In a word, if the source, poetic inspiration or sublime stirrings of passion, is available to all, what dams the source from feeding everyone equally? Upon asking the utopian question—*why can’t the world be full of this?*—Wordsworth steps firmly back into practicality: What obstacles get in the way of more people having the poetic inclination to receive Nature’s moral and spiritual influences? Wordsworth continues from his “glorious creature” passage:

> Our animal appetites and daily wants,  
> Are these obstructions insurmountable?  
> If not, then others vanish into air.  
> ‘Inspect the basis of the social pile:
Inquire,’ said I, ‘how much of mental power
And genuine virtue they possess who live
By bodily toil, labour exceeding far
Their due proportion, under all the weight
of that injustice which upon ourselves
Ourselves entail.’ … (13.91-100)

Wordsworth thus understands that bodily needs, daily desires, and labor exploitation are primary hurdles in achieving the utopian aim of more people receiving Nature’s lessons that could result in something resembling “spiritual Love” that “acts not nor can exist / Without Imagination” (14.188-9). Here, Wordsworth maintains his critical attention on how the mind becomes more beautiful by observing what is in the way of that progress. Again, he is not saying “what” the contents or traits of a perfect mind would be or what utopia is. Instead, he analyzes the route of mental development. The source of development, imagination or inspiration, is the target; thus, analyzing “what” is in the way becomes a practical exercise, whereas asking “what” the perfect mind or perfect society looks like is an act of useless, potentially dangerous, abstraction and generalization.

There are, for Wordsworth, human customs that distance us from Nature and the divine. These forces of the unnatural world obstruct humanity from achieving a more widespread “spiritual Love.” Wordsworth thus contemplates

The tendency, too potent in itself,
Of use and custom to bow down the soul
Under a growing weight of vulgar sense,
And substitute a universe of death
For that which moves with light and life informed,
Actual, divine, and true. … (14.157-62)

Here, Wordsworth identifies the barriers that hinder humanity from gleaning Nature’s divine, true, virtuous light. His conclusion suggests that his ultimate hope, his utopian aim, is for more, if not all, of humankind to be able to feel, to experience, profound internal encounters with
external Nature. Wordsworth identifying the barriers and customs again alludes to empiricist notions; that if we “fix” our external customary influences all human children can develop “properly” and thus utopia can be achieved. Wordsworth very importantly rejects this utopian prescription and promise of customary forces to “fix” society, for it robs something from organic development and individual agency.

The individual, for Wordsworth, has agency regarding self-reflective and self-interpretive actions. While much of self-interpretation comes from solitary reflection for Wordsworth, it is also essentially dependent on external community. Wordsworth warns readers from subscribing too quickly to empiricist promises of utopia dependent on “fixing” and stabilizing forces of custom:

Sages who in their prescience would control  
All accidents, and to the very road  
Which they have fashioned would confine us down  
Like engines; when will their presumption learn,  
That in the unreasoning progress of the world  
A wiser spirit is at work for us (5.355-60).

While generalized epistemological or scientific explanations for human behavior is tempting in its promise to “control / All accidents,” it ultimately dehumanizes the mind and turns humans into “engines,” thus distancing humanity from the utopian energy of its organic sensibilities. Richard Eldridge agrees that Wordsworth opposes those contemporary “engineers of human souls who would seek to analyze away self-sustaining moments of self-interpretation … in favor of causally law-governed psychic events” (280). Wordsworth thus deemed it essential that people not blindly assume philosophic tenets to be universal and all-defining; Wordsworth deemed it essential that people understood they have agency in self-interpretation and self-creation. However, as Eldridge is keen to observe, the influences of external community are still an essential part to self-interpretation. Eldridge argues that Wordsworth saw those who “most
fully assert their particularity and separateness from others” suffer a “plight of mind,” and that “Recovery from this plight occurs naturally when they come both to see that genuine autonomy requires community with others in a particular sort of expressive activity and to find themselves already so engaged” (274). Eldridge’s argument demonstrates the public nature of Wordsworth’s process of self-understanding and self-development.

Essential to the independent agency of interpretation is imagination. As W.B. Gallie notes,

Wordsworth was interested in the imagination as a revealing power … It’s peculiar virtue … does not lie precisely in what it reveals, but in the fact that the insights given are always incomplete and so leave us with a sense of ‘something to pursue,’ of ‘something evermore about to be,’ and a sense of how little ‘we know both of ourselves and of the universe. Thus, the chief moral effect of such visitations is to give our minds renewed appetite and vigour, to call up our powers for further exploration and verification. (668)

The human imagination is independent, individual, and a chief mode of self-agency and self-interpretation. Because Wordsworth realizes that nobody shares his idiosyncratic experiences, he establishes that the imagination must be individual and hopes that he offers enough inspiration and faith that the reader will pursue their own “honourable toil.” Wordsworth writes,

    Imagination having been our theme,
    So also hath that intellectual Love,
    For they are each in each, and cannot stand
    Dividually.—Here must thou be, O Man!
    Power to thyself; no Helper hast thou here;
    Here keepest thou in singleness thy state:
    No other can divide with thee this work:
    No secondary hand can intervene
    To fashion this ability; ‘tis thine,
    The prime and vital principle is thine (14.206-15)
We see here that Wordsworth retains practicality, the practice of a “good” utopian, the utopian who emphasizes the here and now uses of utopian aims. Despite focusing on only his own experiences throughout *The Prelude*, he hopes that his readers are both inspired and capable of practicing a similar reflection. The work of development, learning, and progress thus operates at the level of the individual. The direction to a more perfect world is not paved by the laws and customs of society, but by “you” alone.

But even this faith in solitude and power of individuality is challenged by Wordsworth; and, in my argument the conflict between the individual and society must be analyzed to reveal the utopian and communitarian necessity of his pedagogy. David Ellis notices that “the truth that our lives are largely determined by our relations with other people is far from neglected” in *The Prelude* (134). Ellis writes that for Wordsworth “it is an essential feature of the true self to feel itself part of society,” but this feature is unsettling in the face of the “disappointment in the Revolution” which caused Wordsworth to question his “faith in human nature.” Ellis notes that the struggles of the French Revolution and other harsh realities of the world of “hunger-bitten girl” from Book IX were primary motivating factors for Wordsworth’s toil (144-5, 155). While *The Prelude* is certainly not an explicit political work, these political factors reveal the essential role the relationship between the individual mind and the external social world plays in the development of both. Zoe Beenstock analyzes Wordsworth’s back and forth struggle to balance the line between individual sovereignty and social communitarianism. She primarily compares and contrasts Wordsworth’s views in *The Prelude* with the ideas of Rousseau’s social contract theory. To Beenstock, *The Prelude* is not a flight from politics into the individual imagination, but rather a modification to contemporary ideas of social contract; since Beenstock sees that they ultimately threaten each other, she argues that Wordsworth complicates the balance between the
individual will and the general will. However, Beenstock importantly notes that Wordsworth sees this tension as “a place of productive tension” (109). The notion of productive tension is valuable in bridging the paradox of Wordsworth’s realization that the individual will and the general will are always at odds. When we focus our hopes on inspiration and the way of development, that tension becomes another source of hope in that it is productive to the imagination and development. Perhaps, Wordsworth hopes, the “One only in ten thousand” may find its quantity slowly increased by the learning of Nature’s lessons through one’s own imagination and reflection, even in the face of conflicting values.

By navigating a complex matrix of Nature, imagination, memory, the past-self, and reflection, Wordsworth creates a complicated moral pedagogy that inevitably has utopian aims. However, Wordsworth keeps his utopian impulses in strict check by focusing on the practical here and now and openly limiting his assumptions of humanity through his personal, poetic perspective. Wordsworth admits that his perspective is narrow, single, and limited. But, with faithful optimism, he hopes that his work has practical use for others. At the end of the first book, Wordsworth writes:

The road lies plain before me;—'tis a theme
Single and of determined bounds; and hence
I choose it rather at this time, than work
Of ampler or more varied argument,
Where I might be discomfited and lost:
And certain hopes are with me, that to thee
This labour will be welcome, honoured Friend! (1.637-47)

Importantly, Wordsworth restricts himself from philosophizing in abstract and general principles to be applied to humanity at large. His “theme” is “single” rather than “Of ampler or more varied argument.” Prior, Wordsworth writes that

Meanwhile, my hope has been, that I might fetch
Invigorating thoughts from former years;
Might fix the wavering balance of my mind,
And Haply meet reproaches too, whose power
May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
To honourable toil. (1.621-6)

He understands the chance that “these hopes” might “Prove vain”; he might not better understand himself, and “thou,” the reader, might not come “to know / With better knowledge how the heart was framed / Of him thou lovest” (1.626-30). Nevertheless, all the same, his address to the reader reflects a “humanity-at-large” readership and his ultimate utopian hope that his readers will come away with something learned or experienced. In Wordsworthian fashion, he conflates, blurs, and leaves open that something; however, the passage suggests that Wordsworth assumes one of the things learned could be a better understanding of those the reader loves. Nonetheless, despite his humble realization that the outcome might not be achieved, he maintains the hope that the reader might hear the “Prophets of Nature” “speak / A lasting inspiration” and come to know how the mind of man “becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth.”

As the rest of this thesis argues, anywhere there are traces of teaching and learning, there are traces of utopian hope, or utopian aims, and vise versa. Wordsworth aimed high his hopes for humanity; he contemplates the internal progress of an individual mind and the relationships and effects that ultimately constitute the human social body. Sarah McDowell observes Wordsworth’s faith in the future-oriented promise of reading. She notices that Wordsworth values “the hope that the relationship [between writer and reader] will be sustained through the promise of a future reading” (59-60). She discusses Wordsworth’s praise in the writer-reader relationship’s ability to transcend temporal boundaries and fulfill the promise of writing and reading. However, similar to my argument, McDowell notices the humble practicality of that hope: she beautifully writes that Wordsworth understands “The acceptance that things need not
always keep to their promise still recognizes the need to keep quietly tucked away the fond belief that they must” (75). Wordsworth repeatedly acknowledges that “these hopes” might “Prove vain,” but the very nature of hope silently and confidently trusts the promises of hope.

**Recognizing our Teachers and Ministers**

A vast and complex network of teachers and ministers populate *The Prelude*, forces that complement, trigger, or otherwise assist the human mind in accessing or using its invisible powers. While the “divine fabric” of the human mind allows its beautiful development, the teachers and ministers are external influences that help shape that fabric into something more beautiful. The poem places extraordinary faith in the potential of this network of teachers and ministers to develop and provide a foundation for a human mind. While Wordsworth provides the specific details of his development, the specifics do not directly contribute to the generalized method of development he presents. Again, this is where Wordsworth is profoundly different than his empiricist predecessors: He does not propose an abstract, universal philosophical model for how the human mind develops like we see with Locke or Shaftesbury. Instead, he demonstrates that the way the mind develops is ungeneralizable except that the source of that development can be identified only through completely idiosyncratic experiences or overtly vague terminology precisely because vague terminology is always interpreted idiosyncratically by the reader. Thus, *The Prelude* does not inform how we might “properly” educate the children in an ideal society. Instead, the poem reflects how the past-self and an admiration of Nature can teach and inspire the present and future self.

The idea of “past-self” must be unpacked and complicated; in *The Prelude*, the term constitutes more than a simple understanding of the past-self as an individual as they were in an earlier time. Wordsworth complicates both how the self exists in an earlier time and the
functioning of memory regarding the past-self. Regardless of this complication, in the reflection of the past-self in this way, the child becomes the teacher of the present and future adult-self. Or, in Wordsworth’s famous terms, “The Child is father of the Man” (“My Heart Leaps up,” In. 7).

Wordsworth extended and challenged the ideas of Lockean empiricism. One common thread between Locke and Wordsworth is that they both share the belief that the child-self significantly informs the adult. But, Wordsworth challenges and complicates the empiricist notion of how the child-self teaches the adult-self by regarding the past-self as a teacher or minister. Where Locke sees the adult as a more completely inscribed slate as opposed to the *tabula rasa* of the child, Wordsworth sees the adult as a separate entity, in a different state of existence, but who has memories that, when revisited by the adult-self, carry essential and self-developing lessons for the adult. As a young individual navigates life, they will encounter various “spots of time” that contain a certain power capable of developing, “nourish[ing]” and “invisibly repair[ing]” the mind, particularly when revisited upon reflection (12.208, 214). This ubiquitously quoted spots of time passage will be revisited later in my argument, as it works to advance and connect various threads and effects of the ministry and teaching network. Notably, the “spots of time” passage extends beyond simple memory and past experiences.

Wordsworth values the role of memory and previous experience as an educative force. For Wordsworth, Nature had the unique ability to teach the mind higher principles, but Wordsworth was aware that these higher principles would not be fully understood or able to be put to practice by younger minds whose intellects are still developing.¹² Wordsworth writes,

——the earth  
And common face of Nature spake to me  
Rememberable things; sometimes, ‘tis true,

¹² This appreciation of the difficulty of understanding and putting to practice high or abstract principles is similar to Shaftesbury’s “universal love” debate between Theocles and Philocles from the previous chapter.
By chance collisions and quaint accidents
(Like those ill-sorted unions, work supposed
Of evil minded fairies), yet not vain
Nor profitless, if haply they impressed
Collateral objects and appearances,
Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep
Until mature seasons called them forth
To impregnate and to elevate the mind. (1.586-96)

Like the planting of a seed, the “face of Nature” teaches “Rememberable things” that are
“lifeless then, and doomed to sleep” until the adult-self of “mature seasons” reflects. Upon the
present-tense act of reflection, the mind of the adult-self is “elevate[d].” In this regard, there
exists a harmony between the past-self and the present-self. The past childlike self is capable of
hearing the various profound lessons from Nature; the present adult self is capable of making
certain connections and links from those encounters. Notably, the adult-self acquires
development upon reaching into the experiences of the child-self; thus, we return to noticeably
empiricist notions. While there is no clean equation of the tabula rasa, the past-self grants
lessons to the adult learner.

As this thesis suggests, pedagogic moments correlate directly to moments of hope and
utopia. And this transaction gives Wordsworth hope; he writes,

Meanwhile, my hope has been, that I might fetch
Invigorating thoughts from former years;
 Might fix the wavering balance of my mind,
And Haply meet reproaches too, whose power
May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
To honourable toil. (1.621-6)

This passage demonstrates that Wordsworth hopes the experiences or lessons his of his child-self
may be converted into “Invigorating thoughts”; that he seeks invigoration suggests a connection
to inspiration and sensibility—those invisible powers of the mind. Here, we also learn that
Wordsworth hopes to “fix the wavering balance of [his] mind” by present reflections of the past
self. The word “fix” here holds twofold meaning. One, he feels that his present adult mind has lost some degree of balance, and he wishes to repair his mind and restore balance; additionally in the other sense of the word “fix,” he hopes to fasten and secure the permanent balance of his mind. In this struggle for balance, Wordsworth complicates the transaction from past to present; thus, the empiricist roots and the clean teacher-learner transaction are challenged. Michael Bedsole comments on this “balance” as one of the primary paradoxes present throughout The Prelude. Bedsole claims that Wordsworth struggles to balance a sense of self-identity. On the one hand, Wordsworth seeks to embody and recapture the identity of his former years, but on the other, the very act of reflection reinforces his present tense gap and distance from that idealized past. Bedsole writes that “[Wordsworth] indulges in recollection for the purpose of emotional revivification, a usage of memory which works to suggest a cohesive, unified self.” However, according to Bedsole, “the very use of memory undercuts his efforts at constructing the unity of self he seeks” (422). The relationship is thus not as harmonious as Wordsworth’s hopes suggest. The model of the child-self teaching the adult-self is complicated as it no longer follows the tabula rasa equation since the two selves are not unified. However, I disagree with Bedsole that this crisis disjoins Wordsworth and usurps his hopes.

While the act of reflection may indeed prove his stuckness in the present, I think that Wordsworth is practical enough of a Romantic to recognize these reflections for what they are—a mental exercise. The following passage is the focus of the crisis that Bedsole identifies, but in the “wide … vacancy,” I read a hopeful slate of possibility and growth:

A tranquilizing spirit presses now
On my corporeal frame, so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind,
That musing on them, often do I seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other Being. (2.27-33)

And why would Wordsworth not value that “wide … vacancy”? After all, does he not subscribe to Romantic notions that the sublime invigorates and stirs the imagination?13 It seems Havens would agree: “For it was the sublime and terrible in the external world that impressed [Wordsworth] most; it was these that came to his mind first when he thought of the ministry of nature” (46). While this refers to the sublime of external nature, I believe it to be equally relevant to any source of the sublime, whether internal, external, or some “spirit” in between. In short, this “tranquilizing spirit” is a source of sublime experience for Wordsworth and, thus, a source of hope for restoration and renewal. Bedsole argues that the matrix in which “Events, perceptions, and reflection intermingle … recursively and indefinitely … implies, too, the impossibility of constructing a reality in which any of these elements can be understood apart from one another” (425). Ultimately, Bedsole concludes that this suggests the reflection is not used to “nourish” or “repair” the mind, “but as a means for self-construction and self-understanding” in order to “overcome this disunity” (434). However, I argue that Wordsworth understands the gap between the idealized, nostalgic past and the present-self and thus treats memories and spots of time like teachers, separate from the self but capable of teaching and elevating the self. That the empiricist correlation of past-defines-present is severed is not a source of existential crisis but a source of possibility and hope. In short, Wordsworth’s attempt to “fetch / Invigorating thoughts from former years” is not a wistful yearning but a genuine attempt to learn from the now separate past-self, a teacher in the here and now of the present mind. That they are recollectable memories suggests their usefulness in the present. Recalling these spots of time thus does not sever Wordsworth from his past-self but reinforces that those moments are a part of his present-tense

13 See Edmund Burke’s A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757).
development and thus can serve as present-tense teachers. We may get further away from a moment when we learned something, but that does not mean that lesson belongs only to a separate self.

Wordsworth is a practical optimist who was capable of locating internal struggles and finding peace and harmony even amongst discontinuity and disunity. Another scholar also notices Wordsworth’s struggle to assimilate memories of himself with his current, present-tense identification of his self; Laura Quinney contends that Wordsworth sees past memories as ghosts, or alien forms, that “haunt” the mind (293). Like Bedsole, Quinney also reads the “two-consciousnesses” passage as a primary indicator of a struggling Wordsworth. Quinney reads Wordsworth’s *Prelude* as a work that “poeticized Locke, where poeticize means to deepen the resonance” (294). In short, Wordsworth uses a similar epistemological model, but rather than the blank slate receiving permanent engravings from external stimuli that forever shape and constitute the mind, Wordsworth challenges the empirical solidity of those impressions. Quinney writes, “the world stamps its image upon the mind but the image is frail and ghostly,” and that for Wordsworth, “Consciousness does not recognize itself unproblematically in its past experience; on the contrary, it feels itself to have diverged so much from its former constitution that it hardly knows itself in its old self” (296, 300). Bedsole identifies the “problematic status of [Wordsworth’s] own project” in that the poet’s contemplations are a “simple reaction to his own existential self-diminishment” (434). Quinney concludes that “Wordsworth’s representation of the self [is] porous, fragmented, haunted and half-blind” (300). A deeply poetic empiricist label does seem appropriate for *The Prelude*; however, I do not think Wordsworth’s attempts to generate a unified self-identity by exploring the development of his mind is as crisis-inducing as Bedsole and Quinney seem to indicate. Attempts at self-understanding are not a matter of crisis
but are utopian and full of hope; much can be learned from the teacher past-self and the reflective process of self-interpretation. As Eldridge points out, “To be a person at all, Wordsworth’s example shows us, is to be engaged with others in an unending activity of the interpretation of oneself as objectively directed to certain ends” (290-1). Sure, the “unending” nature of self-interpretation is daunting, but in the unending task lies purpose and promise, which necessitates a certain anxiety to induce action, or “honourable toil.”

Finally, Wordsworth’s “spots of time” passage reveals and complicates yet even further the source and wisdom of reflective ability to extend beyond the self into a more extensive network of teachers and ministers. The passage is often read as a contemplation on memory; the spots of time are past personal experiences that exist in the mind of the adult. These spots were profound then and remain profound in the reflecting adult. However, not only can the present-self use spots of memory to learn from the past-self, but also the spots of time can be understood as external physical forces completely outside the self. I quote the passage at length, for not only do many read this as a sort of thesis of *The Prelude*, but it depicts the influential forces of the teachers and ministers of Nature and their effects on the “divine fabric” of the mind:

There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life that give
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
The mind is lord and master—outward sense
The obedient servant of her will. … (12.208-23)

The spots of time are not merely profound moments in memory for recollection (although they are certainly that, too), but they are spots in external space and time. The “efficacious spirit” notably “lurks”; a personification that renders the spirit not just individualized, but of an external and public nature. Bernadette Guthrie discusses the gibbet mast on the moor scene and concludes that the physical, material “spot,” in which the boy Wordsworth encounters the gibbet mast, inscribes and imprints lessons not from Nature or himself, but from previous actions of humankind. The “otherness” that Wordsworth encounters in that “spot of time” is not just that of God or Nature or “Being, but the otherness of past beings and ways-of-being” (192). Her reading then turns to the following passage:

Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours. I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give,
Else never canst receive. The days gone by
Return upon me almost from the dawn
Of life: the hiding-places of man's power
Open; I would approach them, but they close.
I see by glimpses now; (12.272-81).

Guthrie then notes, “The passage reinforces the role of the spots of time as ‘grounds’ of the self—‘the base / On which thy greatness stands’” (194). She offers a provoking claim that suggests the past-self is not the only past-identity that teaches modern subjects. Guthrie writes, “the ‘days gone by’ that are the ‘hiding-places of man’s power’ extend far beyond the days of Wordsworth’s individual childhood and instead represent a much more capacious understanding of ‘the dawn of life’” (194). The “capacious understanding” Guthrie refers to posits that previous ways of being and previous identities influence present individuals’ minds at certain “spots of
time.” Guthrie’s contemporary criticism must be appreciated by my argument for a couple reasons: one, it broadens the “past-self as teacher” I have developed; and two, it presents another external power capable of impressing present and future minds. While it is not my goal to locate other supernatural spots of time where previous ways of being pressure Wordsworth as Guthrie’s conclusion advocates, her argument nonetheless must be acknowledged, for it further complicates any linearity of pedagogy; Wordsworth suggests our minds and our sensibility are under constant pressure from a wide variety of influencing forces. The “river of [the] mind” thus has innumerable tributary sources (2.209).

Wordsworth’s repeated references to Nature, imagination, and the divine warrant analysis regarding these teaching forces as well. Nature has a vital role to play in higher virtues and inner progress. Wordsworth had an optimistic faith in the moral and intellectual benefits that could arise from the relational interchange between silent and external forces of Nature and humankind’s internal response. Essentially, Wordsworth saw Nature as a teaching force—something that exerted a thinking or imaginative work on an observer. Additionally, Nature offers an energy and enthusiasm to pursue the course, to follow through, with that thinking work. Nature, the universal minister, preaches (particularly to the poet) lessons that exist forever as a “spot of time” in the memory of the hearer:

—The voice
   Was Nature’s, uttered from her Alpine throne;
   I heard it then and seem to hear it now—
   “Your impious work forbear, perish what may,
   Let this one temple last, be this one spot
   Of earth devoted to eternity!”

Wordsworth wants to immortalize not only that place of earth but also that moment in time in that place. Again, where Nature’s voice was heard could be a “spot of time” in Wordsworth’s mind wherein the “temple” is a memory with a “distinct pre-eminence [that] retain[s] / A
renewing virtue” (12.209-10). To return to Guthrie’s argument, the “temple” may also be a
temple in a more physical, traditional sense: a physical location meant to preserve a previous
way of being. Wordsworth hopes his poetry can immortalize that particular utterance of the voice
of Nature in part, but he acknowledges that the true experience of Nature’s uttered ministry will
forever remain in that one “spot of time,” particular to that time and place:

—even so, its powers and aspects
Shape for mankind, by principles as fixed,
The views and aspirations of the soul
To majesty. Like virtue have the forms
Perennial of the ancient hills; nor less
The changeful language of their countenances
Quickens the slumbering mind, and aids the thoughts,
However multitudinous, to move
With order and relation. (7.753-61)

The ministry of Nature may land on diverse ears in diverse ways, but the height of the morals
imparted lead to a certain unity of humankind. One of the virtues imparted on these students and
learners of Nature’s ministry is that of hope itself: “its powers and aspects /Shape for mankind …
the views and aspirations of the soul / To majesty.”

Conclusion

All the same, he insists upon reflecting and hoping that there can be realized more of
those “glorious creatures” capable of easily receiving nature's impressions and converting them
into naturally enlarged sympathies and “spiritual love” (13.87, 14.188). Tracing certain habits to
the roots of their inception is a recognizably impossible task, yet Wordsworth admits that is, in
part, what he seeks to do:

Time, place, and manners¹⁴ do I seek, and these
Are found in plenteous store, but nowhere such
As may be singled out with steady choice;

¹⁴ Jonathan Wordsworth, et al. here translates: “general way of life; morals; habits”
No little band of yet remembered names
Whom I, in perfect confidence, might hope
To summon back from lonesome banishment,
And make them dwellers in the hearts of men
Now living, or to live in future years. (1.146-65)

He identifies the folly of the task; he realizes there is no philosophic nor mathematical equation
to trace mental influences and habits, that “nowhere such / As may be singled out with steady
choice,” but he still believes that the direction of those habits can be positive regardless of how
individualized or nebulous they are. Wordsworth goes forth in “perfect confidence” thanks to his
profound hope that higher morals and habits may be revived in the hearts of men. This is
precisely the Romantic hope, or faith, that this thesis wants to do to revive in fields deadened
with nihilism or postmodern hopelessness. A humble recognition that the diversity of values,
habits, and morals can never know true unity or universal acceptance but that the direction can
nevertheless be positive in nature. Wordsworth openly acknowledges the impossibility of the
utopia of his hopes but continues onward in “perfect confidence” regardless. Is that not a
perfectly practical approach to positive change? Even if his hopes prove vain, he at the very least
has created something of “lovely forms” and “sweet sensations,” which is also an honorable toil
of its own. It is a win-win situation in which he aims high and accepts the beauty of life’s gifts
regardless of whether those hopes are achieved.

Wordsworth humbly accepted that his hopes may come off as impractical or “utopian” in
the pejorative sense; thus, he advocates that humankind “[fit] their own thoughts” and “exercise
their skill,”

Not in Utopia,—subterranean fields,—
Or some secreted Island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all! (11.140-4)
We must practice our self-development publicly and communally, “in the very world, which is the world / Of all of us.” Wordsworth praises a practical hope—the type that renews the spirit. He criticizes the ideological, wistful utopia that Terry Eagleton would call a “bad” utopia. A good utopia is recognized for what it is—a vision that can fuel and inspire reflective, interpretive, and creative action; ideally this action is positive for both the individual and the community, but it is the attempt at self-progress, the very inspiration and hope that renews the spirit that is the reward. Kindness and other “divine” actions in the here and now must be the ends of utopia, for anything beyond the here and now moves towards dangerous and exclusionary ideology. Wordsworth recognizes that the gap between the individual ideal and the social ideal cannot be bridged in entirety, but in the void of that gap lies inspiration and promise that has a beautiful effect on the frame of the human mind. Actually, the fact that the human mind stands awkwardly between agency and passivity, between past and future, and between itself and the community is the very thing that makes the mind of “fabric more divine” than the earth. A critical awareness and willingness to be open to the teachings of this awkwardness allows one to begin understanding the “how” of “how the mind of man becomes / A thousand times more beautiful than the earth.”
“plans for tomorrow can have no significance at all unless you are in full contact with the reality of the present, since it is in the present and only in the present that you live” - Alan Watts

Chapter 3

The Uncommon School of *Walden*: Thoreau’s Utopian Vision

This chapter argues that Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) deploys a pedagogy of provocation to achieve wakefulness in himself and his reader and that ultimately contributes to his utopian vision of the Uncommon School. Many scholars have grappled with Thoreau’s notion of the ideal self, or rather, the process of developing towards the ideal self. But, because his works maintain a clear focus on the individual, relatively few Thoreau scholars read his works with a community-oriented, utopian lens. Scholars who do read for utopian themes tend to see Thoreau’s utopia in terms of a world in which everyone tends solely to their own lives and repel any socializing forces; in Thoreau’s own words, “Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made” (462). Owen Holland writes that English craftsman, poet, and designer William Morris adopts the utopian motifs of *Walden*, namely aesthetics of simplicity; however, Holland adds that Morris was not satisfied with (what he interpreted as) Thoreau’s utopian suggestion of a “little world all to oneself” (31). J.C. Oleson claims Thoreau “turned [his] back on education and withdrew to the woods” and advocated a “chimerical utopia” where we separate ourselves from a “pathological … modern society” (226-7). Much fairer to Thoreau’s ideas, Melissa Lane argues that Thoreau’s utopia involves each person turning to a pure independence that “does not demand interpersonal interaction, even though it may set itself up as a model for others. It is the politics of the lonely beacon, not the convivial bonfire” (359). Lane’s reading of Thoreau’s utopia reflects a more practical utopia that Thoreau would agree with; however, to assume that Thoreau’s utopian vision is one where everyone’s relationship
with one another in society is insignificant so long as one can sustain their own Walden-esque project sells short the ambitious project of *Walden*.

In a passage of *Walden* much neglected by scholars, Thoreau concludes his chapter “Reading” by championing the idea of an “uncommon school” (hence my title for Thoreau’s utopia) (95). Because of his championing of the self and his dismissal of excessive governance and laws, the analysis of his utopia is complicated, but utopian analysis proves fruitful for a deeper understanding of his vision for the ideal self and the ideal society. By analyzing and exploring Thoreau’s notion of the Uncommon School, we get a clearer picture of his desire for both the individual and society and how they would enrich each other. While most scholars tend to think of a Thoreauvian utopia as one without social entanglements, this chapter argues that Thoreau values educational relationships between individuals. His development of the Uncommon School describes the ideal relationship between the individual and society in which everyone is a wholly independent self but open to both learning from and teaching one’s neighbors.

In this way, his ideal community is not defined by its government or laws but based on a community’s ability to provide access to whatever facilitates learning and culture for its independent units—each single person. As Thoreau writes in the conclusion of *Walden*’s chapter “Reading,” “As the nobleman of cultivated taste surrounds himself with whatever conduces to his culture, —genius—learning—wit—books—paintings—statuary—music—philosophical instruments, and the like; so let the village do” (287). He notably calls for the collective village to do as the singular nobleman does, which challenges traditional anti-collectivist readings. In order that each villager can access provoking and inspiring learning to achieve a Thoreauvian self-development, “the village should in some respects take the place of the nobleman of
Europe” and collectively invest in culture and learning (286). While utopias are generally understood as ideal communities, cities, or governments, Thoreau’s utopia is necessarily a school. The Uncommon School is not defined by its stable statutes as we traditionally see in utopian literature, philosophy, politics, or ideology, which generally cause the “utopian” citizens to become a less independent fraction of that society.

Thoreau’s utopian aim seeks to retain the wholeness and independence of each individual by making them a student whose perpetual, always-changing self-development and self-awareness defines their wholeness. For Thoreau, this ideal student is perpetually awake to their present moment, and this thesis argues that a “good” utopian aim depends upon this wakefulness.15 A “good” utopia, in the Thoreauvian sense, is an aim that inspires action or thoughtfulness in the present; it is a goal that recognizes itself as a goal. Thoreau writes, “In the long run men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high” (218). As David Halpin suggests, utopianism, when used as a source of hope and channeled into practical pedagogies, makes the future-orientedness of utopia a practical, present-tense vehicle of student development (Hope 14). This chapter seeks to demonstrate that by combining an understanding of Thoreau’s pedagogy of wakefulness and self-development with his aim and advocacy for the utopian Uncommon School, we come to an understanding of Thoreau’s ideal self, ideal society, and the ideal relationship of studenthood between the self and society.

**Independence, Wholeness, and Collective Cooperation**

Notably, the utopian subtext throughout Walden runs parallel to the American utopian efforts of cultural and political independence. Thoreau himself makes this parallel; he writes that

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15 I again continue my use of Terry Eagleton’s notion of “good” utopia whenever using “good” in standalone quotes.
when he first began spending his days and nights in the wood, it “by accident, was on Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, 1845” (266). Lane argues that “The New World is, for Thoreau, the land promising independence,” which he uses for “individual self-reform” (359, 341). Lane compares Thoreau’s ideas and politics with Rousseau’s and claims that Thoreau sees humankind as “externally corrupted” by civilization and its domestic comforts (359). While I agree that this is a “fact” that Thoreau proposes, Thoreau’s own words expose both sides of that “fact” of external corruption: “If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career” (277). Thus, Thoreau also recognizes that external socializing forces have a duality: they can corrupt and correct; they can lull you into blindness or provoke you into wakefulness.

The tension between Thoreau and society is essential to the heart of Walden, and dismissively reading the experiment exclusively for themes of departure and isolation is to miss one of the primary elements of the book. Stanley Cavell also questions Thoreau’s “accident” of beginning the project on Independence Day and asks, “From what is he supposed to have declared his independence? Clearly not from society as such; the book is riddled with the doings of society. From society’s beliefs and values then? In a sense—at least independence from the way society practices those beliefs and values” (8). The tension between Thoreau and society is a fruitful tension that offers provocation, estrangement, and purpose. Cavell continues later that Thoreau discusses “the first shelters the colonists made … in the world which for them was new,” and Cavell claims, “That moment of origin is the national event reenacted in the events of Walden, in order this time to do it right, or to prove that it is impossible; to discover and settle this land, or the question of this land, once and for all” (8). Cavell keenly observes the project is
one of rebirth and origin. Importantly, the heart of this rebirth has an infinite nature: rebirth is either something that we must undertake every moment until we “do it right” and are “born” into utopia, or we undertake rebirth ad infinitum as there is no way to settle “once and for all.”

Thoreau’s utopian inclination depends on perpetual renewal into the present moment. Thoreau writes, “In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and the future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line” (210). Thoreau’s relationship to time will be discussed at length later, but for Walden to be read as a practical, educational, utopian text, it is essential to recognize the book’s attempts to live in the reader’s present, just as the writer sought to live in his present. Notably, Thoreau wants to “improve” that nick of time notched on his stick. Cavell argues the notch on the stick is a metaphor for his writing of the book Walden (9). Thus, there are traces of Thoreau wishing to improve his own present moment through his Walden experiment, but also there are hopes that the reader’s present moment may also find improvement through their provoking encounter with Walden. The Walden project is a declaration of independence with a poetic infinity—that is, not a one-time historical-political break from another political body but an always-in-process breaking away from anything that is not our present reality. This independence belongs to the author and the reader and, with hope, to the improvement of society.

When discussing various utopian communities in nineteenth-century America, like Brook Farm or Fruitlands, most scholars do not directly connect Thoreau as one who strove to build a utopia. However, in his book Transcendental Utopias, Richard Francis demonstrates how

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16 Brook Farm and Fruitlands were nineteenth-century American utopian-communitarian efforts. The Fruitlands experiment was undertaken in 1843 by Bronson Alcott (father of Louisa May Alcott), and the more successful Brook Farm was organized in 1841 by George Ripley.
Thoreau’s *Walden* fits into the utopian category as a “community of one” (225). Opposite to the aforementioned example of the totality of the village replacing the individual nobleman, Francis argues that the Thoreauvian individual can “replace” the totality (225). Francis sees other utopias like Brook Farm or Fruitlands as communities in which the individual becomes an essential fraction of the society; Francis argues that in *Walden*, Thoreau steps “outside the social network altogether” (240). Because society is necessarily plural, Francis sees Walden as a utopia of one in which the individual can find wholeness within the self. The chapter goes on to discuss how Theodore Parker’s transcendentalist views differ from Thoreau’s; Francis points out that Parker’s ideal individual contributes their own individual wisdom to raise “the temperature of the human world” (241), in other words, a great person leaves an impact on the world and makes it wiser than it was before. However, I contend that Parker’s view of how human societies ideally develop is not as different from Thoreau’s as Francis suggests.

Francis’s argument is persuasive regarding Thoreau’s goals for the ideal individual; however, I maintain that it fails to address Thoreau’s utopian blueprint regarding the neighborly relationship of independent units within the context of a social body. Francis parrots Thoreau and suggests that the individual should retain their status as a whole, an integer rather than a fraction, by “be[coming] a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought” (Thoreau 458): to construct your own Walden project and thus create a whole, individual self. As Francis writes, “If the argument [in *Walden*] is that students should build their own colleges, that a worker should embody the factory, then the obvious continuation of the logic is that civilization should be established at the level of its ultimate unit, its lowest common denominator … a single person” (226). While this analysis captures a primary concern of the utopian thesis of *Walden*, it somewhat ignores the relationship
between those independent units. Thoreau would not have the relationship between independent selves be one of simple acknowledgment of individuality and independence. Thoreau importantly emphasizes the relationship that these ultimate units of society should have—one of learning, provocation, and cooperation. In a Thoreauvian utopia, the Uncommon School, the link between each individual is a relationship of studenthood.

Returning to Thoreau’s chapter “Reading,” we can identify a blueprint for individuals to retain their wholeness (not become a fraction of society) while still collectively contributing to a utopian vision. Thoreau concludes his chapter “Reading” by stating that “To act collectively is according to the spirit of our institutions” (287). This reminder that the spirit of our institutions informs our collective actions provokes readers to question their institutions and consequently question our collective actions. The phrase also reminds readers how this truth might be used in culturally generative ways, as opposed to letting institutions that have become unquestioned and dogmatic guide our collective action in prescribed, culturally diminishing or stagnant ways.

Recalling Thoreau’s claim that the village should replace the European nobleman and noting that Thoreau also states we should have “noble villages of men,” we can see how he envisions an ideal social body, one in which each unit is an individual identity, but one that can learn and culture itself from the existence of other neighboring units (287). Continuing his collectivist language, he writes, “Instead of noblemen, let us have noble villages of men. If it is necessary, omit one bridge over the river, go round a little there, and throw one arch at least over the darker gulf of ignorance which surrounds us” (emphasis added 287). The individual unit may have an opportunity to “throw one arch” over our surrounding ignorance, thus contributing to our

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17 It strikes me that this quote is somewhat left out of the scholarship. I wonder to what extent scholars avoid it because it is so contradictory to individualistic readings, or if it is commonly read as a satiric jab at society. If a satiric tone is interpreted, I wonder if it’s to say: Until society can show me a true collectivist spirit of Thoreauvian development, I’m going to minimize social entanglement and focus on reaching as many interested students as I can.
collective wisdom—similar to Theodore Parker’s *increasing the temperature of the human world*. After discussing classic literature in which Thoreau calls the classics “the noblest recorded thoughts of man,” he optimistically states, “That age will be rich indeed when those relics which we call Classics, and the still older and more classic but even less known Scriptures of the nations, shall have still further accumulated … By such a pile we may hope to scale to heaven at last” (279, 282). To reach heaven, or utopia, each individual must produce their own wisdom and contribute to expanding the collective wisdom.

**Students of Provocation, Wakefulness, and Rebirth**

But does this “pile” reduce each contributor into a fraction, as Francis argues? How does Thoreau seek to advocate for the establishment of a whole self able to contribute to the collective without getting too involved in other people’s business and falling victim to the “little virtue in the action of masses of men” or becoming one of the “mass of men [who] lead lives of quiet desperation” (Thoreau 80, 203)? The answer lies in the relationships and principles of studenthood and teacherhood. Thoreau quite clearly sets forth one of the primary goals of his project at Walden Pond in his famous remark, “I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up” (266). Thoreau engages in being a student to everything, including himself, in order to be a teacher of wakefulness to others. As Thoreau writes, “I do not wish to flatter my townsmen, nor to be flattered by them, for that will not advance either of us. We need to be provoked,—goaded like oxen, as we are, into a trot” (285). Provocation is a catalyst for wakefulness, and provocation can occur when we “become essentially students and observers” and open ourselves to learning (278). Jonathan Ellsworth concludes that the “intent of *Walden* is not so much to instruct, but to provoke and inspire” (158). A teacher does not instruct students; a
teacher *creates* students, or rather, provokes or guides students such that they can create themselves. The utopian aim of each individual contributing their idiosyncratic wisdom, genius, and culture to the social pile depends on a willingness to be a student, to be provoked into wakefulness. Thus, this section examines the positive feedback loop between Thoreau’s notion of wakefulness and the tools of provocation.

To start with the former, Thoreau’s notion of awakening is essential to both his personal and teaching goals. He writes that his “religious exercise” of bathing in the pond served to “Renew thyself completely each day,” and he would “do it again, and again, and forever again” (269). He goes on to say that “the morning … is the awakening hour” but also “the day is a perpetual morning” and “morning is when I am awake and there is dawn in me” (269-70). For Thoreau, morning is not a particular time; morning is when we are awake. Awake in this sense means “to front only the essential facts of life, and see if [we] could not learn what it had to teach” (271). Thoreau’s intention as a chanticleer seeking to “wake [his] neighbors up,” then, can be appreciated as a noble endeavor. He is taking up the position of a teacher and a student. He is learning as a student of his own experiment and hopes to teach others into wakefulness. Thus, individuals who contribute themselves to society as students and teachers, through their wit, books, genius, lives or otherwise, constitute the Uncommon School.

Thoreau’s relationship to time plays a crucial role in provocation, wakefulness, rebirth, and ultimately development. However, it must be noted that Thoreau warns against “[seeking] so anxiously *to be developed*” (emphasis added 464). For, a yearning to be develop-*ed* implies a conclusion in the future. It negates the eternal present and eternal process of learn-*ing* that Thoreau valued as sacred. Rather, we should seek to go about develop-*ing* our current experience of living. Thoreau somewhat humorously asks, “Who would not be early to rise, and rise earlier
and earlier every successive day of his life, till he become unspeakably healthy, wealthy, and wise?” (301). Besides being a subtle jab at Benjamin Franklin, the question is a clear return to his earlier passage that “the day is a perpetual morning” (270). However, the humorous suggestion that we can continue to wake up earlier and earlier ad infinitum recalls his concluding remarks in “Where I Lived, And What I Lived For”: “Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars” (277). This passage clearly has fun with notions of time, and it plays a critical role in the self’s ability to remain forever “awake” in the present. Thoreau is disappointed to find the stream of time is “shallow,” but he notices that “eternity remains”—the depth of the stream does not need to influence its richness in the moment. That is to say, just because our time may be short (or shallow), does not mean our experience has to be equally shallow. So long as we perpetually enter the realm of estrangement—“fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars”—the present moment reveals its universal depth. Following his stream of time passage, Thoreau writes “I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born” (277). Edward F. Mooney calls this “the wisdom of wonder,” which places Thoreau “into a world that predates the wisdom of numbers and letters” (131). Wonder, in its ability to suspend the experience of time, then, is adjacent to awakening. To achieve wakefulness, one must be alert and open to estrangement; the pedagogy of provocation can be an infinite “education for grown-ups” so long as we are awake and observant to the things that wake us.

As Cavell compellingly suggests, Thoreau’s *Walden* takes up the task of offering a template for adults a process of continual development and learning; Thoreau writes “we must be born again in order to speak” (280). Thoreau suggests “we must learn to reawaken” and is
encouraged that, when we reawaken every “morning,” we are “awake and there is a dawn” in us (270). Rebirth, reawakening, and openness to learning are closely related for Thoreau. Cavell compares Thoreau’s notion of education to a continual rebirth: “for the child to grow he requires family and familiarity, but for a grownup to grow he requires strangeness and transformation, i.e., birth” (60). Cavell connects this passage with Thoreau’s description of the cockerel in the Walden chapter “Sounds”: Thoreau writes that the cockerel “would put nations on the alert” (301), and Cavell notices that the bird was domesticated “because its clear trumpet is too disturbing,” meaning it offers a degree of estrangement capable of waking up its hearers (36-7). Paul Standish notices that Thoreau did not isolate himself in the depths of the woods but intentionally placed himself “within about a mile of his nearest neighbors—which is to say, at a distance where they will see what he is doing, in such a way that his experiment can serve as a kind of example. It is something from which he expects to learn, and it may teach others” (147). Thoreau did not place himself at Walden Pond purely to be isolated, but because he wanted his experiment to be seen and known by his neighbors, to wake up anyone noticing his project. However, before we can discuss the productive tension of neighbors at length, we must continue analyzing the pedagogy of provocation implied throughout Walden.

Thoreau, the careful observer he was, always kept himself alert to any catalyst of provocation and wakefulness, whether books, cockerel-teachers, or even just sounds in general. While all these things offer their various lessons and provocations, one must be alert, for “No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert.” If we are too “confined to books,” “we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor” (Thoreau 288). Throughout Thoreau’s writing, it is clear he pays close
attention to the sounds of nature, whether birds, critters, winds, or otherwise. Interestingly, in another passage that demonstrates Thoreau valued social entanglements, he writes that “Every day or two, I strolled to the village to hear some of the gossip … which, taken in homœopathic doses, was really as refreshing in its way as the rustle of leaves and the peeping of frogs” (335). Variety is the spice of provocation for Thoreau, and human environments produce as different a sound as frogs from trees. Importantly, the sounds are “refreshing” and even “homeopathic doses,” or alternative medicine. “As I walked in the woods to see the birds and squirrels,” continues Thoreau, “so I walked in the village to see the men and boys; instead of the wind among the pines, I heard the carts rattle” (335). All sounds are refreshing and provoking in their own regard. Thoreau extends and offers plenteous examples of provoking-catalysts; for the student of the Uncommon School, all forms of communication encourage alertness and open the door to learning, self-awareness, and self-examination.

Thoreau’s goal as a student is to remain in a state of continual wakefulness and rebirth, and his goal as a teacher is to prod others into the same state; to undertake this task, he combines the high-minded influence of true, deliberate observation (including reading) with the acute sense of the present moment (i.e., reality). As a teacher in both actual practice at his school, The Concord Academy, and as a written teaching model in Walden, Thoreau wanted to be a figure that practiced all the qualities he would see in his students. In regard to Thoreau’s primary and secondary education, Harding notes that, according to Thoreau, it had “branches of learning” but lacked roots (qtd. in Miller). He thus sought to connect the branches of learning that expand

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18 References to the sounds are too inexhaustible to cite. Some examples include: “these sounds and sights … a part of the inexhaustible entertainment” (328); “the red squirrels … kept up the queerest chuckling and chirruping and vocal pirouetting and gurgling sounds … They were wholly deaf to my arguments, or failed to perceive their force” (448-9); “some cow … sounded sweet and melodious” (298); “a hooting owl … the most melancholy sound in Nature … It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods” (299-300).
upward with roots firmly grounded in reality and practicality. John P. Miller notes that the school Thoreau ran with his brother John frequently took field trips and was known for innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Students under Thoreau had plots to grow crops, practiced mathematics by surveying land, and had longer recesses than average schools (61-2). Miller includes a biographic episode of a field trip to the woods in which Thoreau provokes his students to guess why Indians might have set up camp in a particular area, encouraging observation and practicality—rather than lecturing his students on where Indians might set up a camp, students were put in a position to use their own observation skills (62). The students were compelled to turn to observe their physical reality. This pedagogy connects the “branches of learning” with the practical roots of the human ability to observe. In a similar vein, Thoreau writes in his conclusion to *Walden*, “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them” (460). In this sense of castles and trees, we understand that a person should aim high and expand their learning; however, a person must also be firmly planted right where they are, rooted in everyday life.

That the individual has feet in the essential facts of observable reality is crucial to the Uncommon School because alertness to the here and now enables a continuous state of studenthood. Importantly, Thoreau proposes “that we [do] not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women,” but that we have education *through* adulthood, which requires this alert state of mind (286). For us to be “as wise as the day [we] were born,” we must “settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance … through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we will call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake” (Thoreau 277, 276). To be awake is to be attuned to this reality and to
see every moment as an opportunity for development and growth. To be awake thus means to experience reality not as an attempt to find an answer through science, religion, philosophy, or poetry; life is not a question to be solved for Thoreau, but a reality to be experienced.

Despite the student needing roots and attunement to reality, Thoreau simultaneously sought the harmonious opposite: Not only must one be rooted in the mud of reality, but we also must have our branches in the sky, or our castles in the air. As the conclusion of “Reading” reminds us, Thoreau places great importance on abstract observation as well: let the village “surround [itself] with whatever conduces to [its] culture,—genius—learning—wit—books—paintings—statuary—music—philosophical instruments, and the like” (286-7). Thus, the student of the Uncommon School must use those abstract things of unreality in order to “work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of [opinion, prejudice, tradition, delusion, appearance, poetry, philosophy, and religion]” and arrive at reality of the present moment (276).

If our observation of the present place gives us a foundation and roots, then reading is Thoreau’s instrument of branching, fruiting, and expansion, and both are essential to the feedback loop between provocation and wakefulness. Afterall, the “finer fruits” of life are not located in the hard rocks of reality, but must be “plucked” from the branches in the air (201). Reading deliberately, as will be seen, is one way any individual can contribute and benefit to the utopian aim of the Uncommon School.

Thoreau calls for his readers to become students and engage in a more deliberate and authentic reading experience as a part of his pedagogy. His chapter “Reading” opens, “With a little more deliberation in the choice of their pursuits, all men would perhaps become essentially students and observers” (278). Thoreau continues, “Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written” (279). Robert Klevay argues that this chapter, “although often
seen as a defense of classical literature against popular nineteenth-century writing, actually contains several back-handed compliments that encourage the engaged reader to question the inherent value of any literary authority—Greek, Roman, or Transcendental” (195-6). That Thoreau simultaneously praises and questions classic literature empowers deliberate readers to be actively learning in ways that contribute “—genius—learning—wit—books—” to the collective village (Thoreau 287). One does not have to produce the modern *Iliad* to contribute to Thoreau’s utopian aim so long as they can read and learn deliberately and integrate that learning into their own lives. Klevay argues that Thoreau expresses frustration with any form of “shallow” reading, whether it be daily newspaper gossip or the Homeric epic, *Iliad* (199-200). While Thoreau was busy with the “Incessant labor” of building his house and hoeing his beans, he notes little time for study, for which he felt “ashamed” of himself (Thoreau 278-9). Klevay argues that what Thoreau “finds disappointing in himself is something he also finds disappointing in his readers—a desire to avoid strenuous reading rather than to embrace it. His self-castigation is intended to provoke both his readers and himself to the greater discipline of truly engaged reading” (200). Klevay goes on to note that the true power of the classics is their ability to “provide the tools for industrious readers to find their own answers” and eventually apply that wisdom to their everyday lives, recalling the earlier point about provoking students and readers to think for themselves (201, 215). However, not all members of a society are able to be “industrious readers” nor have the education or leisure time to allow them to be. Yet, I argue that Thoreau’s utopian aim acknowledges these realities and would have the privileged and the underprivileged always in open-minded communication to exchange the benefits of both perspectives.
The ideal Thoreauvian student reaches for higher wisdom while still keeping themselves rooted in reality. Personal and social progress requires both high-minded wisdom and sober realism. Thoreau’s famous episode in “The Beanfield,” in which Thoreau puts his garden work on the scale of a Homeric epic, exemplifies the branches (of abstract wisdom) and roots (of practical reality) equilibrium: “A long war, not with cranes, but with weeds … the beans saw me come to their rescue armed with a hoe, and thin the ranks of their enemies” (Thoreau 329). Klevay suggests that Thoreau substitutes himself with legendary hero Achilles to empower “readers to take liberties with classical literature” to ultimately “valorize the everyday struggles” of the student-reader (196-8). Cavell sees the Beanfield episode as Thoreau playing the role of a “parable-maker” or a living parable (20-1). From this episode his readers can come to realize that you have to live out the parable to understand its meaning and influence. Thoreau cleverly blends the high-mindedness of classical literature with the lowly mundane tasks to produce an appreciation and excitement for the present moment and present place: ingredients for wakefulness, rebirth, and perpetual independence as a whole self amidst a network of provoking units.

Thus, one of the ultimate tools of Thoreau’s utopian aim is language, especially in books. Language transcends time in its ability to perpetually exist as a provocation. When Thoreau discusses the “heroic” and “ancient” classics, he writes that “It is worth the expense of youthful days and costly hours, if you learn only some words of an ancient language, which are raised out of the trivialness of the street, to be perpetual suggestions and provocations” (emphasis added, 279). Immediately prior to his advocacy of the Uncommon School, Thoreau discusses the liberalizing effects of wisdom found in words. In a passage that reveals Thoreau’s awareness of people’s ability to teach each other and set each other free, he famously writes: “There are
probably words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the morning or the spring to our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on the face of things for us. How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book” (285). Words exist always in the present and thus, if used deliberately, place the reader or writer in the present with them in a state of estrangement and provocation.

The act of reading illustrates the pedagogy of Walden itself: Reading is an act of the self that depends on the past action of someone else which provokes the reader into self-exploration in their present. Thoreau hopes that both his words of Walden and his life at Walden pond achieve this ability to always provide wakefulness in his readers. Jonathan Ellsworth argues that “Walden is designed to serve as a catalyst for self-examination” (144). He goes on to argue that Walden draws attention to the fact that every individual must thoroughly and deliberately examine themselves, “[f]or there is no place, no formula or program, that will automatically transform or awaken us” (148). In this sense, Ellsworth argues that Thoreau strategically encourages his reader to get lost and “force[s] us to think for ourselves” (155) and ultimately to “Explore thyself” (Thoreau 459). Thoreau encourages the use of the wisdom of others (himself included), usually recorded in books, to discover the wisdom of the self. Therefore, we can begin to see how a relationship of studenthood achieves the utopian aim of social harmony and independent wholeness.

Reading deliberately thus works like a bridge between the provoking unreality of past wisdom and the present reality of the student-reader. Words and books, when written and read deliberately, perhaps even piously, are tools that incite thoughtfulness and reflection in the present moment to the reader. Thoreau writes that “The heroic books … will always be in a language dead … and we must laboriously seek the meaning of each word and line” (279).
Reading revives the wisdom into the present moment; there is a rebirth of the reader and the writer. Thus, for Thoreau, the life of words comes from ourselves; words are the dead vehicles of provocation which gives life to us in return from our deliberate reading of them. Thoreau continues his discussion about “words addressed to our condition”:

The book exists for us, perchance, which will explain our miracles and reveal new ones. The at present unutterable things we may find somewhere uttered. These same questions that disturb and puzzle and confound us have in their turn occurred to all the wise men; not one has been omitted; and each has answered them, according to his ability, by his words and his life. (emphasis added 285)

The sacred relationship between words and our lives is a prerequisite to wisdom, and “with wisdom we shall learn liberality” (285). Importantly, these wise men answered this puzzling, confounding estrangement with their words and their lives, like Thoreau hopes to do with his life at Walden and his words of Walden. To open oneself to the confounding questions and answer them with both words and actions is essential to the principles of the Uncommon School; both the words and the life of a wise person reveal truths inherent to the human condition.

Thoreau places profound faith in spiritual wisdom; he praises the wise language of scripture and the classics, but criticizes the institutional immobility of the church and other organizations. He elaborates further on his claim that the “same questions” have “occurred to all the wise men”:

The solitary hired man on a farm in the outskirts of Concord, who has had his second birth and peculiar religious experience, and is driven as he believes into the silent gravity and exclusiveness by his faith, may think it is not true; but Zoroaster, thousands of years ago, travelled the same road and had the same experience; but he, being wise, knew it to
be universal, and treated his neighbors accordingly ... Let him humbly commune with Zoroaster then, and through the liberalizing influence of all the worthies, with Jesus Christ himself, and let “our church” go by the board. (emphasis added 285)

For Thoreau, people are not seeking a “second birth” that gets them through their local church doors; waking up once to a truth from a single encounter with a “peculiar religious experience” is not enough. Pupils of the Uncommon School are students open to learning liberality from “all the worthies” according to individual communion with their words and lives. The student of this utopia does not follow the principles gleaned from a singular encounter with truth, but leads their own experiment of perpetual rebirth inspired by the wisdoms of language that leads us to genuine, provoking and wise relationships with our neighbors.

Provoking Neighbors

The tension between the individual and society throughout Walden contributes to the blueprint for the Uncommon School. Thoreau found that society and socialization are worth facing deliberately; but, like all things Walden, that worth must be weighed. Thoreau writes “I think that I love society as much as most, and am ready enough to fasten myself like a bloodsucker for the time to any full-blooded man that comes my way. I am naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if my business called me thither” (312). Two things of note in this passage: one, his admission that he loves society and his consequent willingness to engage with a “full-blooded man,” and two, he will engage in the social bar-room if his own business takes him there. While the latter claim seems selfish, that is the point, in part. Thoreau seems to suggest that if the social encounter is not worth his business, it is equally likely that his business is not worth the society of the bar-room. Thus, some selfish judgement is required for society to be worthwhile. If the parties present will not learn, grow,
gain perspective, achieve wakefulness, or be present to the here-and-now, then the social entanglement may be one of desperation. Nevertheless, if the parties present are “full-blooded” (perhaps in a state of wakefulness), the social entanglement is worth spending every drop of time for the “bloodsucker.” Ever the strict economist, Thoreau weighs his actions and business carefully.19

That each reader employs their own business according to their own constitution, according to a degree of selfish judgement and keen self-awareness, is essential to Walden’s didacticism. He does not propose that every person employs themselves as he has done; his message is received by anyone willing to “live deliberately” and “front only the essential facts” of their own lives, in their own way. Jerry Rodnitzky argues that “With his thoughts centered on himself and living an almost hermit existence, perhaps Thoreau overlooked the simple pleasures most Americans found in being part of home, family, and community—of being a husband and father, and, above all, being depended upon by their fellows” and concludes that “Thoreau’s cure for society’s ills involved individual reformers, operating outside social institutions” (176). However, this simplifies the project of Walden. Certainly, Thoreau appreciated solitude more than most, but Walden’s purpose is not that others may hoe beans and read and write in a forest cabin. Near the end of the first chapter, “Economy,” Thoreau admits a degree of selfishness: “But all this is very selfish, I have heard some of my townsmen say. I confess that I have hitherto indulged very little in philanthropic enterprises.” But, he importantly admits he is not suited for it: “You must have a genius for charity as well as for anything else … I have tried it fairly, and, strange as it may seem, am satisfied that it does not agree with my constitution” (256).

19 I wish to note that I refer here to his strict economy of actions and words, not necessarily his monetary economy. While frugality is essential to his advocated life-style, I agree with Cavell that Thoreau’s lists of numbers in Walden “are parodies of America’s methods of evaluation” (30); the money is not the point.
Interestingly, he turns to frankly admitting his social contribution lies elsewhere, notably, in writing.

However, Thoreau’s purpose was never to get in anyone’s way if they were rightly, wakefully, employed in the present moment: “But I would not stand between any man and his genius; and to him who does this [philanthropic] work, which I decline, with his whole heart and soul and life, I would say, Persevere” (256). Thoreau encourages everyone to examine their idiosyncratic constitution and genius, and set their life-experiments accordingly. Thoreau did not disparage the American family man or city-dweller so long as they were not living desperately: being “occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life” and having “no time to be anything but a machine” (201-2). Thoreau would not have us become machines or “become the tools of [our] tools,” but he wishes for us to be provoked into wakefulness to appreciate the human condition and pluck its “finer fruits” (226, 201). Standish notes the following on Walden: “this is no recipe for the good life but an illustration of the need for each of us not to copy Thoreau but to engage in our own experiment, … [to] regard our lives as opportunity at every point, with neither established foundation nor final settlement, but with every occasion an occasion for new departure” (148-9). Once one is awake in the present moment, one can begin their own life experiment. In an 1850 letter to H.G.O Blake, Thoreau captures the idea of the idiosyncratic genius inspiring others: “The Muse should lead like a star which is very far off; but that does not imply that we are to follow foolishly, falling into sloughs and over precipices, for it is not foolishness, but understanding, which is to follow, which the Muse is appointed to lead, as a fit guide of a fit follower” (509). In a word, let us learn, be inspired, and be provoked by our neighbors, but remain alert and practical. Standish writes that “If it is Thoreau’s aim to present us with a holistic vision on an economy of living, it becomes
possible to see [Walden] as a kind of utopian text—albeit that Thoreau’s concerns are painstakingly practical (planting beans, building a shelter) and doggedly realistic” (148). Thoreau has a utopian expectation of wakefulness for each of his students, but the “no place” of the traditional utopia is replaced with the “your place” of reality.

Thoreau’s visit to his neighboring Baker Farm is perhaps one of the most telling and exemplary episodes of the neighborly education dynamic I have been constructing. His visit to the Fields family may come off as condescending, but Thoreau’s blunt and frank approach is virtuous in its honesty and earnestness to help a neighbor. After delivering a rather long and depressing portrait of the family’s dismal conditions, Thoreau writes, “I tried to help him with my experience; telling him that he was one of my nearest neighbors … that I lived in a tight, light, and clean house … and how, if he chose, he might in a month or two build himself a palace of his own” (365). In this moment of utopian hope, Thoreau suggests that he himself resides in a “palace” and that his closest neighbor can also live in a “palace.” Philip Cafaro writes that Thoreau “lectures the couple on how to live better lives” by advocating self-discipline and frugal habits (119). A bit later in the episode, Thoreau reveals the key to understanding his seemingly condescending nature: “I purposely talked to [John Field] as if he were a philosopher, or desired to be one” (366). Thus, as Cafaro rightly states, “[Thoreau] believes he is speaking up, not down, to John Field” (119). That is to say, Thoreau treats his neighbor as a capable and free adult.

Importantly though, there is a need for free adults to be provoked or else risk joining the slumbering masses. Cafaro writes about the virtues of Thoreau’s neighborliness that fit the educational relationship I’ve been highlighting: “To make a neighbor of another person means linking your life to [theirs] … it means caring about the choices our neighbors make without interfering unduly in them” (120-1). Stanley Cavell borrows from Sandra Laugier the aphorism,
“philosophy as the education of grown-ups” (“Philosophy…” 28). I believe that Thoreau would have agreed with Cavell and Laugier here; the Baker Farm episode exemplifies Thoreau explicitly making an educative gesture to his neighbor and treating him as a philosopher and student. Using Cavell and Laugier’s aphorism to illustrate my argument, we can understand that Thoreau would have all neighbors extend philosophic support and provocation to their neighbors. If, on the one hand, each person is willing to open themselves to studenthood by remaining humbly awake, and, on the other, execute their own business and life experiment as a teaching model for others, perhaps, all neighbors help each other build “[palaces] of [their] own.” In time, “By such a pile we may hope to scale to heaven at last” (282).

Interestingly, one of the social institutions that Thoreau praises embodies this adult-oriented teacher-and-student dynamic: the lyceum. The lyceum, a place where people could go to share and teach their ideas, respects that speakers have wisdom to share from their words and lives, and the audience has something to learn or be provoked by. Thoreau writes “we have a comparatively decent system of common schools, schools for infants only; but excepting the half-starved Lyceum in the winter, and latterly the puny beginning of a library suggested by the State, no school for ourselves” (286). Notably, the “half-starved” (whether by attendance or funding or both) lyceum still remains one of the few worthwhile social investments noted by Thoreau: “The one hundred and twenty-five dollars annually subscribed for a Lyceum in the winter is better spent than any other equal sum raised in the town” (286). I would argue this is precisely because it offers a public space for chanticleers to wake their neighbors up. The lyceum, with obvious limitations, thus becomes a miniature embodiment of the Uncommon School, or, at very least, one of the investments that contributes to Thoreau’s utopian aim.

Conclusion
Through provocation, self-exploration, and staying awake to the present moment, the individual student can become an independent whole (or, as Francis terms it, an integer), while also becoming an essential contributor and teacher to the utopian social pile. Educational scholar Martin Bickman notes how Thoreau combines “goal-orientedness with openness to experience, to create a certain rhythmic alternation between self-abandonment and self-construction” (72). According to Thoreau, this alternation is essential in developing the self; he would have us abandon our past selves and past prejudices to remain open to the influences of the here and now. In other words, we have to accept the strangeness of ourselves “to call our lives into question and bring us to the point where our lives … become a question for us” (Ellsworth 154). Thoreau’s utopian aim requires everyone to be students to themselves, their environmental influences, and to embrace estrangement. “Not till we are lost,” Thoreau writes, “not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations” (338). Thus, Walden, to a large extent is a book about realizing your neighbors, both human and nonhuman, not dismissing them.

Having a village full of students living out their experiments, pursuing liberal studies and fine arts sounds idealistic, but that vision is an essential component of Thoreau’s utopian aim; recall that the ideal vision is hopeful fuel for action in the here and now. Interestingly, Thoreau anticipates the criticism of idealism: “[the village] can spend money enough on such things as farmers and traders value, but it is thought Utopian to propose spending money for things which more intelligent men know to be of far more worth” (94). Thoreau complains that there is “no school for ourselves”; his contemporary towns lack cultural and intellectual investment: “We spend more on almost any article of bodily aliment or ailment than on our mental aliment” (93). Thus, he hopes that everyone can rethink their spending and regear their economics towards
generating culture and “living wit” (286). Wise men invest in “whatever conduces to his
culture,” whether that be books, philosophical instruments, music, learning, cockerels, or
otherwise. Since “To act collectively is according to the spirit of our institutions,” why not invest
as a wise man does (287)?

The marriage between the pursuit of personal rebirth and collective cultural investment
constitutes the utopian aim of the Uncommon School. Thoreau’s notion of perpetual renewal and
rebirth respects the never-ending nature of learning. There is beauty to found in the fact that
there is “no end in sight,” so, Thoreau would have us be students to our experiences forever. If
each person could continue to be a student of their experiments in life, they would be able to
meaningfully contribute to the cultural capital of the Uncommon School Thoreau advocates.
Provoked by other individuals or themselves, individuals find, begin, change, or otherwise
modify their own life experiments, creating a positive feedback loop of learning and wisdom and
culture: “That is the uncommon school we want” (Thoreau 95). Thoreau hopes that if his
deliberate readers can maintain the utopian vision of the Uncommon School (without becoming
preoccupied by it) while existing in the here and now as students, teachers, and observers, his
utopian aim will remain acting in and influencing the infinite here and now.
Poets, prophets, and reformers are all picture-makers—and this ability is the secret of their powers and of their achievements. They see what ought to be by the reflection of what is, and endeavor to remove the contradiction.”

-Frederick Douglass

Conclusion

Throughout this project, I have analyzed hopeful and educational language to discover authors’ utopian aims. I have demonstrated that a “good” utopian aim is multifaceted: it is practical to the present moment; it has an imaginative, future-oriented target; and it is an energy that works to bridge the practical present with the hoped-for future. Recognizing an author’s utopian aim appreciates that learning and progressing is a process without end; progress cannot reach a destination, although progress demands an imagined destination. Therefore, “good” progress is reaching for a “good” utopia. My definition of “good” utopia comes from Terry Eagleton’s notion that a “bad” utopia “negates the present in the name of some inconceivably alternative future,” whereas a “good” utopia “finds a bridge between present and future in those forces within the present which are potentially able to transform it” (22). Hope, an energy that helps the mind imagine utopia, becomes “those forces within the present moment.” Therefore, the utopian aim of an author is always the bridge and never the land on either side; the past contributes its experiences and knowledge, and the future provides the inspiration, hope, or energy to be a “good” actor in the present.

This project examined the structures of hope, education, and utopian imagination in Sarah Scott’s Millenium Hall, William Wordsworth’s The Prelude, and Henry David Thoreau’s Walden. Each chapter analyzed the balance between idealized utopian visions and practical pedagogies to expose each respective text’s utopian aim, the directional force towards utopia that depends on present-tense actions like loving, reflecting, and learning. Millenium Hall demonstrates clearly how a text exists always as a present-tense teacher by emphasizing the act
of reading as an educational (even reformative) process. Despite *Millenium Hall, The Prelude,* and *Walden* being published in 1726, 1850 (initially 1799), and 1854 respectively, when read today, their (explicit or implicit) hopes and educational efforts exist today as well. Scott’s novel may only consist of only descriptions, anecdotes and reflections, but there is a hopeful teaching energy latent in the text as indicated by the title page: “A Description of Millenium Hall, and the Country Adjacent: Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants, and such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections, as May excite in the Reader proper Sentiments of Humanity, and lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue” (51). By illustrating the narrator’s own excited “Sentiments of Humanity” and his newfound “Love of Virtue” upon touring the utopia, Scott invites the reader to realize they have taken the same tour and can walk away from the text with the same principles, albeit to their own scale. Scott’s utopia is intimately concerned with the real world (both the “real” outside world of the fictional characters and the real world of the novel’s reader); therefore, Scott’s novel embodies a “good” utopia. Thus, reading texts for their “good” utopian aims is less concerned with the utopian place, but rather the here-and-now utopian actions that are directed towards a utopian vision.

The other two chapters, which analyzed texts that are not inherently utopian (or, do not belong in the category of “utopian literature”), explore the complex matrix of practicality, idealism, hopefulness, educational principles and goals, and the threads that tie them together into a utopian aim. In *The Prelude,* William Wordsworth identifies the goals of progress and mental development in vague terms like “spiritual love” because he understood that the utopian goal serves mostly to inspire the present self, just as the past-self informs and inspires the present self. Therefore, his utopian aim is at the very source of the human mind’s abilities, notably, the “organic sensibility” that allows us to be inspired, to love, and to experience beauty. Wordsworth
identifies “glorious creatures” as those who are especially in-tune with the abstract wisdom that
the human mind can become “more beautiful than the earth,” and his educational aspirations
work to teach both himself and his readers to be these “glorious creatures” in the here and now.

Thoreau’s *Walden* is similarly concerned with the mind’s relationship to the here and
now, and his utopian vision of the Uncommon School fueled his utopian aim of an individualistic
collectivism where openness and studenthood define our social relationships with one another.
This third chapter challenges isolationist and anti-social readings of *Walden* by examining
Thoreau’s utopian aim, which consisted of a practical here-and-now recognition with high hopes
of ideal social investments and relationships. Thoreau hopes that individuals would contribute
cultural capital to the social pile in the form of the individual’s “—genius—learning—wit—
books—paintings—statuary—music—philosophical instruments, and the like,” and “By such a
pile we may hope to scale to heaven at last” (287, 282). *Walden* encourages readers to always be
open to provocation in order that they may “awake” to their present reality, for Thoreau believed
that only when we were awake to the infinite here and now could we appreciate “the infinite
extent of our relations” (338). *Walden*’s pedagogy of provocation requires this appreciation
because the relations of the Uncommon School are relations of studenthood; we can learn and be
provoked by the words (or sounds) and lives of our neighbors, both human and non-human. Both
Thoreau and Wordsworth help readers appreciate that education happens in our everyday lives
outside formal educational settings. While books are artifacts of education and schools are
systems of education, education is an organic and daily process regular to the happenings of the
human mind.

Each of the chapters demonstrates that utopian thinking, especially when applied to
education, has practical effects in the present. When authors hope, they offer insights to their
utopian visions, and often those utopian visions imply pedagogic roadmaps that outline how society might educate its way towards that vision. This project locates those moments of hope (when an author “entertain[s] expectation[s] of something desired (OED)) and the implied pedagogies and utopian visions of that hope. Together, these moments and implications suggest a latent utopian energy. This utopian energy can be understood as an inspiring force and an educative force; identifying this energy thus reveals the teaching work of a text to its reader. This project does not suggest that the simple act of reading unleashes the forces of some dead author’s ideals into the world; however, reading for a text’s utopian aims in the way this project exemplifies can inform us of various pedagogies, hopes, and energies that can be useful in better understanding an author and a text. Ideally and hopefully, this type of reading can also inform us how to have a better relationship to things like learning, reading, and “good” progress. Reading for a text’s utopian aim gives us access to the bridge between an author’s present and their utopian vision, which helps us understand how to navigate our own hopes as we are “stuck” in our own present moments.

When a plan or a vision is labeled as “utopian,” it is generally understood as a pejorative term. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “utopian” as “Originally and chiefly depreciative. Of a vision, plan, etc.: expressing or founded on an unrealistic belief in the perfectibility of society; excessively idealistic; impracticable; (of an ideal condition) illusory, unattainable.” This project has worked extensively to reject the negative connotations of the word by appreciating the progressive work and energy of utopian thinking. While accepting the underlying notions of this thesis requires a good deal of optimism, it equally works to render practical that optimism. David Halpin writes that despite being illusions, “optimistic illusions … act as spurs to new action” but warns that “Such illusions, however, need to be carefully put together if they are to
work the desired effect. If framed too optimistically, they may give rise to foolish risk-taking … Thus, while optimistic illusions must be utopian, they need equally to be realistic, and therefore realizable” (Hope 126). The utopian visions of the texts analyzed in this thesis are certainly optimistic, but their practicality is essential to the optimism. In this regard, I worked to analyze the utopian progress, not the utopian destination. Taken to its extreme conclusion, each utopian vision is certainly “excessively idealistic” and “impractical,” but this project demonstrated how the utopian thinking fuels “good” action in the present and never expects extreme or dogmatic conclusions. This practicality is demonstrated in reading Wordsworth’s utopian vision as vague and unspecified, placing the emphasis on the utopian process, not the utopian conclusion. In Millenium Hall, the narrator admits he will work to imitate the utopian scheme “on a smaller scale,” respecting the contextual applicability to his life (249). The Prelude humbly asks that some obstacles are removed between an individual and their organic sensibility so that we may have “more” “glorious creature[s]” (13.87). Walden does not expect that we all construct cabins in the woods; rather, it asks that we conduct our own experiments of life and learn from others.

All three texts recognize that to remain practical, the utopian hope must remain in check and its energies should be spent in the here and now. All three texts commit engaging purposefully, carefully, and practically with the things that are not of our present reality. The past and the future are illusions in the here and now, but have very real influences on the present moment, and my analysis of these authors has demonstrated a method to understanding and using the influences of those illusions for goodness and progress. I do not wish to restrict the applicability of reading for utopian aims of texts other than the three discussed here. I hope this thesis inspires scholars, teachers, and other readers to conduct their own utopian thinking experiments with texts very different from the ones presented here. However, the three texts
herein offer very helpful illustrations of how and why the education-utopian framework works in the reader’s here and now. Taken together, these works have demonstrated that educational principles and utopian hope have an intimate, even symbiotic, relationship. The fruits of the relationship are fruits of the present moment, whether it is a temptation to imitate a utopian blueprint (even if on a smaller scale), a cultivated sense of universal love and benevolence towards humanity, an appreciation for the capabilities of the human mind, or a heightened alertness to our present conditions and how they might be improved. The hopes and utopian visions of these texts may nudge the reader into action or nudge their thinking in a particular direction. Whether temptation, inspiration, provocation, or otherwise, readers encounter a force in the present moment upon an interaction with a text. This thesis has demonstrated a way of reading that interaction as a teacher-student interaction, particularly a hopeful one.

Hope is an energy that stirs people to action in the here and now that, paradoxically, depends on a non-existent vision of the future. The opening epigraph of this thesis demonstrates this energy fittingly: “The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough” (Emerson 23). The extent of our vision does not define where our feet stand, but rather directs where they are going.
Works Cited


