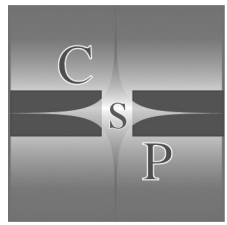
Popular Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and the Literary Marketplace

Edited by

Earl Yarington and Mary De Jong



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CHAPTER TEN

MARGARET FULLER: IN AND OUT OF THE BORDERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

AYSE NAZ BULAMUR

In this essay, I claim that Margaret Fuller's feminist critique in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) both anticipates the poststructuralist approach to feminism and reflects prevalent nineteenth-century attitudes as well as the Transcendentalist vision of her times. I will examine her work in relation to Hélène Cixous's and Michel Foucault's theories on gender and power and within the context of the historical period in which it was written. Like the French feminist Cixous, Fuller challenges socially constructed gender identities and crosses the borders between masculinity and femininity. Since men and women are "twin exponents of a divine thought," she calls for harmony, equality, and unity between the two spheres.[1] In accordance with Michel Foucault's definition of power, Fuller also suggests that both sexes contribute to the functioning of the patriarchal system. She shows how American women internalize their gender roles and submit to manpower.

Even though Fuller foresees the deconstruction of gender identities, she cannot totally emancipate herself from the borders of the nineteenth century. Twenty-first-century readers feel the presence of the cultural apparatuses shaping her writing and feminist rhetoric. Her work is a product of the philosophy and the spirit of its age. Women were considered to be inferior to men in intellect and "deficient in mind." In order to have credibility and respect in the social sphere as a woman writer, she needs "rational," "reliable" men's voices to convince her readers. She prefers to criticize patriarchy implicitly through the "irritated" husband, who is afraid that his wife will be taken "from the cradle and the kitchen hearth to vote at polls."[2] She also perpetuates the equation of femininity with chastity by presenting the virtuous, pure, and virgin

[1] Margaret Fuller, "Woman in the Nineteenth Century," in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds Criticism*, ed. Larry J. Reynolds (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 5.
[2] *Ibid*., 15.

female knights in mythology as role models for women. As a member of the Transcendentalist circle, she encourages women to live "*first* for God's sake,"[3] learn to be self-reliant, and expand their own spheres. Although she speaks to our own times, her feminist critique bears the stamp of its age.

Fuller crosses the borders of nineteenth-century patriarchal society by questioning the "rude classification" of sexes into domestic and social spheres. She displays how "male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism" in her time:[4]

> The growth of man is two-fold, masculine and feminine.
> As far as these two methods can be distinguished they are so as
> Energy and Harmony.
> Power and Beauty.
> Intellect and Love.
> Or by some such rude classification, for we have not language primitive and pure enough to express such ideas with precision.
>
> These two sides are supposed to be expressed in man and woman, that is, as the more and less, for the faculties have not been given pure to either, but only in preponderance. There are also exceptions in great number, such as men of far more beauty than power, and the reverse. But as a general rule, it seems to have been the intention to give a preponderance on the one side, that is called masculine, and on the other, one that is called feminine.[5]

Fuller shows how nineteenth-century American society equates masculinity with reason and intellect, femininity with beauty and harmony. She challenges the "radical dualism" between the sexes by stating that these characteristics are not given "pure" to man and woman. She illustrates how the two sides of the dualism are not fixed and intact, but shift and pass into one another. She also points out that masculinity is not essentially defined by power and logos. We read in the quotation above that there are also men who possess more beauty than power. For this reason, she claims that the growth of human beings is "two-fold." Therefore, both men and women can have intellect and be emotional at the same time. However, she also observes that patriarchy chooses to present genders in terms of hierarchical classifications. She underlines the supremacy of the male over the female traits by stating them first in the oppositions. Unlike Fuller, society does not acknowledge that seemingly opposing and different faculties might coexist in both sexes.

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[3] *Ibid*., 103.
[4] *Ibid*., 68.
[5] *Ibid*., 99.

Cixous, a century later, starts her essay "Sorties" by expanding Fuller's list of binary oppositions. Like her forerunner, she underlines the structuralist mindset of her society that works "through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior."[6] She asserts that literature, mythology, and philosophy are subjected to binary systems such as Speaking/Writing, High/Low, and Man/Woman.[7] A comparative reading of the two texts suggests that patriarchal societies in the late 1970's had not moved away from the dualism of sexes displayed by Fuller. Cixous demonstrates how patriarchal thought assigns universal and stable character traits to man and woman:

> Where is she?
> Activity/passivity
> Sun/Moon
> Culture/Nature
> Day/Night . . .
> Head/Heart
> Intelligible/Palpable
> Logos/Pathos . . .
> Man
> Woman[8]

It is significant that Cixous begins her essay with her inquiry of woman's position in the late twentieth century. Ironically, nineteenth-century definitions of masculinity and femininity hold true in Cixous's times. Patriarchal societies continue to privilege man—the symbol of authority, activity, and logos—over the "passive," "deficient" female. Cixous shows that woman is still in the domestic sphere and associated with harmony, beauty, and love. She claims that gender identities are not natural and essential but socially and historically constructed.

Nineteenth-century patriarchal philosophy worked through the hierarchical oppositions displayed by Fuller and Cixous. A.G.M., a reviewer for the *Southern Quarterly Review*, exemplifies Fuller's argument that patriarchal thought works through the hierarchical binary of masculinity and femininity. In "The Condition of Women," he writes that men are active, brave, and courageous whereas women are feeble, passive, emotional, and delicate. Women, for A.G.M., are inferior both in physical strength and in intellect. He argues that women, by nature, are not strong enough to join the army and talented enough to work in the senate. He is convinced that women who have

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[6] Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," in *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 64.
[7] *Ibid*., 63.
[8] *Ibid*.

"proficiency in the braches of abstruse science are but exceptions to the general rule."[9] Fuller observes that women are "shut out of the marketplace"[10] because of these gender stereotypes. In a letter to George T. Davis, she writes: "we women have no profession except marriage, mantua-making and school-keeping."[11] In a majority of marriages, she remarks, "the man looks upon his wife as an adopted child, and places her to the other children in the relation of nurse and governess, rather than of parent."[12]

In his critique of *Woman*, A. G. M. naturalizes gender roles by claiming that God, not man, assigns sexes to social and domestic spheres:

> Endowed, like the partner of her race, with an immortal mind, an emanation of that holy original whence she sprang, she yet differs from man in that peculiar organization and its effects, which she owes to the immutable will of her Creator.[13]

He asserts that it is the will of God that woman be dependent on man who will protect and support her in the "rough and rugged paths of life."[14] For this reason, he refutes Fuller's proposal, "We would have every path laid open to women as freely as to men." [15] Orestes Brownson concurs with A.G.M.'s belief that patriarchy is the law of God to which women must yield: "Their appropriate spheres are allotted to man and woman by their Creator, and all they have to do is to submit as quietly, and with as good a grace as they can."[16] He disapproves of Fuller's arguments on the equality of sexes:

> She [Fuller] says man is not the head of the woman. We, on the authority of the Holy Ghost, say he is. . . .Therefore the inspired Apostle, while he commands husbands to love and cherish their wives, commands wives to love and *obey* their husbands; and even setting aside all considerations of divine inspiration, St. Paul's authority is, to say the least, equal to that of Miss Fuller.[17]

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[9] A. G. M., "The Condition of Women," in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, 219.
[10] Fuller, *Woman*, 19.
[11] Quoted in Eve Kornfeld, *Margaret Fuller: A Brief Biography with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 20.
[12] Fuller, *Woman*, 42.
[13] A. G. M., "The Condition of Women," 219.
[14] *Ibid*., 219-20.
[15] Fuller, *Woman*, 20.
[16] Brownson, "Miss Fuller and Reformers," in *Woman,* 215.
[17] *Ibid*., 215.

We see how the advocates of patriarchy use religion as a political tool to perpetuate hierarchical oppositions. They maintain the subservience of woman by presenting gender identities as being natural and eternal. They rely on the authority of the Holy Ghost and St. Paul to undermine Fuller's call for the equality of the sexes. They hope that women with religious upbringing will credit holy commands rather than Fuller's radical doctrines.

What makes Fuller's feminist rhetoric radical is her implication that the hierarchical classification of sexes is not God-given but social. Fuller anticipates Cixous's argument that gender identities are not universal but socially constructed. "Men and women are caught up in a web of age-old cultural determinations . . . . One can no more speak of 'woman' than of 'man' without being trapped within an ideological theatre," Cixous writes.[18] Fuller shows that the appeal to religion, as illustrated in the articles by A. G. M. and Brownson, is not free of nineteenth-century class, race, and gender ideologies. She displays the hypocrisy of the system that assigns passivity and weakness to "woman" but lets "negresses endure field work, even during pregnancy" and "the sempstresses to go through their killing labors."[19] Champions of patriarchy claim that "The beauty of home would be destroyed"[20] if the white, middle-class American housewives raise their voices in the social sphere. However, Fuller notes that the black women working hard in the fields do not destroy the myth of democracy in the States. Fuller finds it ironic that the advocates of patriarchy argue that women are naturally unsuitable for work in a nation where "the Indian squaw carries the burdens of the camp, . . . and the washerwoman stands at her tub and carries home her work at all seasons, and in all states of health."[21] She acknowledges that physically demanding social duties are only "inconsistent with those of" a white mother and not the Indian or black woman.[22] She is aware that nineteenth-century American society does not "secure" motherhood, housekeeping, and passivity to the woman of color. Fuller mingles feminism with her critique of slavery and racism in America where "'All men are born free and equal.'"[23] As Christina Zwarg writes, *Woman* "encounters the tie between feminism and the racism of European-American Culture."[24]

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[18] Cixous, "Sorties," 83.
[19] Fuller, *Woman*, 19.
[20] *Ibid*., 18.
[21] *Ibid*., 19.
[22] *Ibid*., 18.
[23] *Ibid*., 13.
[24] Zwarg, "Fuller's Scene before the Women: *Woman in the Nineteenth* Century," in *Feminist Conversations: Fuller, Emerson, and the Play of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995), 169.

Furthermore, Fuller undermines socially constructed sex-role stereotypes by providing alternative conceptions of gender in history, literature, and mythology. As Bell Gale Chevigny argues, Fuller's illustrations underline "the cultural construction of the female and its temporal contingency" and suggest how "womanhood might be otherwise construed."[25] Fuller refers to Queen Elizabeth, Queen Isabella of Castile, and Emily Plater to challenge the equation of femininity with passivity. With these influential figures, Fuller shows how women can also be strong, self-sufficient, and energetic enough to rule their nations and play significant roles in history. Elizabeth was a powerful queen of England who "lived and died alone, [had] a wide energetic life, and a courageous death."[26] Fuller adds that the poets' "imaginations were stimulated as to the possibilities of woman" with the headstrong and ambitious woman ruler.[27] She praises Isabella of Castile for unifying the Spanish kingdom and encouraging Columbus to discover America. Fuller asserts that America should "pay back its debt to woman, without whose aid it would not been brought into alliance with the civilized world."[28] Polish nationalist Emily Plater and French heroine Joan of Arc are used to illustrate that women can be brave enough to fight for their countries.

Fuller also points to the range of the female "self-sufficing" figures in mythology and literature to challenge the nineteenth-century definition of femininity. For example, Egypt's Isis represents divine wisdom; Minerva is the Roman goddess of crafts and war; and Nike is the Greek goddess of victory. As Fritz Fleischmann points out, "Fuller turns to myth in order to subvert cultural formations that are posing as 'natural.'"[29] With the images of powerful mythological goddesses, Fuller implies that the equation of womanhood with domesticity is not free of her time's "cultural determinations.[30] If women had been essentially weak and submissive as A. G. M. and Brownson claimed, there would not have been potent and influential figures in history and mythology.

Fuller goes on to argue that not only women but also men are trapped in the "ideological theatre"[31] of the nineteenth century. She hints that masculinity can be an impediment for men who do not want to perform the role of strong, macho, and overruling heroes. Men can suffer as they try to conform to their

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[25] Chevigny, "'Cheat Me [On] by No Illusion': Margaret Fuller's Cultural Critique and Its Legacies," in *Margaret Fuller's Cultural Critique: Her Age and Legacy*, ed. Fritz Fleischmann (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 29.
[26] Fuller, *Woman*, 37.
[27] *Ibid*., 38.
[28] *Ibid*.
[29] Fleischmann, "Introduction: Cultural Translation as Cultural Critique," in *Margaret Fuller's Cultural Critique,* 9.
[30] Cixous, "Sorties," 83.
[31] *Ibid.*

socially constructed gender identities: "man does not have his 'fair play' either; his energies are repressed and distorted by the interposition of artificial obstacles."[32] Once again, she underlines the artificiality of the hierarchical oppositions that ascribe fixed and rigid identities to man and woman. Fuller remarks that men are "early forced into the bustle of life" and "weighed down by demands for outward success."[33] Society expects a husband to be a "good provider," moneymaker, and a "capital housekeeper."[34] In order to show that men are not naturally active and social, Fuller cites Hercules, who "fell in love with Omphale, queen of Lydia, and led a submissive life spinning wool." She points out that a man can "feel maternal love, to nourish his infant like a mother."[35] She even envisions "a female Newton, and a male Syren."[36] Fuller's illustrations from history, myth, and literature "jeer at the attempts of physiologists to bind great original laws" to gender identities by presenting them as eternal and God-given.[37]

Fuller proceeds to deconstruct the opposition of gender identities in her time:

> Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.[38]

If the opposition of male/female is not fixed, then both sexes can have authority, harmony, and intellect. As Judith Strong Albert states, "Fuller sought to define the parity of pairs carrying equal value, if not in advocating that humanity must rise above constructs of pairing altogether."[39] However, what Fuller proposes is not simply the equality of the two sides. She attempts to abolish the dualism itself by illustrating how seemingly opposing gender identities cross-cut each other. As Jeffrey Steele writes, Fuller's feminism "embodied a 'both/and' style that countered the 'either/or' world [that] faced Fuller's contemporaries."[40] She applies the "'both/and' style" to her feminism by bringing the two hemispheres of the "radical dualism" together: "Man partakes of the feminine in the Apollo,

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[32] Fuller, *Woman*, 27.
[33] *Ibid*., 64.
[34] *Ibid*., 42.
[35] *Ibid*., 69.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] *Ibid*., 68.
[39] Albert, "Currents of Influence: 'The electrical, the magnetic element in woman…" in *Margaret Fuller: Visionary of the New Age*, ed. Marie Mitchell Olesen Urbanski (Orono: Northern Lights, 1994), 234.
[40] Steele, "Margaret Fuller's Rhetoric of Transformation," in *Woman*, 287.

woman of the masculine as Minerva."[41] She surpasses the dual spheres by proposing that women can be courageous enough to be Queens, fight for their countries in battles, and bear "cold and frost," whereas men can feel maternal love towards their children and be submissive in marriage. She aims to free individuals by dissolving the boundaries between intellect/love, energy/harmony, and masculinity/femininity.

This leads many critics such as Elizabeth Ann Bartlett to see Fuller "as one of the earliest exponents of androgyny."[42] However, Fuller does not envision an androgynous humanity that cannot be distinguished by its behavior and appearance as being either man or woman. As Cynthia J. Davis points out, "Divorcing gendered traits from gendered forms, what Fuller works toward here is not so much androgyny—the blending of masculine and feminine into a sort of third amorphous gender—as simultaneity, not one melded sex but both at once, and more."[43] Davis notes that, for Fuller, we "can be both male and female at once."[44] "A fantasy of unity"—"two within one"—is a theme that reappears in Cixous's "Sorties."[45] Fuller's claim that we can simultaneously be male and female resonates with Cixous's definition of "bisexuality:" "the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes."[46] Both writers believe that the coexistence of differing gender traits is beneficial for an individual's self-development. Fuller writes that if masculinity and femininity "were in perfect harmony, they would correspond to and fulfill one another, like hemispheres, or the tenor and bass in music."[47] Her statement anticipates Cixous's argument that "accepting the other sex as a component makes them much richer, more various, stronger."[48]

Fuller not only challenges the universality of gender identities but also illustrates how patriarchal ideology is constructed and maintained by both men and women. Fuller shares Foucault's definition of power as she suggests that both sexes have a role in the continuation of patriarchal ideology. As a nineteenth-century feminist writer, Fuller holds men responsible for women's subservient position in society: "If there is a misfortune in woman's lot, it *is* in obstacles being interposed by men."[49] She accuses men of treating women as their handmaids and "prevent[ing] them from finding out what is fit for

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[41] Fuller, *Woman*, 69.
[42] Bartlett, *Liberty, Equality, Sorority* (New York: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1994), 103.
[43] Davis, "What 'Speaks in Us': Margaret Fuller, Woman's Rights, and Human Nature," in *Margaret Fuller's Cultural Critique,* 48.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] Cixous, "Sorties," 84.
[46] *Ibid*., 85.
[47] Fuller, *Woman*, 100.
[48] Cixous, "Sorties," 84.
[49] Fuller, *Woman*, 27.

themselves."[50] If women were free from manpower, they would develop their intellects and take active roles in the social sphere. "It is with women as with the slave," she writes.[51]

However, Fuller blames the "slaves" of patriarchy no less than men. From Foucault's perspective, both genders are caught in patriarchy's power network. He argues that "power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them."[52] If power is transmitted by those who "do not have it," then patriarchy can also be "manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those [women] who are dominated."[53] Patriarchal ideology cannot be maintained if women do not invest or transmit power. Fuller, a century before Cixous, discovers that "Shut out of his system's space, [woman] is the repressed that ensures the system's functioning."[54] In *Woman*, Fuller notes how women writers become the agents of manpower by assigning passivity, domesticity, and inferiority to their sisters in their conduct books. She is "sighing over" the guidebooks that undermine the "energies" of the female sex. For example, in *The Study of the Life of Woman*, Madame Necker de Saussure affirms men's superiority to women "in fortitude, in aspiration, in moral power" and encourages women to "remain inferior to man and subject to his will."[55] She believes that women "must take some man for [their] head, and be his hands" if they want to be successful in arts and sciences.[56]

Fuller declares that women have power to challenge the rules of femininity:

> Far less has woman to complain that she has not had her share of power. . . . woman has always power enough, if she choose to exert it, and is usually disposed to do so, in proportion to her ignorance and childish vanity. Unacquainted with the importance of life and its purposes, trained to a selfish coquetry and love of petty power, she does not look beyond the pleasure of making herself felt at the moment, and governments are shaken and commerce broken up to gratify the pique of a female favorite.[57]

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[50] *Ibid*., 36.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 174.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] Cixous, "Sorties," 67.
[55] Fuller, *Woman*, 93-95.
[56] *Ibid*., 93.
[57] *Ibid*., 35.

However, instead of using their power to break the chains of the masculine order, women perpetuate patriarchal ideology by conforming to their gender roles. Fuller criticizes women for not accepting the social obligation to improve their position. She is frustrated to see how they fulfill men's expectations by becoming the "ignorant," "childish" playthings of men. Patriarchy transmits its power through women who internalize their subordinate social roles and do not fight for equality. As Arthur Brown argues, Fuller "considers women's willingness to be subservient to men partially responsible for the continuing restrictions of their activities."[58]

Fuller observes that women perpetuate the link of femininity with coquetry by adopting the "doll" image to win men's admiration. At a fashionable public resort, Fuller has encountered wealthy American ladies "dressed without regard to the season or the demands of the place" to attract the attention of men. The ladies were pleased to receive an "open sneer" from men. Fuller could see the belittling gaze that "marked the women's low position in the moral and intellectual world."[59] She writes that these men are "confirmed" in "the low opinion they already entertained of woman."[60] As women allow themselves to be flattered by men, they reaffirm the prejudice that women are attractive but indolent creatures. Fuller believes that her fellow women reinforce the doll-like image of women in society by receiving compliments such as "beautiful" and "fashionable" with gratitude. As Foucault would say, they become the "voluntary actors"[61] of patriarchal ideology.

Fuller attempts to convince her nineteenth-century women readers to stop functioning as the agents of patriarchy. She knows that she cannot overthrow manpower without the readers' participation. Collective action is necessary to establish the equality of sexes. As Judith Mattson Bean points out, Fuller "aims to persuade listeners that they can be agents of change."[62] For this reason, she asks American women to "clear [their] souls from the taint of vanity," ignorance, and "selfish coquetry."[63] Her reformist vision can never be realized unless women give up aimless excitements such as "love of dress" and "love of flattery."[64] As long as a woman "wastes the flower of her mind on transitory sentiments," she will never have the opportunity for self-development and can never be addressed as "accomplished Eve." Instead of taking "the flattery of

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[58] Brown, *Margaret Fuller* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 128.
[59] Fuller, *Woman*, 86.
[60] *Ibid*.
[61] Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, 174.
[62] Bean, "Conversation as Rhetoric in Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*" in *In Her Own Voice: Nineteenth-Century American Women Essayists*, ed. Sherry Lee Linkon (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), 27.
[63] Fuller, *Woman*, 83.
[64] *Ibid*., 86.

men as proof of perfection,"[65] Fuller asks women to listen to the voice of their consciences that will prepare the way for self-improvement. She wants them to "ward off the corruptions of vanity and idleness,"[66] improve their talents and intellect, and prove that reason and logos are not essentially masculine traits. Fuller underlines the power of oppressed women to challenge patriarchy by stating, "Tremble not before the free man, but before the slave who has chains to break."[67]

Fuller points out how mothers, in particular, become "voluntary actors" of patriarchy by teaching their sons to be the head of their families and their daughters to be submissive wives. She asks: "Women of my country!" and "the mothers of our own revolution: have you nothing to do with this?"[68] Once again Fuller encourages women to be more than passive readers and to put her revolutionary doctrines into practice. She urges them not to be their husbands' playmates but their companions:

> You would not speak in vain; whether each in her own home, or banded in unison. Tell these men that you will not accept the glittering baubles, spacious dwellings, and plentiful service, they mean to offer you through these means. Tell them that the heart of women demands nobleness and honor in man, and that if they have not purity, have not mercy, they are no longer fathers, lovers, husbands, sons of yours.[69]

Mothers can alter the patriarchal system by teaching their sons to revere the female sex and their daughters to refuse to be their husbands' servants. What women need, Fuller argues, is honor and reverence. She courageously advises women to disavow their husbands, fathers, and sons if they are incapable of treating them with respect and nobility. As David Watson writes, Fuller wants women to "avoid colluding with the exercise of [man] power."[70] With the opening lines of the text, Fuller also suggests that "the Earth waits for her Queen"[71] to save women from their ignorance and childish vanity and challenge the patriarchal system. As we see, Fuller insists on women's capacity to disrupt patriarchy's power network.

Even though Fuller challenges the universality of gender roles and the masculine order, she cannot entirely free herself from the restraints of her time.

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[65] *Ibid*., 85.
[66] *Ibid*., 98.
[67] *Ibid*., 36.
[68] *Ibid*., 98.
[69] *Ibid*.
[70] Watson, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic* (New York: Berg Publishers Limited, 1988), 72.
[71] Fuller, *Woman*, 7.

Our social environment, profession, educational background, family upbringing, and the traditions of the community shape the way we perceive the world. The language we speak and the prevailing ideologies in our society give us identity and determine our thought and behavior. Since our notion of reality is socially constructed, it is impossible to detach ourselves from our social and historical moment. Thus, nineteenth-century beliefs and conventions inevitably haunt Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. In the rest of this paper, I will point out that Fuller quotes from prominent male figures of her century to support her arguments, perpetuates the equation of masculinity with intellect and femininity with purity, and mingles her Transcendentalist vision with her feminist rhetoric.

As a nineteenth-century woman writer, Fuller needs men's voices to justify her reformist doctrines and to win credibility with her readers. As Mary Loeffelholz writes, Fuller's contemporaries "assigned critique, philosophy, and abstraction to the masculine."[72] Writing was considered as a male profession in the early nineteenth century. Early American women writers published anonymously and concealed their identities with feminine pen names. Women had no voice in the political sphere. Men were the speaking subjects. Men's statements serve as proof texts for Fuller to claim equality for man and woman and analyze how both sexes perpetuate patriarchal ideology. As Marie Olesen Urbanski points out, Fuller tries "to buttress her argument with authority using the views of recognized authors to support her position."[73] Goethe, Eugene Sue, and John Adams are the "spiritual sires" of *Woman*.

Fuller uses Goethe's views to question male supremacy and call for an "equal and noble" relationship between man and woman:

> He aims at a pure self-subsistence, free development of any powers with which they [women] may be gifted by nature as much for them as for men. . . Accordingly the meeting between man and woman, as represented by him, is equal and noble . . .[74]

Goethe's belief in the "free development" of the sexes coincides with Fuller's conviction that "every path [should lie] open to woman as freely as to man."[75] She also refers to the French novelist Eugene Sue, who "has the heart of a reformer, and especially towards women."[76] The strong and independent women

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[72]Loeffelholz, "Essential, Portable, Mythical Margaret Fuller," in *Challenging Boundaries: Gender and Periodization*, ed. Joyce W. Warren and Margaret Dickie (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2000), 174.

[73] Urbanski, "*Woman in the Nineteenth Century*: Genesis, Form, Tone, and Rhetorical Devices," in *Margaret Fuller: Visionary of the New Age*, 166.

[74] Fuller, *Woman*, 76.

[75] *Ibid*., 20.

[76] *Ibid*., 88.

characters in Sue's novels show that he has "the true spirit of reform as to women."[77] French philosopher Charles Fourier "places woman on an entire equality with man and wishes to give to one as to the other that independence which must result from intellectual and practical development."[78] Intertwining her feminist principles with eminent male writers' position on gender is another strategy to call readers into action.

Fuller also quotes John Quincy Adams and his father John Adams to criticize American "ladies" and to provide an ideal. J. Q. Adams advises women "not to take the flattery of men as proof of perfection."[79] A letter by John Adams indicates that his wife has a bright genius, refined taste, virtuous heart, and firm character. She was not her husband's "handmaid, but his help-mate."[80] Her son tells us that "perhaps the greatest of blessings that can be bestowed on man" is a mother.[81] As a result of his mother's teachings, he regards the female mind as virtuous and wise. He has been taught not to flatter but "to love and revere the female sex."[82] If women in Fuller's time believed that reform comes from the "rational," "educated" male thinkers of the century, they would value the Adamses' words more than Fuller's arguments.

Fuller also relies on man's voice to dramatize the inequality of the sexes in patriarchy. She blames man for woman's limited status in society not in an overt, outrageous fashion but in an implicit and indirect manner: a dialogue. Zwarg remarks that the reader witnesses the subservient position of woman in marriage not from Fuller's first person point of view, but from "a conversation between a husband and someone whose views are obviously similar to Fuller's."[83] The husband thinks that his wife cannot fulfill her domestic duties if she is educated, has the right to vote, and can "preach from a pulpit." Without ever asking his wife, he is sure that "she is happy enough as she is" in her own sphere.[84] Here is an excerpt from the conversation between the husband and his radical listener:

> "She is too amiable to wish what would make me unhappy, and too judicious to wish to step beyond the sphere of her sex. I will never consent to have our peace disturbed by such discussions."
> "'Consent--you?' it is not consent from you that is in question, it is assent from your wife."

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[77] *Ibid*.
[78] *Ibid*., 73.
[79] *Ibid*., 85.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] *Ibid*., 84.
[82] *Ibid*.
[83] Zwarg, "Fuller's Scene before the Women: *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*," 175.
[84] Fuller, *Woman*, 15.

> "Am I not the head of my house?"
> "You are not the head of your wife. God has given her a mind of her own."
> "I am the head and she the heart."[85]

Through the husband's point of view, we witness how men classify the sexes as "the head" and "the heart," and imprison women in the domestic sphere. The listener, on the other hand, speaks up for equality of sexes in marriage. As Zwarg argues, by not identifying herself with the listener/questioner, Fuller "refuses to endorse openly the position of the voice challenging patriarchy and 'family union' even as she manages to show how each conversational turn between the two voices opens a potential site for critique."[86]

Although Fuller questions the dualism between the sexes through the conversation quoted above, her narrative is not completely free of nineteenth-century gender stereotypes. She strengthens her society's "masculine" stereotype by stating that Adam should have been the "guardian," "teacher," and "spiritual sire" of Eve.[87] However, man "misunderstood and abused his disadvantages, and became her temporal master instead of her spiritual sire. . . . He educated woman more as a servant than a daughter, and found himself a king without a queen."[88] Fuller suggests that if man had taught woman to improve her intellect, she would not have become a mere plaything.

Fuller also perpetuates eighteenth-century ideals of virtue. Juxtaposing Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuller leads us to see that both writers ascribe chastity, nobility, and purity to the female sex. Mary Wollstonecraft:

> Why must the female mind be tainted by coquettish arts to gratify the sensualist, and prevent love from subsiding into friendship, or compassionate tenderness, when there are not qualities which friendship can be built? Let the honest heart shew itself, *reason* teach passion to submit to necessity; or, let the dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge raise the mind above those emotions which rather imbitter than sweeten the cup of life, when they are not restrained within due bounds.[89]

Margaret Fuller:

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[85] *Ibid*., 16.
[86] Zwarg, "Fuller's Scene before the Women: *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*," 176.
[87] Fuller, *Woman*, 100.
[88] *Ibid*.
[89] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), 30.

> Pure love, inspired by a worthy object, must ennoble and bless, whether mutual or not; but that which is excited by coquettish attraction of any grade of refinement, must cause bitterness and doubt, as to the reality of human goodness, so soon as the flush of passion is over.[90]

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft defines passion as an immoral and sinful emotion that should be tamed by reason. She envisions desire as a transitory emotion that would "imbitter" love—compassionate friendship and tenderness—between man and woman. For this reason, she believes that women should be guided by virtue and knowledge, not with fancy and lust. Logos, not passion, should influence woman's judgment and behavior. Like her forerunner, Fuller encourages women to lay aside coquetry. Her concept of "pure love" does not involve passionate feelings either. In the quotation above, we see that the equation between desire and bitterness reappears a half-century later in Fuller's discourse. Strong, intelligent women in mythology, literature, and history also serve as role models of purity and morality in Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. For example, she refers to the goddess Sita, "a form of tender purity," in a Hindu epic poem.[91] She also praises the self-sufficient and virgin Roman goddesses Diana, Minerva, and Vesta. Britomart, the strong female knight of chastity, and Belphoebe, the chaste huntress in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, also illustrate Fuller's conception of ideal woman as being both courageous and virtuous. She reproduces the hierarchical binary of purity and coquetry by comparing Duessa, an evil enchantress, and Una, a virgin representing truth, in *The Faerie Queene*. She remarks that "the love of truth" and "the love of excellence" will eventually save one from passion and desire.[92] Her feminist discourse resonates with Ralph Waldo Emerson's claim that "Virtue is the governor, the creator, the reality. All things real are so by so much of virtue as they contain."[93] The Polish revolutionary Emily Plater also serves as a role model for women with her "dignity," "purity," and her "calm, deep enthusiasm which yet could, when occasion called, sparkle up a holy, an indignant fire."[94] As Davis observes, "many of her arguments for ending women's oppression are grounded in traditional views of women as the gentler, purer, more spiritual sex."[95]

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[90] Fuller, *Woman*, 83.
[91] *Ibid*., 28.
[92] *Ibid*., 83.
[93] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 330.
[94] Fuller, *Woman*, 25.
[95] Davis, "What 'Speaks in Us': Margaret Fuller, Woman's Rights, and Human Nature," 47.

However, *Woman* differs from *Vindication* with its Transcendentalist vision of self-reliance. Fuller's belief in the universality of the human soul accords with Emerson's statement in "The American Scholar" that "It is one soul which animates all men."[96] The Transcendentalists did not trust religious institutions and ministers who interfered with the communication between man and God. As Kornfeld explains, they "sought divinity within themselves and nature."[97] In their view, relying on one's nature, instincts, and thoughts will eventually bring moral and intellectual growth. In "Self-Reliance," Emerson writes, "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature."[98]

Fuller shares the Transcendentalist view that to know one's soul is to know God. In her journal of 1842, she writes that she does not need an institution, a Church, to worship God:

> [I] accept nothing till it is affirmed in the due order of mine own nature. I belong nowhere. . . . God and the soul and nature are all my creed, subdivisions are unimportant. -As to your church, I do not deny the Church…. I have my church where I take these simpler modes, if the world prefers more complex, let it. I act for myself, but prescribe for none other.[99]

As in her journal, in *Woman*, Fuller emphasizes her belief in the universal soul that unites individuals from different race, gender, and cultural backgrounds. Her call for the independence of women and slaves is also reminiscent of Emerson's belief in the divinity of human soul. Fuller defies the social "subdivisions" among humans by stating, "If the Negro be a soul, if the woman be a soul, appareled in flesh, to one Master only are they accountable."[100] Fuller argues that since "there is one law for souls," then all humans regardless of their race and sex should be treated as equals.[101]

Fuller incorporates Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance in her feminist rhetoric as well. Like Emerson, Fuller believes "that true knowledge comes from the intuitive and personal knowledge of self-discovery and the discovery of nature."[102] She exclaims that what a woman needs is "as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded."[103] She hopes to

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[96] Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), 208.
[97] Kornfeld, *Margaret Fuller*, 19.
[98] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 321.
[99] Quoted in Bartlett, *Liberty, Equality, Sorority*, 96.
[100] Fuller, *Woman*, 20.
[101] *Ibid*.
[102] Bartlett, *Liberty, Equality, Sorority*, 96.
[103] Fuller, *Woman*, 20.

change women's inferior position in society by encouraging them to look inward, where they will discover God and approach spiritual perfection. If a woman lives for God's sake, "she will not make an imperfect man her god, and thus sink to idolatry."[104] In other words, she will learn how to be self-dependent and to expand her own sphere. Fuller asks women to form their own ideals and decide "what offices they may fill" for themselves.[105] Women can be "sea-captains," join the army, fight for the liberty of their countries, or stay in the domestic sphere if they want to. Fuller writes:

> We are pleased that women should write and speak, if they feel the need of it, from having something to tell; but silence for ages would be no misfortune if that silence be from divine command, and not from man's tradition.[106]

As long as women rely on their divine intuition, they can choose to "write and speak" or to have no voice in the public sphere. Breaking away from "man's tradition" and having self-assurance will help women achieve spiritual and moral growth. Once again we should note that what Fuller offers is a limited freedom. Self-reliance does not give women the liberty to follow their passions. She remarks that "when intellectual consciousness is calm and deep[,] inspiration will not be confounded with fancy."[107] Improving the intellect will, in fact, keep women from lust and fancy. She supports the Enlightenment idea that human beings should be guided by reason, regularity, and proportion rather than imagination and pleasure.

Miranda illustrates Fuller's belief in self-reliance and in "the growth of individual minds."[108] Fuller uses Miranda to encourage nineteenth-century women readers to restrain their passion by reason, emphasizing that Miranda's relations with men and women were "affectionate without passion."[109] Because her "mind was often the leading one, always effective," she had virtues such as courage, honor, self-confidence, and "clear judgment."[110] Miranda overcame "outward adversity" and inner conflicts with intelligence and self-respect. Men did not stand in her way but approved and aided Miranda, in whom "they saw resolution and clearness of design."[111] Miranda tells us why she is uniquely self-dependent:

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[104] *Ibid*., 103.
[105] *Ibid*., 102.
[106] *Ibid*., 47.
[107] *Ibid*., 62.
[108] *Ibid*., 13.
[109] *Ibid.*, 21
[110] *Ibid*.
[111] *Ibid*.

> Because the position I early was enabled to take was one of self-reliance. And were all women as sure of their wants as I was, the result would be the same. But they are so overloaded with precepts by guardians, who think that nothing is so much to be dreaded for a woman as originality of thought and character, that their minds are impeded by doubts till they lose their chance of fair free proportions. The difficulty is to get them to the point from which they shall naturally develop self-respect, and learn self-help.[112]

Using Miranda's voice, Fuller encourages women to free themselves from the precepts of "guardians," trust themselves, and form their own inner principles. Woman, for Fuller, will remain "an overgrown child," if she cannot learn to be self-dependent.[113] As Bartlett writes, Fuller's emphasis on "the importance of acquiring knowledge through intuition, and the need of woman to grow as a nature and develop as a soul are all reminiscent of Emerson and Transcendentalism in general."[114]

Miranda, "a child of spirit," is also an example of how "Fuller placed women . . . in a position close to the secret qualities of divine wisdom and vitality existing in the cosmos."[115] As Eve Kornfeld and Melissa Marks argue, women, for Fuller, embody Transcendental values such as divine intuition and self-dependence. Paradoxically, in *Woman*, Fuller both signals the contractedness of femininity and describes the essential "feminine element" in woman. She offers alternative definitions of femininity as she challenges nineteenth-century gender stereotypes. Her illustrations from history, mythology, and literature show that women are not biologically weak and submissive. However, her definition of femininity is as essentialist as the one offered by the advocates of patriarchy. Fuller equates femininity with "creative genius" and "the electrical, the magnetic element."[116] "The especial genius of woman I believe to be electrical in movement, intuitive in function, spiritual in tendency," she writes.[117] Miranda emerges as the ideal woman with her "strong electric nature."[118] Ironically, Fuller perpetuates the dualism of sexes by arguing that woman's "intuitions are more rapid and more correct" than man.[119] She believes that woman "excels not

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[112] *Ibid*., 22.
[113] *Ibid*., 103.
[114] Bartlett, *Liberty, Equality, Sorority*, 97.
[115] Eve Kornfeld and Melissa Marks, "Margaret Fuller: Minerva and the Muse," *Journal of American Culture*, no. 13 (1990): 50.
[116] Fuller, *Woman*, 61.
[117] *Ibid*., 68.
[118] *Ibid*., 21.
[119] *Ibid*., 61.

so easily in classification, or re-creation, as in an instinctive seizure of causes."[120] Like her critics A. G. M. and Brownson, Fuller attempts to assign universal and eternal qualities to woman. Even late-twentieth-century feminist writers attempt to create alternative gender roles as they deconstruct traditional ones. For example, Cixous describes a "self proper to woman"[121] as she deconstructs the equation of femininity with domesticity and passivity. Like Fuller a century before, Cixous idealizes the "especial genius" of woman by claiming that "her libido is cosmic," "her flesh speaks true," and "her unconscious is worldwide."[122]

Ultimately, different genres and multiple perspectives come together in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* to expose the patriarchal consciousness of Fuller's age. Fuller, as a nineteenth-century feminist writer, "breaks down barriers to the future"[123] by deconstructing gender identities and unraveling the workings of patriarchal ideology in her society. She challenges the universality of gender roles by juxtaposing powerful women figures from mythology, history and literature with the culturally constructed images of femininity in her time. From the conversational sketch with the husband and Fuller's criticism of American "ladies," we see the patriarchal system as a network in which women as well as men participate. As Chevigny argues, Fuller "anticipates a generation of social-construction theorists" by suggesting that sexual stereotypes and patriarchal order are not God-given but socially constructed.[124] Although Fuller is ahead of her time, she is not totally liberated from nineteenth-century beliefs and ideals. She reinforces the traditional definition of masculinity in her society with her belief that Adam should have been Eve's educator. In addition, her proposed path to women's freedom arises from living for God's sake and being self-reliant. She shares the Transcendentalists' spiritual vision that intuitive knowledge will lead to self-growth. Reading Fuller's text in the light of late-twentieth-century theories of gender and power, and the historical period in which it was written, enables us to see how different literary periods can merge with one another.

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[120] *Ibid*., 68.
[121] Cixous, "Sorties," 87.
[122] *Ibid*., 88-92.
[123] Fuller, *Woman*, 88.
[124] Chevigny, "'Cheat Me [On] by No Illusion,'" 29.