

“To be alive – is Power”:
Fuller’s Feminine Ideal Realized in Dickinson’s Poems

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of English

UNION COLLEGE
June 2011

ABSTRACT

KROSSCHELL, EMMA “To be alive – is Power”: Fuller’s Feminine Ideal Realized in Dickinson’s Poems. Department of English, June 2011.

ADVISORS: Professor Judith Lewin, Professor Bernhard Kuhn

This thesis examines the relationship between nineteenth-century American feminism, transcendentalism, and poetry through an analysis of Margaret Fuller’s essay *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in tandem with Emily Dickinson’s collected poems. Fuller presents an original type of feminist optimism influenced by the precepts of the American transcendentalist movement. Her essay employs the transcendental belief in the possibility for human semi-divinity in order to proclaim that women, rather than men, possess unique potential for transcendence. As a result, Fuller theorizes that with women’s social, sexual, and intellectual liberation, a certain ideal woman will be able to transcend not only women’s limited position in a patriarchal society, but also the confines of human experience.

I investigate the details of Fuller’s ideal woman and employ her theories as a lens through which to read Dickinson’s poems, with the goal of determining if Dickinson’s poetic genius embodies this female ideal. By simultaneously analyzing the two women’s works, I reveal the ways in which Dickinson’s poems enhance, complicate, and deviate from Fuller’s concepts, as well as the literary exchange that arises between the two writers. Due to the essay and poems’ capacity to reciprocally nuance each other, I argue that Dickinson’s poetic achievement, when read concurrently with Fuller, does fulfill Fuller’s concept of the feminine transcendental ideal.

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INTRODUCTION

To be alive – is Power –
Existence – in itself –
Without a further function –
Omnipotence – Enough –

To be alive – and Will!
'Tis able as a God –
The Maker – of Ourselves – be what –
Such being Finitude!

- Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson's resounding words suggest the great strength and knowledge inherent in human existence. How can this poet – a devout, reclusive woman – draw such conclusions from her rather ordinary and restricted life? As the unmarried daughter of a well-respected New England politician, Dickinson spent the majority of her days in her father's household, cooking and cleaning and scribbling bits of poems on scrap paper. Despite pleas from friends and acquaintances, Dickinson almost always refused to have her poems published, and she remained obstinately separate from the literary world until her death. As she grew older, she became more withdrawn, observing public life in Amherst only from her window.

This mundane image of Dickinson is at odds with the unyielding, prophet-like voice that permeates her poems. Poem 677¹ exemplifies that her words and poetic style are incandescent as well as ominous, jagged as well as smooth. What lies at the center of "To be alive – is Power -" is the assertion of the beauty and possibilities natural to human life. Dickinson throws out such loaded words as "Power," "Omnipotence," and "Will," simultaneously invoking associations of dominance, spirituality, and pride, and questioning the acceptance of these associations. In the first line Dickinson creates a causal relationship, conflating the concepts of "To be alive" and

“Power.” The meaning of these words is straightforward enough; however, with the jolt of the dash between the concepts, their relationship becomes more complex. The same is true throughout the rest of the poem, where the unconventional punctuation creates an overall sense of incomprehension and doubt.

And yet, Dickinson insists upon the initial concept asserted in the first line. “Existence” is linked to “Omnipotence,” “Ourselves” to “a God.” She thus declares the power each individual can obtain through simple existence, a feeling that remains mostly constant throughout the first seven lines of the poem. But, with the final line, Dickinson’s words complement the discomfort caused by the dashes: “Such being Finitude!” As with most of her poems, this line is grammatically ambiguous. Is “being” a verb or a noun? To what does the “being” refer? Is it to “Ourselves,” “a God,” or “the Maker”? These questions need not be answered with complete certainty, for the meaning of the lines remains the same: despite our divine-like existence, humans, as well as God, are all “Finit[e].”

It is through poem’s tension that this central idea can emerge. Following in the footsteps of the idealist tendencies of mid-nineteenth-century American literature, Dickinson’s poems reveal similar beliefs in the power of the individual, but also raise questions about the limitations of that power. She wrestles with the interaction of the secular and the divine, the private and the public, life and death, and many other complicated themes. And yet, the ambiguity and tensions in her poetic voice emerge not as weak and indecisive, but as some of the most honest, truthful verses written. What is it about Dickinson that allows her to achieve this impossible balance of truth, clarity, and uncertainty?

And will she not soon appear? The woman who shall vindicate
their birthright for all women; who shall teach them what to claim,
and to use what they obtain? Shall not her name be for her era
Victoria, for her country and life Virginia?

- Margaret Fuller

The literary atmosphere of Margaret Fuller's nineteenth-century American era was marked by a need for a uniquely American literary, as well as cultural, social, and political identity. This desire reached partial fulfillment in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and other New England writers, creating a specifically American Romanticism known as transcendentalism. As a collection of ideas about literature, philosophy, religion, social reform, and American culture, transcendentalism surfaced as an intensely idealistic literary movement. The publication of Emerson's essay "Nature" in 1836 marks the beginning of transcendentalism. A series of meditations on the human state as it exists in the natural world, "Nature" paved the way for the development and understanding of the complicated concepts circulating in the Boston literary scene. As a dissenting Unitarian minister, Emerson combines an uncorrupted, individualistic religious fervor with a somewhat secular emphasis on the beauty of human nature. Emerson's other major essays, including "Self-Reliance," "The American Scholar," "Divinity School Address," "Experience," and others, delineate the tenets of transcendentalism. These integral concepts are: that the connection between the human soul, nature, and God, is the gateway to the divine; that human nature mirrors the truths of the universe, and therefore has the potential for universal knowledge; and that individual intuition is the incarnation of this godlike capacity for knowledge. It is most important for the purposes of this thesis to recognize transcendentalism as an idealistic theoretical concept that indicates the possibility of a type of divine human existence.

Fuller was intimately involved with the “inner circle” of the American transcendentalists. As a highly intelligent, educated, and ambitious woman living in New England, Fuller sought intellectual fulfillment and stimulation among the great minds of her time; thus, Fuller was introduced to Emerson in 1836, just as “Nature” was published and Emerson’s genius was taking shape. The friendship between the two writers became one of reciprocal, intellectual respect and provided Fuller with a literary mentor who helped form her philosophical and creative mind. In reading her correspondence with Emerson, her essays and creative works, and the records of her “conversation classes,”² it is clear that Fuller internalized the basic principles of transcendentalism, especially the belief in a type of human perfection. However, with her essay *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, she adds an unprecedented claim: that women specifically have the potential to achieve the transcendentalist ideal. She states that if equality for women were achieved, “the Divine would ascend into nature to a height unknown in the history of past ages, and nature, thus instructed, would regulate the spheres not only so as to avoid collision, but to bring forth ravishing harmony.”³ The radical optimism of this claim rests entirely upon the feminine capacity for a certain pseudo-omniscience. In this way, the connection between Dickinson’s poem 677 becomes clear; through her poems, Dickinson comments on the human potential for “Omnipotence,” specifically through her unique feminine mind, as this thesis will demonstrate.

Fuller is generally recognized as the first American feminist. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, first published as “The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men, Woman versus Women” in 1843, presents Fuller’s unique combination of transcendentalist idealism and outraged social subversion by advocating for the rights of women. She argues for legal, political, emotional, and sexual gender equality in America and suggests the immediate need for modern America to

achieve, for lack of a better phrase, sexual transcendence. Throughout the essay, Fuller presents various reasons and methods for creating this equal society, almost all of which name woman as the proprietor of all transcendental qualities. These qualities are manifested in three general positions of women: social, sexual, and intellectual. The conclusions drawn from *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* thus suggest that it is a woman who will achieve the divinity and universal knowledge posited by Emerson.

Around the same time that Fuller was publishing *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Dickinson began writing poetry. Radically different from the public life Fuller wished to lead, Dickinson's life was spent in relative seclusion in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her writing does not resemble Fuller's, for where Fuller excelled in the essay form and struggled with poetry and creative prose, Dickinson wrote nothing but poetry. Dickinson never proclaimed a feminist agenda nor did she specifically adhere to the tenets of transcendentalism. Yet, when read alongside Fuller's essay and her concept of the female transcendentalist ideal, Dickinson's work takes on a new significance. Could Emily Dickinson embody this "immortal being"⁴ through her poetry that Fuller insisted would arrive? This question provides the basis for this thesis.

In both subject and style, Dickinson's poems are unparalleled in modern poetic tradition. Her use of disjointed syntax and eccentric punctuation sets her work apart from any preceding or succeeding poet. Where the poetic conventions of her time dictated a generally strict form, ornate language, and lofty subjects, Dickinson's own poetic principles displayed playfulness of rhyme and meter, unexpected diction, and bluntly honest topics. Some of her most successful and well-known poems meditate on death and mortality in a grim way, a quality completely uncharacteristic of most nineteenth-century female poets. In addition to her unwavering honesty

about a wide variety of subjects, Dickinson approaches her own position, as both woman and poet, in a frank manner. Unlike Fuller's writing, however, her poems do not take on a directly feminist stance; instead, she seems to contemplate womanhood, femininity, and the subordination of women through the creation of female characters, voices, and subjects. As Dickinson is a woman, it is natural to make the connection of a female subject in a poem or a feminine speaker directly to Dickinson herself. While this assumption is often valid, it is also important to recognize those female subjects as Dickinson's indirect commentary on womankind in general. By leaving her subjects undefined and anonymous, she allows for an abstract, feminine space to surround many of her poems. At the same time, Dickinson's genius is in no way limited to her identity as a woman. On the contrary, she often makes reference to poetic voice, song, beauty, and the "mysterious bard,"⁵ suggesting her identification as a poet. A tension arises from the interaction of the roles of woman and poet, from which emerges her originality and unique style.

In this way, Dickinson's poetic genius represents the feminine ideal prophesied by Fuller in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. The unnamable, intangible truthfulness of her poetry indicates her ability to "enter into the secrets of truth and love,"⁶ as Fuller believed was possible. In addition, Dickinson's writing style and linguistic choices display commonalities with the somewhat illogically written *Woman*, in which Fuller's associative (rather than argumentative) style mirrors her comments on the female mind. She recognizes the basic differences between man and woman and thus champions the "feminine" mind, just as Dickinson welcomes her own original, female poesy.

In order to make sense of the ambiguous and often conflicting thematic shifts in Fuller and Dickinson's work, my argument is organized according to Fuller's commentaries on three of

the women's positions – as social, sexual, and intellectual – in her contemporary society. The separation of these roles is not meant to be restrictive or all-inclusive of Fuller's thoughts in *Woman*; on the contrary, these guidelines point out overlap among the topics as much as they convey their differences. Fuller did not organize her essay according to conventional logic, and so each of my explanations of these female roles synthesizes various moments from Fuller's work. The application of the poems, in conjunction with feminist theory and criticism, fleshes out Fuller's abstract concepts and grounds them in Dickinson's poetry.

The first chapter analyzes Fuller's description of and commentary on the women's social position. It breaks down the social theories in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in order to elucidate the scope of Fuller's feminism, which appears most clearly in the social aspects of the female condition. I also employ more contemporary, first- and second-wave feminist theory, as a way to demonstrate the complexities of *Woman* and Dickinson's poems as they relate to women in society. The second chapter extracts Fuller's subtly hidden commentaries on female sexuality. Due to the fact that female sexuality was a taboo subject in the nineteenth century, Fuller's essay theorizes less directly on the sexual condition of women as it does on the social condition. Nonetheless, with the help of contemporary feminist theories, the chapter demonstrates how Fuller and Dickinson formulate unprecedented, liberating concepts of female sexuality. The last chapter focuses on the intellectual position of women. As writers themselves, Fuller and Dickinson both illuminate the importance of reclaiming intellectual indulgence and development for women, thus presenting a multifaceted perspective on the subject. The truly original content in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and in Dickinson's poems emerges with this final analysis.

This thesis significantly synthesizes Fuller and Dickinson in order to illuminate the subtleties of each writer's works and the unique feminist perspective that they reveal when

combined. Though I employ Fuller's essay, for the most part, as a theoretical lens through which to consider Dickinson's poems, I do not delimit Fuller and Dickinson as simply theorist and poet, respectively. By reading the essay and poems together, each writer's works become newly nuanced and fresh conclusions are revealed for both. As a result, this thesis displays how the literary achievements of the two nineteenth-century women writers provide an abundance of original ideas still relevant today, and how these ideas persist in promoting and continually transforming modern feminism.

¹ All Dickinson poems cited in this paper refer to: *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960. Print.

² Fuller founded an all-women discussion group that provided intellectual knowledge and stimulation for women in the Boston area.

³ Fuller, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticism*. Ed. Larry J. Reynolds. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. Print, 6. All future citations from this edition will be cited as e.g. Fuller 6.

⁴ Ibid 41.

⁵ Dickinson poem 167

⁶ Fuller 23.

CHAPTER 1: THE SOCIAL WOMAN

Be thou obedient, for the law of superiority is given to man from above, and subjection is the portion of the daughters of Eve.

- William Kenrick, *The Whole Duty of Woman*

The feminist spirit saturating Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, though now easily conflated with present-day feminist concepts, was intensely radical at the moment of the essay's publication. Having received an extraordinarily prolific education for a nineteenth-century woman, Fuller was able to break free from many of American women's constrictive social and intellectual roles. Despite her position in her father's household as typically domestic, she could write fiction and poetry, participate in Boston's literary circle as an editor of the transcendental journal *The Dial*, and found her "conversation classes." Her remove from conventional women's roles allowed her to recognize the true injustice of the female condition.

Nineteenth-century gender inequality, especially in social life, demonstrates the degree to which women themselves were blindsided by patriarchal tradition. An interesting, though slightly disquieting, historical lens for nineteenth-century female social expectations is the so-called "female conduct" handbooks that circulated Europe and America. Frequently written by men, these texts delineate "appropriate" female social, intellectual, and private behavior. In retrospect, the conduct books read much more like the male fantasy of an ideal, submissive woman than like guidelines for female existence. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller herself acknowledges having read such manuals.¹ Conduct manuals covered extensive subjects ranging from women's "vanity" to "modesty," from "marriage" to "chastity,"² and much more.

An excerpt from one such manual, William Kenrick's *The Whole Duty of Woman* (1798), reads as follows:

She weepeth with those who weep, she laugheth with those who laugh; she singeth in the house of gladness, and rejoiceth in the joy of her neighbors. She giveth not her advice to the stranger, nor openeth her lips among a crowd of visitors, 'till after the rest have spoken... In the contest betwixt two, she is silent: she divulgeth not herself, that either might know to condemn or approve.³

The title of this passage's section, "Complacence," indicates that the woman described here embodies the ideal woman. The insistence on "complacence" as necessary for female conduct implies that women must not question patriarchal society and the roles it places them in. In addition, she is obligated to abandon her own identity in favor of this feminine ideal, never to "openeth her lips among a crowd." This is only one, relatively understated example among a myriad of such declarations in the female conduct books.

Social regulation of female behavior, as displayed by the conduct manuals, weighs heavily on the female roles that Fuller wrestles with in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Generally, women's place in nineteenth-century society was delimited entirely by the domestic sphere; thus, this chapter describes how women's traditional "social" role was in fact contained within her private, domestic responsibilities. It may seem counterintuitive to describe "the social woman" in terms of non-social (or private) concepts, such as motherhood, marriage, and others; in fact, Fuller's essay rebels against the very inescapability of this paradoxical role.

More contemporary feminist theory also combats women's subjugation to a lower, domestic position. Due to this chapter's interest in women's unequal societal position, first- and second-wave feminism will be useful in analyzing Fuller and Dickinson's works. First-wave

feminism proclaimed goals similar to Fuller's demand for legal equality of citizenship in society, and second-wave feminism focused on equalizing "unofficial" gender differentiations and promoting positive images of femininity. Feminist theorists that provide valuable lenses for this chapter include Simone de Beauvoir, Sherry Ortner, Adrienne Rich, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Gilman Perkins, and others. As we will see, Fuller's early feminist social views correlate strongly to with these moments in feminist history.

Most notably for this chapter, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) remains a reference point for most subsequent feminist theory. De Beauvoir's theories span an enormous breadth of female social experience and thus apply easily to many of Fuller's social concepts. De Beauvoir conceives of the pivotal concept of woman as the "Other" and the counterpoint of man as the "One" or the "Self" as the basis for female subjugation. In her introduction, de Beauvoir declares that "[woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential."⁴ The notion of relative sex differentiation leads to de Beauvoir's insistence upon the women's complete lack of identity, freedom, and individuality. Woman cannot be defined separately from man; so, woman does not truly exist except in relation to him. The "othering" of female existence works under many of the same concepts of Fuller's theories in *Woman*. Fuller explains woman's societal position as completely dependent on men, to the extent that they lack the "self-dependence" that is "deprecated as a fault in most women. They are taught to learn their rule from without, not to unfold it from within."⁵ Here, Fuller's transcendentalist tendencies intensify the injustice of female dependence. Transcendentalists profess the precepts of self-reliance and individuality to guide individuals toward universal knowledge and connection to the divine; therefore, women's position as inevitably dependent on men represents, for Fuller, a crime against human nature.

While de Beauvoir's viewpoint serves as an excellent reference point for Fuller's more pessimistic feminist propensities, her approach often contrasts with Fuller's. For example, de Beauvoir relates material through a constructionist feminist lens, specifically due to her famous belief that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."⁶ Fuller tends more toward an essentialist feminist analysis of female experience,⁷ though this essentialism is not a limitation of her work. Though *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* may read as a tamer brand of feminism, Fuller's refusal to separate her transcendentalist idealism and her feminism often yield a sincerely optimistic perspective on women's social roles. Her ability to conflate these concepts differentiates her feminism from many subsequent feminists and renders her ideas unique. In fact, only through her idealism can she conclude that woman possesses the potential for transcendence.

Reading Dickinson's poems in light of Fuller's essay is the last piece to this chapter. While Dickinson's works do not directly proclaim a feminist point of view, as does Fuller's, they often depict various female social roles. Dickinson's female speakers, female subjects, and honest subject matter complicate Fuller's concepts of the social woman. Often, the poems relay troubled interpretations of social existence, as in the second stanza of poem 77:

I never hear of prisons broad
By soldiers battered down,
But I tug childish at my bars
Only to fail again!

The quality of confinement described here represents Dickinson's own social confinement as a woman. At the same time, many other poems display joy, ecstasy, and playfulness in relation to female experience. In this way, the complicated Dickinson poems reflect the complicated, idealist feminism of Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

The rest of this chapter deconstructs the idea of the “social woman” in terms of her domestic roles, mainly defined by Fuller as compulsory motherhood and marriage. Fuller also analyzes the effects these roles have upon her notion of the feminine, transcendental ideal. By reading feminist theory and Dickinson’s poems in conjunction with Fuller’s explanation of women in society, both Fuller and Dickinson’s works reach closer to understanding if the Dickinson poems are representative of the “ideal feminine.”

Women and Nature: Establishing Subjugation

Throughout history, traditional and hackneyed definitions of sexual difference have been riddled with binaries. Preconceived notions of male and female, masculine and feminine, conflate sex with gender and work under the assumption that biological sex necessitates dichotomized characteristics. For example, stereotypes dictate that masculinity is strength, femininity is weakness; women are to be protected, men are to do the protecting; man is governed by reason, woman by emotion. These oppositions often arise from associations of men with civilized, societal thought processes, and women with wild, sexual and emotional impulses.

Patriarchal social perspectives therefore intimately connect women and nature. Specifically, constructs of “natural” or “wild” femininity imply that an association with nature is inherently negative; however, as a transcendentalist, Fuller reconstructs this view of nature, marking it with awe and idealism pertaining to its function in relation to humans, and, more specifically, women. During the introductory pages of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller declares that man

feels himself called to understand and aid nature, that she may, through his intelligence, be raised and interpreted; to be a student of, and servant to, the universe-spirit; and king of his planet, that as an angelic minister, he may bring it into conscious harmony with the law of that spirit.⁸

This description conveys a mostly Emersonian transcendentalism. Fuller indicates that the human place in the universe lies within the “universe-spirit,” a semi-divine connection between the natural and spiritual world. However, it is pertinent to consider Fuller’s use of “man” to represent all humans. Nineteenth-century linguistic conventions utilized masculine pronouns to include women, a practice that Fuller subtly remarks on by personifying “nature” as female. Thus, Fuller’s diction acknowledges a separation of the masculine transcendental self and the feminine subject, which can be generalized as either nature or woman. In either case, Fuller’s contemplations on man and woman in relation to human nature and nature, respectively, complicate her seemingly transparent transcendentalism. Despite this distinction, Fuller’s views are clearly based on a belief in nature’s purity and humans’ potential to gain universal knowledge through its study.

Fuller’s analysis of women’s relation to nature is manifested further in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* with her essentialist analysis of femininity as “electrical in movement, intuitive in function, spiritual in tendency.”⁹ This description is part of Fuller’s portrayal of women as both Muse (goddess of artistic inspiration) and Minerva (goddess of wisdom). Here, her illustration of women’s innate “electrical,” “intuitive,” and “spiritual” functions refers to the “Muse” side. Fuller concentrates on the female soul as “natural” in its vitality, and that it “blows...breathes...sings.”¹⁰ She indicates that this feminine energy is analogous to some sort of essential fluid saturating the natural world: “that which is especially feminine flushes, in

blossom, the face of the earth, and pervades, like air and water, all this seemingly solid globe, daily renewing and purifying its life.”¹¹ Her idealistic tone echoes the idea she presents: that women’s connection to nature literally supports the existence of life and bolsters masculine survival.

Feminists other than Fuller, however, often see women’s symbolic correlation with nature as innately destructive to their social condition. In her essay “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?”, Sherry B. Ortner cites the socially-constructed relationship between women and “nature,”¹² condemned in almost all cultures, as one source of female subordination. In connection with the concept of women’s social role within the private sphere, Ortner asserts that “woman’s body and its functions place her in social roles that in turn are considered to be at a lower order of the cultural process.”¹³ Here, Ortner posits that pejorative views of women and nature indicate the depth of patriarchal control through ownership of women’s bodies. Due to the fact that “woman’s body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life,”¹⁴ her escape from patriarchy’s social and biological roles is impossible. Women are condemned to an identity based solely on their sexual and reproductive purposes, as illustrated by de Beauvoir: “Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female.”¹⁵ The first chapter of *The Second Sex*, “The Data of Biology,” focuses on a scientific study of female animals as they represent socially-constructed ideas of women: “The word ‘female’ brings up in [man’s] mind a saraband of imagery... the female praying mantis and the spider, satiated with love, crush and devour their partner.”¹⁶ De Beauvoir’s analysis of nature in order to comprehend sex-based power dynamics concentrates on the female animals’ passive, receiving reproductive role as reflective of women’s subjugated position. In contrast with Fuller’s

idealistic perspective, both Ortner and de Beauvoir see the connection between the “natural” and the “feminine” as another patriarchal tool to legitimize female subordination.

Whereas Fuller uses an essentialist analysis of natural “femininity” to reinforce the beauty of women’s connection to nature, and Ortner and de Beauvoir indicate its evils, Dickinson supplies many varied perspectives on the subject. She clearly meditates on the natural world in many of her poems, and unlike Fuller’s transcendental boldness with regard to nature’s functions for ideal human existence, Dickinson sees nature as perfect without regard to human life, as seen in poem 668:

“Nature” is what we see –
The Hill – the Afternoon –
Squirrel – Eclipse – the Bumble bee –
Nay – Nature is Heaven –
Nature is what we hear –
The Bobolink – the Sea –
Thunder – the Cricket –
Nay – Nature is Harmony –
Nature is what we know –
Yet have no art to say –
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity.

This poem centers on the speaker’s attempt at defining nature. She lists aspects of the natural world varying in grandeur, from a tiny cricket to the celestial phenomenon of an eclipse. Dickinson’s use of zeugma to juxtapose each of these images demonstrates her inability to fully articulate nature, a reaction also reflected in the repetition of “Nay – Nature is....” The speaker seems not to know how to qualify the immensity of the subject, yet evidently finds joy and love within it. The final two lines solidify her incomprehension with the image of “Our Wisdom” being “impotent” in face of nature. Dickinson thus parts from the transcendentalist point of view of the natural world; though she reveres it, she denies the possibility to comprehend its

“Simplicity.” Many other Dickinson poems describe nature’s harshness in conjunction with its beauty. For example, poem 314 begins “Nature – sometimes sears a Sapling – / Sometimes – scalps a Tree –.” Nature’s cruelty here does not seem to fit with the natural harmony described in poem 668; however, these are not inconsistencies. Unlike Fuller, Dickinson does not attempt to philosophize on nature’s purpose, and thus is not limited to definite interpretations of it. Yet, like Fuller, she succeeds in showing nature’s reflections of human nature, such as the end of poem 314: “We – who have the Souls – / Die oftener – Not so vitally –.” Dickinson connects humans, especially women, to nature.

She develops this connection in poem 507 by concentrating on a female animal as a subject:

She sights a Bird – she chuckles –
She flattens – then she crawls –
She runs without the look of feet –
Her eyes increase to Balls –

Her Jaws stir – twitching – hungry –
Her Teeth can hardly stand –
She leaps, but Robin leaped the first –
Ah, Pussy, of the Sand,

The Hopes so juicy ripening –
You almost bathed your tongue –
When Bliss disclosed a hundred Toes –
And fled with every one –

Dickinson captures many of Ortner and de Beauvoir’s arguments for the denial of women’s identity due to their biological status. The poem’s sexualizes the subject – a female cat parodied as a fierce feline predator – with words such as “hungry,” “juicy,” and “tongue.” Though Dickinson makes sure to identify the subject as a cat, the repetition of “she” and “her” in the first two stanzas allows the poem to apply to females in general. Dickinson calls her female

representative wild and sexual, a savage animal that still retains anthropomorphic characteristics (the ability to “chuckle”). The first two stanzas focus on the cat’s movements, the simple syntax reflecting the simplicity of the cat’s endeavor. In some ways, poem 507 indicates Dickinson’s acknowledgment, whether conscious or subconscious, of the tendency to negatively correlate women’s behavior with nature.

At the same time, the poem also recognizes the strength of females in nature, an analysis similar to Fuller’s essentialist glorification. Though poem 507 comically represents the cat’s attempt at catching a bird, the last stanza portrays a more complicated image of femaleness and sexuality. The cat’s predatory qualities are not negative; Dickinson instead reveres the cat’s feminine, sexual instincts. In addition, the cat does not reach the bird, and so remains unsatisfied, having “almost bathed [her] tongue.” The mention of “Bliss” then suggests that the bird allegorically represents female happiness or desire, which has “fled” from its female pursuer. So, where de Beauvoir uses similar subject matter in relation to masculine power, saying, “the most superb wild beasts – the tigress, the lioness, the panther – bed down slavishly under the imperial embrace of the male,”¹⁷ Dickinson depicts the female’s dissatisfaction even without male interference. In this way, she suggests that “natural” femininity exists apart from masculinity, implying an independent female sexuality. The poem’s overall experience concludes in uneasiness, but also reveals the joy and playfulness characteristic of Dickinson’s admiration for the natural world.

Both Fuller and Dickinson recognize nature’s complexity and the meaning women’s connection to it imparts upon female existence. Dickinson’s poems illustrate a complex relationship of humans and nature, suggesting at once harmony and impasse. Such lines as the third stanza of poem 357 indicate a simultaneous love and fear of nature:

The River reaches to My Breast –
Still – still – My Hands above
Proclaim with their remaining Might –
Dost recognize the Love?

The full text of the poem portrays the river as a lover, the rising water pleasuring the speaker as she becomes one with the river and attempts to “proclaim” her “love.” And yet, the river threatens to engulf her. The poem’s sexual undertones could indicate an interpretation of the river as the speaker’s repressed sexuality, in which case her bodily connection with nature is both pleasurable and dangerous. Dickinson’s uncertainty about women’s “natural” qualities also arises in this example as she recognizes nature’s subjugating effect on female existence described by Ortner and de Beauvoir. Meanwhile, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* also does not allow one to conclude that femininity is equivalent to natural impulses. Though her description of women as Muse argues convincingly in favor of this idea, Fuller also indicates that femininity is not so simple: “It is no more the order of nature that [feminine essence] should be incarnated pure in any form, than that the masculine energy should exist unmingled with it in any form.”¹⁸ Hence, Fuller’s interpretation of femininity as associated with nature reaches a different conclusion than de Beauvoir and Ortner. While Fuller acknowledges that this association causes female social subordination¹⁹ and concedes that femininity in nature can never be unadulterated, she also implies that femininity and nature’s close relationship allows for a more complete transcendentalist communion with the natural world. Comparing the ideas of the two writers about women and nature, Dickinson’s ability to convey and impart meaning on each of Fuller’s transcendental views indicates that she embodies the female capacity to commune with nature. Dickinson embraces transcendentalist ideas of nature while questioning many of Fuller’s assumptions.

Motherhood, the “Natural” Role

Societal constructs of female identity link women to their natural instincts and biological roles, and the most obvious “natural” role that women fulfill is motherhood. De Beauvoir delineates both human and animal reproductive processes that facilitate society’s interpretation of women as, first and foremost, mothers. This role, de Beauvoir explains, is dictated by a necessary passivity²⁰ and subservience²¹ to the male, or father, not to mention the responsibility implied in women’s child-rearing duties; at the same time, the maternal role has often been regarded with unparalleled respect.

In this question of motherhood as a social role, both Fuller and Dickinson’s biographical information becomes significant. Fuller remained unmarried for almost her entire life, until a trip to Italy at thirty-six years old, where she met Giovanni Angelo Ossoli. It is still unclear whether Fuller and Ossoli ever actually married, though it is widely assumed that they did; nonetheless, Fuller gave birth to her son, Angelino, only a year before the three family members were killed in a shipwreck. During the nineteenth century in America, Fuller’s single life of almost forty years qualified her as an old maid, and she experienced no more than a year of motherhood before her death.

Similarly, Dickinson neither married nor had children, and famously spent her entire life in her hometown of Amherst, Massachusetts. Dickinson’s unmarried life and willful seclusion from the public world was viewed as abnormal and strange, gaining her the nickname “the Nun of Amherst.” Yet Dickinson’s life experience was not bereft of sexual and emotional love despite not marrying or having children. It is impossible to know whether Dickinson’s unwed life was a

conscious rebellion against society's attempt to normalize female social experience through marriage and maternity. In any case, Dickinson's, and to some extent Fuller's, rejection of the motherhood role may amplify or muddy their claims when discussing maternity.

Fuller's initial reference to motherhood in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* depicts an embrace of the role as a positive, idealized position recognized by both sexes. She declares simply that "Man is of woman born,"²² a statement that begs the logical conclusion that, if all men are born of women, women are in part responsible for masculine power. In her similarly-titled book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich introduces an analogous concept: "All human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spent unfolding inside a woman's body."²³ As with Fuller, Rich asserts maternity as an inherent human and natural state, an idea that seems transcendentalist in its idealism. Fuller's analysis of the motherhood role continues with a somewhat psychoanalytic concept, in that for man, "[his mother's] face bends over him in infancy with an expression he can never quite forget."²⁴ The pure, idyllic image that men preserve of their mothers cuts through and remains mostly uncorrupted by other, negative images of women that social influence creates. Fuller reinforces this idea with an additional analysis of Western culture's Christian psyche. She points out that, despite the evil presence of woman in the Bible (namely, of Eve), there is also a "woman in as high a position as she has ever occupied,"²⁵ the Virgin Mary. The Madonna as the embodiment of idealized motherhood is of course problematic in that her pregnancy was divine, and therefore her body and image were uncorrupted by sexual contact.

Nevertheless, Fuller notes the maternal role's possible influence on individual men through the image of their mothers, and on entire nations through the image of the Madonna. As

she proclaims that “Earth knows no fairer, holier relation than that of a mother,”²⁶ Fuller insists that if maternally-identified women were truly respected by men, women would be less subservient and dependent: “in the eyes of the mother of his child... dim fancies pass before his mind, that woman may not have been born for him alone, but have come from heaven, a commissioned soul, a messenger of truth and love.”²⁷ Again, Fuller illustrates women, especially mothers, as semi-divine beings capable of transcending human existence. This “Rosicrucian lamp”²⁸ of motherhood could encourage men to elevate women’s social position.

Rich’s study of motherhood acknowledges some of the same awe-inspiring views that occur in *Woman*. Addressing the cultural power of the mother-image, Rich explains that “throughout most of the world, there is archeological evidence of a period when Woman was venerated in several aspects, the primal one being maternal; when Goddess-worship prevailed, and when myths depicted strong and revered female figures.”²⁹ However, like Fuller’s Rosicrucian lamp, this cultural admiration of mothers no longer exists. Rich suggests that it has been lost forever in the mutation of the maternal institution. For the most part, *Of Woman Born* distinctly denounces motherhood as it is socially constructed.³⁰ The title of her second chapter, “The ‘Sacred Calling,’” condemns the idealized mother described by Fuller; where Fuller champions the “Sacred Calling” as a vehicle for gaining female respect, Rich uses the phrase sarcastically to display the part it plays in duping women into adhering to the convention of motherhood.

In terms of motherhood as awe-inspiring and childbirth as miraculous, Dickinson’s poetic observations magnify Fuller’s claims and highlight Rich’s ambivalence through images of birth and renewal in nature. Though only a few poems specify a maternal subject, she does often

describe images of nature in which nativity plays a significant role. One such example occurs in poem 66:

So from the mould
Scarlet and Gold
Many a Bulb will rise –
Hidden away, cunningly,
From sagacious eyes.

So from Cocoon
Many a Worm
Leap so Highland gay,
Peasants like me,
Peasants like Thee
Gaze perplexedly!

The speaker's language, describing a flower's growth and the birth of a worm, indicates her veneration for what she witnesses. "Scarlet and Gold," "cunningly," and "gay" all celebrate this seemingly insignificant moment of natural birth and growth. Thus, Dickinson reformulates the clichéd image of the "miracle of life" as represented by nature. The final lines of the poem convey the speaker's incomprehension of the phenomenon of birth, as she and all those watching are "Peasants" who "Gaze perplexedly." These concluding images position Dickinson's speaker as an outsider to the experience of birth, perhaps allying her with men who do not encounter childbirth and suggesting her own alienated feelings about motherhood. The poem does not clearly mention a mother in the process of birth:³¹ both the flower and the worm are born from external sources (though the "Cocoon" could symbolize a woman's womb), so, Dickinson separates herself from the female experience of pregnancy and birth, both revering and avoiding this female role.

The uncertainty concerning maternity that Dickinson's poem 66 insinuates leads to the discussion of motherhood's institutionalized, restrictive qualities. Fuller broaches this subject when addressing women's lack of political and social rights in the nineteenth century:

I have known these men steal their children whom they know they had no means to maintain... to frighten the poor woman, to whom, it seems, the fact that she alone had borne the pangs of their birth, and nourished their infancy, does not give an equal right to them.³²

This injustice, which she equates to that of banishing men from their mother-land,³³ addresses the connection between mother and child; though women's rights have, of course, progressed to allow (and usually necessitate) custody of children to go to their mothers, Fuller's argument here still applies to maternal injustices in patriarchal society. Furthermore, Fuller affirms that the mother-child connection to some extent entraps mothers in their bodies. In spite of women having given their bodies physically to carrying and giving birth to a child, most often the father, as a patriarchal figure, possesses the majority of control in decisions pertaining to the family unit.

The emotional turbulence and trauma of motherhood³⁴ also finds place in Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Though she wrote the essay before she had a child herself, Fuller recognizes complex maternal feelings muddled in the institutionalization of motherhood. As they become mothers, women are forced into the maternal ideal, which, as Fuller explains, involves having a male child. Fuller presents a mother's reaction upon finding out her child is male: "A sort of glory swells at this thought the heart of the mother.... She has given a citizen, a defender to her country... and yet she seems to recognize in him *a nature superior to her own*."³⁵ The two-fold reaction displays how deeply social norms of male authority are engrained within

women themselves, to the point where they are simultaneously valued and devalued after producing a male child. Conversely, bearing a female child reverses the experience: “There is usually a slight degree of regret; so deeply rooted is the idea of the superiority of man... and yet, she looks upon this child... [and] a sentiment of identity with this delicate being takes possession of her.”³⁶ Here, the mother’s original disappointment from not producing the “superior” sex abates, and she recognizes the empathetic existence that mother and daughter will experience as “inferior” beings. Again, Fuller’s idealism about motherhood and the female condition ironically prevails, presenting possibilities for female fulfillment through women’s shared subordinated existence.

Dickinson likewise confronts the contradictory experience of maternity and the difficulties associated with such a role. She does so playfully, yet with sincerity, in poem 1085:

If Nature smiles – the Mother must
I’m sure, at many a whim
Of Her eccentric Family –
Is She so much to blame?

Once again, Dickinson asserts the link between nature, female experience, and motherhood. The poem begins with the visual and syntactic pairing of “Nature” and “Mother,” a result of the words’ capitalization and their position in the first line. Here, Dickinson invokes the trite image of “Mother Nature” while simultaneously redefining the image into the separate, but innately conjoined, subjects of Nature and Mother. These subjects stand for women’s natural maternal role and the institutionalized permutation of that role, respectively. The poem continues, creating an unclear grammatical scheme that allows for multiple interpretations. For example, the first line’s enjambment suggests either: “Because Nature smiles, the Mother must smile as well,” or: “Nature smiles and causes the Mother to be subjected to her family’s whim.” Dickinson creates both possibilities in order to indicate that the Mother’s position is concurrently naturally and

socially-defined. The Mother is thus trapped by her biological maternal role and by her family, who control her despite her position as their creator. Dickinson's last line emphasizes her exonerating intent as she asks "Is She so much to blame?" It is unclear whether "She" refers to Nature or to the Mother, though both encourage culpability to be placed on society's negative influence on motherhood.

Fuller, Rich, and Dickinson demonstrate the perplexing, contradictory experience of the social maternal role. Women remain frustrated and trapped between the emotional connection to their children and the subconscious recognition of the motherhood institution's injustice. Fuller's transcendental idealism, and the possibilities she sees for female advancement in this social role, remains strong; yet, she is unable to fully reject motherhood's condemnatory qualities. Thus, due to the ambiguous nature of this subject, Dickinson's obscure approach to motherhood in poem 66 proves effective; she exemplifies idealism, reverence, incomprehension, and resentment when she suggests that in the face of motherhood, we all "Gaze perplexedly."

The "Divine Union"

Marked again by women's natural and reproductive purposes, the next female social role is that of wife. Similarly to motherhood, the institution of marriage in Fuller and Dickinson's nineteenth-century society and in modern-day America has strayed from its original purpose. Natural reproductive instincts conflict with monogamy, thus indicating that marriage has been entirely constructed by society (or patriarchy). According to Fuller, the position women hold within an individual marriage and within the marriage institution yields both negative and

positive results for female advancement. Marriage counters gender equality through women's literal and symbolic enslavement to their husbands, while an ideal marriage can in fact offer possibilities for equality. These opposing negative and positive perspectives on marriage are explained in this section.

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller devotes a lengthy portion of the text to an analysis of marriage as it relates to gender dynamics. She begins her commentary with the inauthentic qualities of most marriages during her time: "It is idle to speak with contempt of the nations where polygamy is an institution, or seraglios a custom, when practices far more debasing haunt, well nigh fill, every city and every town."³⁷ These "debasement practices" relate mostly to the treatment of women within the marriage, the view of marriage as a financial transaction between father and husband, and the perceptions of marriage that society forces upon unmarried or soon-to-be married women. She affirms that if woman were legally, socially, and economically equal to man, "she [would not] be perverted, by the current of opinion that seizes her, into the belief that she must marry, if it be only to find a protector, and a home of her own."³⁸ Thus, Fuller's negative opinion of marriage indicates that women who follow social norms are forced into a false identity as a wife. For Fuller, inauthentic marriage transgresses against both women and the ideal loving union that marriage can, in its purest form, achieve.

In the same vein, de Beauvoir unsurprisingly tackles the marriage institution in a critical manner. Like Fuller, de Beauvoir notes Western society's use of marriage to subjugate women: "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is true that most women are married, or have been, or suffer from not being."³⁹ As with women's social responsibility as mothers, it seems odd that society controls marriage due to the intensely private qualities that modern Western culture attributes to it. In fact, the idea of marriage as an idyllic, loving union is

a relatively new concept.⁴⁰ De Beauvoir posits that marriage is and was used to lawfully keep women subjugated to men, to force reproduction and the continuation of male genes, and to provide men with a legal source of sexual pleasure. Despite claims of progress in marital equality, marriage remains generally polluted with injustices and corruption. Furthermore, de Beauvoir suggests that the patriarchal marriage institution's success in subordinating women arises from women's need for marriage to be economically secure. She admits the possibility of peaceful existence in a financially-based marriage, and thus strengthens her counterargument in recognizing that this economically "beneficial" situation for women actually leads to the further subordination of the wife: "She becomes his vassal. He is the economic head of the joint enterprise, and hence he represents it in the view of society. She takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his 'half.'"⁴¹

Fuller also discusses the idea of a financial, "unromantic" marriage. She names this form of marriage "the household partnership," in which the "man furnishes the house; the woman regulates it.... The wife praises her husband as a 'good provider;' the husband, in return, compliments her as a 'capital housekeeper.'"⁴² This description strongly reflects the well-known, dichotomized social spheres of "public" vs. "private" for men and women, respectively. Fuller's language is disinterested; she neither criticizes nor condones this type of "household partnership." However, as her analysis of marriage continues, it becomes clear that this form of marriage does not measure up.

The mundane "household partnership," however, acts as a jumping off point for the more extreme inequalities that exist in the marriage institution. Fuller's idealistic approach glosses over much of this; however, she does focus on married women's extreme dependence on their husbands. Fuller's explanation of this injustice stems in part from the passage already cited in the

introductory section to this chapter: “self dependence is... deprecated as a fault in most women. They are taught to learn their rule from without, not to unfold it from within.”⁴³ More specifically, regarding marriage, Fuller notes “it is true that, in a majority of instances, the man looks upon his wife as an adopted child, and places her to the other children in the relation of nurse or governess, rather than of parent.”⁴⁴ Here, the wife’s prior independent identity is nullified by the husband devaluing her intellect and parental position. He deprives her of authority and expects her to serve him with the submissiveness of a child or paid employee. In the negation of an independent identity, woman is left impotent and incomplete.

Women’s powerlessness in marriage is a common theme in Dickinson’s poetry. The prevalence of this subject, along with the disquieting language she employs when discussing the theme, draws attention to its importance for Dickinson:

A Wife – at Daybreak I shall be –
Sunrise – Hast thou a Flag for me?
At Midnight, I am but a Maid,
How short it takes to make a Bride –
Then – Midnight, I have passed from thee –
Unto the East, and Victory!

Midnight – Good Night! I hear them call,
The Angels bustle in the Hall –
Softly my Future climbs the Stair,
I fumble at my Childhood’s prayer
So soon to be a Child no more –
Eternity, I’m coming – Sir,
Savior – I’ve seen the face – before!

In this example (poem 461), Dickinson’s speaker describes her anticipated transition from being a “Maid” to a “Bride.” The poem opposes these two identities: “Wife,” or “Bride,” is associated with daybreak, while “Child,” or “Maid,” is associated with midnight. A superficial reading of the poem could interpret these symbolic qualifiers as positive and pejorative, respectively, an

interpretation that makes sense given optimistic connotations of light and negative associations of darkness. In addition, Dickinson associates words such as “Victory,” “Angels,” and “Future” with the speaker’s impending marriage, a decision that could point to the advantages the female speaker has ahead of her after her wedding.

However, a more in-depth analysis reveals very different results about the identities of “Maid” and “Wife.” First, the transition from midnight to daybreak suggests that the speaker is forced to abandon the safe, undefined space of the night. The night’s obscurity is not threatening or evil; instead, it allows the speaker to exist in between identities and without the limitations of normative titles such as “Maid” or “Wife.” The speaker additionally conveys an implicit tension arising from the passage from one identity to the other. The line “How short it takes to make a Bride” interjects doubt into the seemingly joyful tone of the rest of the stanza. In noting the brevity of the transition, the speaker suggests that a complete transformation to a new identity, solely based on a few words spoken at the wedding, is impossible. Furthermore, the second stanza sets up a thematic idiosyncrasy as the speaker says her “Childhood’s prayer” but notes that she is “soon to be a Child no more.” The speaker retains her childhood identity and cannot abandon that identity despite the upcoming wedding. Finally, the second stanza’s diction correlates the passage from childhood to wifedom and the passage from life to death. The images of the “Angels” awaiting the speaker, her “Future” waiting as she ascends to “Eternity,” and the disembodied “Savior” all indicate a journey to heaven. Though a connection between marriage and heaven seems idyllic, it also implies the speaker’s death. The speaker’s active voice and reverence for the afterlife could even signify that she intends suicide after her wedding rather than be forced to perform the sexual acts required of a wife during the night. These ambiguities and multiple meanings stem from the speaker’s own uncertainty about her marriage. She

attempts to convince herself of the benefits of becoming a wife, but subconsciously recognizes that in marrying, her previous life and identity, when unattached to a man, will die.

Another Dickinson poem that focuses on marriage yields similarly negative conclusions about female identity and marriage as does poem 461; yet, poem 732 pushes these pejorative implications further:

She rose to His Requirement – dropt
The Playthings of Her Life
To take the honorable Work
Of Woman, and of Wife –

If ought She missed in Her new Day,
Of Amplitude, or Awe –
Or first Perspective – Or the Gold
In using, wear away,

It lay unmentioned – as the Sea
Develop Pearl, and Weed,
But only to Himself – be known
The Fathoms they abide –

This poem suggests a complex relationship of the concepts of marriage, identity, and dependence, demonstrated again as Dickinson situates a female subject passing into her new social role of wife. The opening of this poem, as opposed to poem 461, leaves less room for an interpretation of marriage as a boon for women. The line “She rose to His Requirement” places the woman in a servile position and is followed by a denunciation of this position with the image of her dropping “The Playthings of Her Life.” The speaker’s voice equivocates with the correlation between “Playthings” and “Life,” and becomes even more dubious as the next line contrasts the woman’s previous life with the “honorable Work / Of Woman, and of Wife.” Dickinson’s sarcasm permeates these lines, heavily emphasizing that the speaker’s new life is

hardly “honorable.” Furthermore, the identity of “Wife” here is synonymous with “Woman,” which accentuates Dickinson’s commentary on society’s expectations for women to marry.

The next two stanzas describe the subject’s loss of “Amplitude,” “Awe,” and “Perspective” as she becomes a wife. These qualities are associated with an independent female existence during which she was able to possess her own emotions and opinions. Along with the somewhat mysterious “Gold,” which could symbolize numerous female qualities, these values are lost after marriage, as if buried under the ocean. Dickinson depicts the speaker’s female essence lying on the sea floor to “Develop Pearl, and Weed.” The contrast of the refinement of “Pearl” with the ugliness of “Weed” suggests the female subject’s complexities as well as the varying, volatile qualities they could take on if suppressed. The last two lines solidify the male subject’s authority even more, for only he can know the “Fathoms they abide.” Dickinson’s diction here is ambiguous as usual. “Fathoms” are a unit of measure for the depth of the ocean, a definition that would create the paraphrase: “Only man can find where woman’s true identity has gone.” Conversely, another definition of “fathom,” meaning “to comprehend,” leads to the paraphrase: “Only man comprehends that woman has lost herself, and what it is that she lost.” Both interpretations powerfully indicate the female self’s inexistence in marriage; the second meaning, however, is perhaps more devastating for female identity. Dickinson suggests that married women and women in general have no idea that they have lost themselves to men, and that men have complete ownership over all aspects of feminine identity. Women remain ignorant not only of their subordination, but of their identities that men bury under patriarchal tradition. Furthermore, women possess no agency, are incapable of uncovering their suppressed feminine qualities, and live entirely defined by masculinity. Unlike the speaker in poem 461, who finds solace in death, Dickinson’s words in poem 732 conclude that women cannot escape because

they blindly inhabit invisible cages. Dickinson's ideas on marriage, therefore, coalesce with this tragic realization.

Clearly, both Dickinson and Fuller recognize the perversion of the marriage institution that renders women ineffectual. At the same time, Fuller's transcendental idealism pervades her analysis, affirming the potential that marriage holds for elevating social opinions of women. Unlike many of her transcendentalist (male) contemporaries, Fuller recognizes pure, loving marriage as another gateway to a semi-divine existence: "Man and woman share an angelic ministry, the union is from one to one, permanent and pure."⁴⁵ Clearly, transcendentalism plays a large part in Fuller's view; she sees the marriage "union" as analogous to, and leading towards, the union of man, nature, and God. Fuller's optimistic opinion of marriage stems in part from the philosophies of Emanuel Swedenborg, the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist, philosopher, and theologian. Swedenborg's ideas of marriage are similarly idealistic. He posits marriage as a gift of human nature: "The conjugal [sic] of one man with one wife is the precious treasure of human life... From the ennobling of this form noble fruits are born, spiritual in the heavens, natural on earth."⁴⁶ Furthermore, Swedenborg declares the potential for both earthly perfection and spiritual excellence in a pure marriage union. It is this connection between the natural and the divine that relates most strongly to Fuller's work. Swedenborg declares: "In and from this union are the celestial beatitudes, the spiritual satisfactions, and from these natural delights, which have been provided from the beginning for those who are in love truly conjugal [sic]."⁴⁷

With Swedenborg's view of marriage in mind, Fuller's "household partnership" demonstrates her acceptance of but lack of enthusiasm for this type of marriage. She thus presents three other possible forms of functional marriages: "mutual idolatry," "intellectual companionship," and "religious union." First, Fuller criticizes "mutual idolatry" as worse than

the ordinary household partnership: “The parties weaken and narrow one another; they lock the gate against all the glories of the universe, that they may live in a cell together. To themselves they seem the only wise, to all others steeped in infatuation.”⁴⁸ Here, Fuller attacks the overly-emotional expressions of love inherited from the literature of sensibility in the eighteenth-century romantic period. In part, she denounces Swedenborg’s idyllic union of man and woman due to the suppression of the female self that such a union promotes. For if “mutual idolatry” causes a complete unification of male and female, it is certain that male identity will predominate.

Fuller devotes more time to her analysis of marriage as an “intellectual companionship.” She asserts that as a result of this relationship,

Men engaged in public life, literary men, and artists, have often found in their wives companions and confidants in thought no less than in feeling. And as the intellectual development of woman has spread wider and risen higher, they have, not unfrequently, shared the same employment.⁴⁹

To contemporary feminist critics, this argument displays the problem of defining female intellect through women’s connection to their husbands. However, nineteenth-century norms impressed upon women that they were not, and never could be, intellectual equals to men; thus, Fuller’s statement promotes progressive social thought about male/female binaries. She provides numerous historical and literary examples of this “intellectual companionship,” such as the relationships of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft,⁵⁰ Jean-Marie Roland and Jeanne-Marie Roland,⁵¹ and Eloisa and Abelard,⁵² to name a few. Fuller describes these marriages as bespeaking “the aspiration of the soul, of energy of mind, seeking clearness and freedom...the two minds are wed by the only contract that can permanently avail, of a common faith and a common purpose.”⁵³

This “common faith and common purpose” leads finally to Fuller’s explanation of her ideal marriage: the “religious union.” Fuller declares that in the religious union, both the household partnership and the intellectual companionship are present, but both are heightened by a shared reverence for marriage’s religious significance and for God’s recognition of the relationship. Swedenborg’s theologically-based marriage ideal informs Fuller’s description of this type of union, and she thus illustrates it similarly: “their love is like to be a healing dew, in the forlorn jungle, a tent of solace to one another. They meet, as children of one Father, to read together one book of instruction.”⁵⁴ The divine qualities evident in Fuller’s words underscore her belief in marriage as a source of transcendental inspiration and achievement.

In delineating the different types of an ideal marriage, Fuller not only determines the possibility for equality within the marriage, but also suggests that certain marriages will help promote women socially. First, she recognizes society’s opinion that “there is no way that men sin more against refinement, as well as discretion, than in their conduct towards their wives.”⁵⁵ These words imply that the public’s opinion of women’s weakness can be exploited to help arrest men’s terrible treatment of women in the private sphere. In conjunction with this idea, Fuller provides a second example of how marriage can be exploited by women. Assuming the majority of marriages display a closeness, if not a deep intimacy, between husband and wife, Fuller declares that “all wives, good or bad, loved or unloved, inevitably influence their husbands, from the power their position not only gives, but necessitates, of coloring evidence and infusing feelings in hours when [he]... is off his guard.”⁵⁶ In these lines, Fuller internalizes the connection of private married life with public society and reforms perceptions of that connection to the woman’s advantage. Whereas the majority of examples already discussed in

this section gear social interference in a marriage against female interests, this example demonstrates that wives can employ patriarchal norms to work towards social equality.

Fuller's insistence on the possibility of ideal marriage is reflected to some extent in Dickinson's poems. Yet, where Fuller believes the perfect union can occur during life, Dickinson's descriptions of pure love often take place after death. As the two preceding poems in this section suggest, marriage symbolizes the corruption of female identity and the literal and symbolic deaths of female speakers. Dickinson's illustrations of ideal love further betray her equivocal beliefs. For example, after having positioned the subjects of the poem as "Before the Judgment Seat of God," the second stanza of poem 625 reads:

These Fleshless Lovers met –
A Heaven in a Gaze –
A Heaven of Heavens – the Privilege
Of one another's Eyes –

The repetition of "Heaven" potently illustrates the love between the subjects of the poem, as their joy arises not from the passage into heaven itself, but from "the Privilege / Of one another's Eyes." In fact, Dickinson does not indicate that the lovers are in heaven, rather they are simply awaiting judgment; so, whether sent to heaven or to hell, true paradise in fact exists in each other. This reflects Swedenborg and Fuller's concept of the divine union, but at the same time, questions the possibility for this perfect union to exist in the poem's last stanza:

Was Bridal – e'er like This?
A Paradise – the Host –
And Cherubim – and Seraphim –
The unobtrusive Guest –

Dickinson contrasts the earthly marriage, or "Bridal," with the paradise of lovers' reunion, surrounded by "Cherubim" and "Seraphim," or angels. For Dickinson, the answer to the question

in the first line seems to be that earthly marriage will never achieve the ideal state that Fuller insists upon.

Fuller evidently posits the potential female advancement that can result from an ideal marriage. In contrast, Dickinson's somewhat pessimistic conclusions about feminine marital power counter Fuller's theory to some extent. Poem 429 demonstrates this pessimism:

The Moon is distant from the Sea –
And yet, with Amber Hands –
She leads Him – docile as a Boy –
Along appointed Sands –

He never misses a Degree –
Obedient to Her Eye
He comes just so far – toward the Town –
Just so far – goes away –

Oh, Signor, Thine, the Amber Hand –
And mine – the distant Sea –
Obedient to the least command
Thine eye impose on me –

The poem's subject matter comments on the same idea of female influence over male authority that *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* analyzes; however, Dickinson reaches different conclusions. The first two stanzas seem to champion feminine control, as Dickinson characterizes the "Moon" as a female force manipulating the male "Sea" through the tides. Of course, the abstract images of moon and ocean are not strict allegories for woman and man; however, the repetition of feminine and masculine pronouns supports the extended metaphor. In illustrating the moon and the ocean, Dickinson's language expresses the feminine, even feminizing, effect of the moon's pull on the water with words such as "docile" and "obedient." The moon's tranquilization of the vast, uncontrollable sea is strong throughout the poem, and therefore upholds the influence femininity can have over masculinity. And yet, Dickinson's last

stanza completely reverses these roles. The male subject, or “Signor,” becomes the “Amber Hand” (previously associated with the feminine moon), and the female speaker becomes the “distant Sea.” First, this reversal implies the male’s actual control over the female. Second, “Signor” takes on the calming (feminine) qualities of the moon, and the female speaker assumes the wild and violent (masculine) qualities of the ocean. The complexities of masculine and feminine roles suggest that Dickinson views power relationships between men and women in a more complicated way than Fuller does. Where Fuller acquiesces to the concept of male authority in public life but suggests exploiting marriage to combat it, Dickinson’s poem questions how valid the associations of masculinity with power are. In the end of the poem, the female speaker remains as trapped as Fuller’s image of a wife; nonetheless, Dickinson offers a more progressive critique of normative assumptions about “natural” male and female characteristics.

The Female Citadel

After having examined women’s social roles, it becomes clear that these roles are inflexible and inescapable for the most part. Not only are patriarchal expectations unjust, they are also extremely restrictive and lead to women’s imprisonment within their social roles.

Dickinson’s description of women’s captivity in the fourth stanza of poem 398 encapsulates this concept:

A limit like the Veil
Unto the Lady’s Face –
But every Mesh – a Citadel –
And Dragons in the Crease –

The “Veil,” as symbolic of woman’s social role as wife, controls her, hides her, and traps her in herself. Identity, body, and voice are subject to socially-constructed norms of femininity and are so intensely regulated by patriarchal influence that, as seen with Dickinson’s poem 732 (“She rose to His Requirement – ,” discussed in the previous section), women are often unaware of their captivity. Where the “Citadel” of imprisoned female experience protects women in public opinion, its true danger arises in women’s ignorance of their enslavement.

Fuller discusses the injustice of female imprisonment in the introductory pages of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller clearly critiques women’s lack of legal rights, a problem that literally imprisons them in their ineffectuality. One of Fuller’s attacks on women’s legal subordination arises from her comparison of women to African-American slaves.⁵⁷ While she does not spell out the implications of this comparison, her meaning is clear: women’s lives in America are equal to a life of physical enslavement. She builds upon the strength of this image by asserting her complete disgust for society’s treatment of women: “I could give instances that would startle the most vulgar and callous, but I will not, for the public opinion of their own sex is already against such men, and where cases of extreme tyranny are made known, there is private action in the wife’s favor.”⁵⁸ Here, Fuller subverts expectations for this type of women’s rights essay by suggesting that the transgressions men perpetrate against women are common knowledge. Instead, she implies that the less extreme cases of female imprisonment are just as horrifying as the more extreme ones.

It is expected that a nineteenth-century feminist writer such as Fuller would address the overt problems of women in society, namely, legal inequality to men. Fuller also considers the metaphorical imprisonment inherent in female existence. In order to understand this abstract captivity, de Beauvoir’s theories once again become useful. As with many of her other

characterizations of gender difference, de Beauvoir opposes male and female experience as defined by “transcendence” and “immanence,” respectively. The theory behind this binary relates the biological, historical, social, and sexual female condition to the confinement of women within inescapable roles: “She remained doomed to immanence, incarnating only the static aspect of society, closed in upon itself.”⁵⁹ De Beauvoir indicates that female immanence arises almost entirely from social influence, as her role is “only nourishing, never creative.”⁶⁰ Here, “nourishing” refers to women’s domestic social role, in contrast with the unimpeded “creative” possibilities of men’s public social role. De Beauvoir also denounces the significance of any limitations on male experience:

He is bound... through his mother, through her to his ancestors and to all that makes up his very substance; but in all his secular functions, in work, in marriage, he aspires to escape this circle, to assert transcendence over immanence, to open up a future different from the past in which his roots are sunk.⁶¹

Thus, de Beauvoir explains female imprisonment, or immanence, as a result of the historical buildup of expectations for women’s social roles; meanwhile, men are able to deny tradition in order to “transcend” their social roles and to generate entirely liberated, unique identities. Due to patriarchal influence, women are always immanent, men are always transcendent.

Considering these historical restrictions on women clarifies Fuller’s concept of female immanence. As discussed in the “Women and Nature” section of this chapter, women are subject to intensely stereotypical definitions of “femininity.” Despite the often negative quality of these descriptions,⁶² Fuller focuses on patriarchal society’s more positive images of women that are equally destructive to female experience. She describes the male view of femininity:

The numerous party...strive[s], by lectures on some model-woman of bride-like beauty and gentleness, by writing and lending little treatises, intended to mark out with precision the limits of woman's sphere, and woman's mission, to prevent other than the rightful shepherd from climbing the wall, or the flock from using any chance to go astray.⁶³

Fuller likely refers here to the influence of nineteenth-century female conduct manuals. In noting men's strategy in writing such guides, Fuller analyzes their subtle chicanery. Instead of negatively portraying femininity, men promote an unattainable feminine ideal of submission, passivity, and complacency in order to control women. In doing so, the clout of male words causes women to be trapped both within this restrictive ideal and within the desire to please male authority by adhering to it. Fuller's use of the image of the "shepherd" and his "flock" denotes religious references to Jesus and God (or man) wisely guiding lost souls (or women). Through the use of a divine metaphor, men dupe women into accepting their own immanence by upholding the male fantasy of a domestic woman.

Like Fuller, Dickinson provides a troubling image of a feminized ideal in poem 428:

Taking up the fair Ideal,
Just to cast her down
When a fracture – we discover –
Or a splintered Crown –
Makes the Heavens portable –
And the Gods – a lie –
Doubtless – "Adam" – scowled at Eden –
For *his* perjury!

Cherishing – our poor Ideal –
Till in purer dress –
We behold her – glorified –
Comforts – search – like this –
Till the broken creatures –
We adored – for whole –
Stains – all washed –
Transfigured – mended –
Meet us – with a smile –

Here, the use of feminine pronouns relates the subject of the poem to female experience while creating symbolically masculine onlookers of the ideal. Unlike in some of her other poems, Dickinson does not create a first-person female speaker in opposition with a male counterpoint. Instead, poem 428 objectifies the feminine ideal, separating her from all others, including the speaker, due to the use of the pronoun “we.” The effect of this tension is to direct the gaze⁶⁴ onto the “Ideal” in an injurious and assaulting way. The plot of the poem depicts the constant, inexplicable flux of opinion about the feminized ideal. Qualified metaphorically as a statue, the ideal feminine form is sullied, in the opinion of the observers, by her flaws (“a fracture”). Realizing the ideal’s imperfection is so jarring that the observers think “the Heavens portable – / and the Gods – a lie.” In the second stanza, the flaws are covered up, her “Stains – all washed,” and she is “Transfigured – mended.” Finally, the feminine ideal reassumes her purity in its entirety “with a smile.”

Though the poem may seem to end positively, it actually reflects the same imprisoning effects of positive feminine images that Fuller describes in *Woman*. The last lines of the first stanza, “Doubtless – ‘Adam’ – scowled at Eden – / For *his* perjury!”, attribute the blame for the observers’ dissatisfaction upon men. In placing “Adam” in quotation marks, Dickinson allows him to stand for all men; similarly, “Eden” opposes Adam, invoking the connection between femininity and nature, and thus signifying female experience. These lines can be interpreted to render men’s use of feminine ideals responsible for bringing about the downfall of women who aspire to the ideal. Dickinson’s italicization of “*his* perjury!” and her use of an exclamation point proclaim her belief that patriarchy harms all women. The second stanza also pushes Fuller’s declaration of the unjust feminine ideal further by describing the reformation of the ideal, an

indication of the female ideal's attempt to transform herself. Women willfully forget their mistreatment by men, causing them to continue on in their imprisoned existence "with a smile," and thereby implying that if women attempt to conform to normative images of femininity, they will never escape. Despite the pessimism of this interpretation, Dickinson's final lines allow for the continued positive, if ignorant, female experience of idealization. She thus questions the importance of happiness over knowledge.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest that many of the tensions, anxieties, and violent images that occur in Dickinson's poems arise from her contradictory experience of being both a woman and poet. Gilbert and Gubar insist that as a writer in male literary tradition, Dickinson displays a subconscious knowledge that "the maker of a text, when she is a woman, may feel imprisoned within texts... thus trapped in their 'perpetual seam[s]' which perpetually tell her how she *seams* [sic]." ⁶⁵ The complexity of female authorship will be addressed in the third chapter; for now, Gilbert and Gubar indicate that women's limited social position, combined with the guilt of self-expression, create a social and personal imprisonment. Women writers thus experience the feeling expressed in the opening line of Dickinson's poem 613: "They shut me up in Prose." ⁶⁶ Furthermore, Dickinson's poem 661 both observes and complicates the concept of contradictory female existence:

Could I but rife indefinite
As doth the Meadow Bee
And visit only where I liked
And No one visit me

And flirt all Day with Buttercups
And marry whom I may
And dwell a little everywhere
Or better, run away

With no Police to follow
Or chase Him if He do

Till He should jump Peninsulas
To get away from me –

I said “But just to be a Bee”
Upon a Raft of Air
And row in Nowhere all day long
And anchor “off the bar”

What Liberty! So Captives deem
Who tight in Dungeons are.

The tone of this poem communicates longing, fantasy, and a desire for freedom. Dickinson indirectly addresses women’s social impotence with the lines “And No one visit me,” implying that normative female experience is governed only by men’s decisions, while the line “And marry whom I may” suggests that women in the nineteenth century were rarely allowed to choose their husbands. In addition, the third stanza’s description of the “Police” symbolizes all male societal, legal, and authoritative power. By invoking typical associations of the police, such as citizens’ obligatory subordination to an omnipotent human power, Dickinson illustrates her speaker as an ineffectual, trapped woman. This is most clear in the resounding last lines, “What Liberty! So Captives deem / Who tight in Dungeons are.” Here, the “Captives” represent all women in society.

The images of nature’s serenity that fill poem 661 indicate the speaker’s desire only to be free. Indeed, using the life of a bee as the speaker’s fantasy demonstrates both the true captivity she presently lives in and how easily freedom could be achieved. Fuller, in her persistent optimism, makes a similar claim in *Woman*. Fuller’s most important argument in her essay is her belief in the unparalleled transcendental potential of women, and the universal knowledge, beauty, and truth women will achieve if recognized as equal to men. Thus, in relation to de Beauvoir’s opposition of immanence and transcendence, Fuller would concur, yet believes in

women's ability to realize both immanence and transcendence with social progress. She asserts that few changes must be made, and that "What woman needs is not as a woman to act of rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home."⁶⁷ Similarly, Dickinson's speaker in poem 661 wishes only for freedom, to "flirt all Day with Buttercups" and float "Upon a Raft of Air." And yet, Dickinson is not content with passive images of transcendental freedom. The speaker desires not only to "run away," but to actively defy imprisonment by man, assuming masculine power in order to "chase Him" if he attempts to make her captive. Dickinson's poem 754, "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun," correspondingly conveys both female imprisonment and a certain rush of power a woman feels in acting as a masculine, aggressive being possessing "the power to kill" (poem 754). Thus, Dickinson seeks much more than simple gender equality; she also craves masculine power in order to conquer male authority. This radically diverges from Fuller's idea that female power can emerge from women's current, normative social roles. Fuller wishes for women not to possess masculine power, but to utilize "natural" femininity instead. Meanwhile, Dickinson's poem 661 suggests a distinct need for control and authority. Perhaps it is from this desire, so foreign to Dickinson's social reality as a woman, that her sometimes melancholic and pessimistic poetic voice originates.

Insanity or Escape? Women in Isolation

Male influence and patriarchy strictly delimit women to biologically-necessitated, subjugated social roles, the conditions of which often cause women to be isolated, whether

physically or intellectually. Society's emphasis on the private sphere for women, and women's imprisonment within that sphere, easily seclude women from society. The combination of their symbolic imprisonment and isolation can be devastating for women.

Both Fuller and Dickinson experienced some type of isolation in their lifetimes. As female writers, symbolic separation from normative social experience was inevitable due to society's rejection of female authorship. Furthermore, each writer was physically isolated from society at one or more points in her life. Fuller's family's displacement from Cambridge to the small, rural town of Groton in western Massachusetts represented her seclusion. As an unmarried woman, Fuller was obligated to follow her father's household and leave the intellectually-stimulating atmosphere of Boston to lead a mundane, domestic life in Groton. One of her letters to friend Caroline Sturgis during this period in her life reveals that Fuller's isolation from society was clearly heartbreaking:

I have never been to any house and to church only once. I have not spent two hours in the society of any person out of our own family. I stay in my own room always till about nine in the eve; when very busy I do not go down then or to meals. I have not seen half as much even of the family as I wished.⁶⁸

Her forced separation from society and her imprisonment within a domestic role also caused her physical and mental illness. She explains the effect on her intellect to Sturgis, saying "Writing is too fatiguing on my body, let alone the constant occupation of my mind."⁶⁹ For a woman whose identity was contingent on the exercise and expansion of her mind, the limitations of isolation were a true injustice.

Unlike Fuller, Dickinson outwardly expressed no desire to take part in Boston's intellectual society, and seemed content to stay in Amherst her whole life. As a girl and a young

woman, Dickinson entertained visitors from Amherst, interacted with the town, and wrote letters connecting her to society. With her advancing age, however, Dickinson slowly became more and more of a recluse, remaining in her room and almost never allowing visitors. Though her seclusion was voluntary, her more and more extreme isolation seemed to be the result of accumulated emotional trauma from the deaths of family members and friends. In addition, many Dickinson biographers have suggested she was pathologically agoraphobic. As with Fuller, Dickinson's isolation results in illness that perhaps arises from her inherently contradictory identity as a woman and a poet.

Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* does not directly address the mental instability of isolated women, though she often mentions madness resulting from other constraints of female social experience.⁷⁰ At the same time, Fuller's own mental destabilization in Groton can be interpreted as a theme of insanity in isolation, an idea that many other literary and historical examples echo. The very title of Gilbert and Gubar's book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, taken from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, indicates the reappearing connection between female isolation and female insanity. Whether it is actual insanity or a false perception of insanity created by men, medical diagnosis seems to play a role in isolating women. As explained by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*, medicine is a power institution used for advancing patriarchal control over subversive identities.⁷¹ While Foucault mentions this medical power institution specifically in relation to "perverse" or non-heterosexual sexualities, his theory applies to female experience as well. Patriarchy utilizes medicine as a "legitimate" source of authority over women through the pathologization of female minds, resulting in complete control over the female body and psyche. Often, this pathologization leads to seclusion and isolation from society as these women attempt to "recover." For Fuller and Dickinson, emotional trauma

and isolation go hand in hand; perhaps when Fuller describes her illness in Groton, she subconsciously perpetuates patriarchy's abuse of the medical institution.

One of the most well-known, albeit disturbing, literary examples of a pathologized and isolated woman is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," first published in 1891. A seminal feminist text, "The Yellow Wallpaper" describes the female narrator's slowly progressing insanity due to her forced seclusion from society by her husband. John, the husband, is a physician, and so embodies the medical institution. The narrator is convinced not to "think about [her] condition," and so is unable to recognize that her "insanity" is a patriarchal construct. Furthermore, she does not resent her husband for his actions, but rather interprets them as expressions of his love and concern. Shut up into a room with yellow wallpaper, she intensely observes it, which eventually leads to her utter mental breakdown and complete agoraphobia: "I don't like to *look* out of the windows even – there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?"⁷² Her visions of the wallpaper thus extend to her horror of all social interaction, especially in her hallucination of similarly mentally-imprisoned women in society.

Gilman explains in a separate text that "The Yellow Wallpaper" was based on her own experience with severe depression:

This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure... and sent me home with solemn advice to 'live as domestic a life as far as possible,' to 'have but two hours' intellectual life a day,' and 'never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived... I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the border line of utter mental ruin that I could see over.'⁷³

Gilman's personal experience not only augments the plot of "The Yellow Wallpaper," it also affirms the actual existence of patriarchal attempts at controlling women, especially intellectual women such as Gilman, Fuller, and Dickinson. Gilman explains that she abandoned medical advice after her breakdown and returned to intellectual pursuits, saving herself from her narrator's fate in "The Yellow Wallpaper." It seems that Fuller and Dickinson did the same in order to avoid complete mental destruction in isolation.

Unlike Fuller's indirect comments on female insanity, Dickinson openly addresses this theme in poem 435 as it relates to normative social experience:

Much Madness is divinest Sense –
To a discerning Eye –
Much Sense – the starkest Madness –
'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail –
Assent – and you are sane –
Demur – you're straightaway dangerous –
And handled with a Chain –

The message of the poem is clear – those who do not "assent" with the "Majority" are deemed insane, an idea that directly endorses Foucault's idea of medicine as a power institution. With the "Majority" most likely representing patriarchal society, Dickinson accuses male authority of pathologizing subversive, often female, voices. Knowing Dickinson's biographical information, it is also possible that she wrote this poem as a direct commentary on her own life. She clearly "demurred" from social expectation in many ways, such as refusing to become wife and mother and identifying as a poet. Perhaps the speculations about her sanity and agoraphobia are therefore nothing other than results of the patriarchal medical institution's influence.

Dickinson expands her description of female insanity with her juxtaposition of isolation, mental instability, and female identity in poem 613:

They shut me up in Prose –

As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they liked me “still” –

Still! Could themselves have peeped –
And seen my Brain – go round –
They might as wise have lodged a Bird
For Treason – in the Pound –

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Abolish his Captivity –
And laugh – No more have I –

The first line, “They shut me up in Prose,” is potent and perplexing. Most likely, “Prose” as opposed to “poetry” symbolizes order, tradition, and control. Men dominated all literary forms during the nineteenth century, though poetry especially was designated as masculine due to its intensely creative qualities. As we have seen with de Beauvoir’s concept of male transcendence, men alone were allowed to possess creative potential and ability; thus, Dickinson uses “Prose” to suggest her isolation from poetry as a woman. She assimilates this abstract isolation with the concrete image of a girl locked “in the Closet.” Even more perplexing, she asserts the cause of her isolation to be “Because they like me ‘still,’” implying that the “they” in the poem claim to have her best interests in mind. The second stanza depicts insanity: the image “Still! Could themselves have peeped – / And seen my Brain – go round” connotes a “reeling brain” and so indicates the speaker’s madness intensifying with her seclusion. The poem concludes with an opposition between the speaker’s experience and a male subject’s experience. In order to “Abolish his Captivity,” a man “has but to will” and he will be freed. Clearly, Dickinson sees her speaker’s mental instability in isolation as a direct result of her sex.

Despite the many negative ways that female seclusion from society affects women, Fuller and Dickinson also present examples of a certain strength in female identity that originates in

being at a remove from social norms. For example, Fuller insists on the possibility for a perfect marriage union, but she also presents an analysis of “old maids” immediately following in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. The phenomenon of unmarried women in Fuller’s time qualifies these women as isolated, not only from the love of a man, but also from the women’s restrictive social duties. Though being an “old maid” was certainly pathologized by society, Fuller recognizes the benefits that seclusion from male influence can offer women: “In this regard of self-dependence, and a greater simplicity and fullness of being, we must hail as a preliminary the increase of the class contemptuously designated as old maids.”⁷⁴ In considering Fuller’s respect for self-reliance as a transcendental precept, the “self-dependence” women gain in a life free from a husband is clearly invaluable. In fact, Fuller’s description of old maids borders on reverence:

Not ‘needing to care that she may please a husband,’ a frail and limited being, her thoughts may turn into the centre, and she may, by steadfast contemplation entering into the secret of truth and love, use it for the use of all men, instead of a chosen few, and interpret through it all the forms of life.⁷⁵

Thus, for Fuller, old maids enjoy the potential to truly transcend the limitations of human nature and achieve a unity of the self, nature, and God. Also, in broadening the impact of unmarried women to “all men,” Fuller casts old maids as saint-like.

In the same vein, Fuller describes a Native American legend of virginal purity in which a young woman believes herself “betrothed to the Sun.”⁷⁶ As with old maids, the woman remained unmarried; however, she was not stigmatized for her social disobedience. Fuller broadens the legend to apply to Western ideals, saying this woman would be “tolerated, and the rays which made her youth blossom sweetly, would crown her with a halo in age.”⁷⁷ Here, Fuller expands

upon the idea of old maids' saint-like qualities and provides an example of how an isolated woman can retain a position of societal reverence.

By remaining outside of the marriage institution, the young woman in the Native American legend and old maids are able to preserve their feminine purity. This, of course, assumes no sexual interaction occurs outside of marriage; nonetheless, the unmarried woman's reputation remains untarnished. Dickinson embodied this spirit. Starting in her twenties, Dickinson wore nothing but white, a color that denotes virginity, angelic purity, innocence, bridal beauty, and more. Gilbert and Gubar explain that as Dickinson created this persona, she "herself became such an angel."⁷⁸ The persona, Gilbert and Gubar argue, allowed Dickinson to "literally and figuratively impersonat[e] 'a woman – white,'" and to make her life "into a gothic 'Yarn of Pearl' that gave her exactly the 'Amplitude' and 'Awe' she knew she needed in order to write great poetry."⁷⁹ Dickinson uses her symbolic purity to become a vision of poetic inspiration; thus, her isolation from married life was instrumental in facilitating her poetic voice.

Dickinson plays with her virginal self-image in poem 324, or "Some keep Sabbath going to Church." The poem centers on the speaker's willful separation from social customs, as represented by her refusal to go to church on Sundays. Instead, the speaker keeps the Sabbath "staying at Home" and worshipping alone with "an Orchard, for a Dome." The superiority of the speaker's faith is clear, especially when viewed through a transcendental lens – instead of the man-made church, she turns to nature to convey her faith. She raises herself to semi-divine or angelic status with the statement "I just wear my Wings." Finally, instead of arriving in heaven after death like those who go to church, the speaker is "going, all along." Her individualistic faith allows her to be free of sin and worthy of heaven during her whole life. The poem correlates extremely well to Dickinson's projection of her own pure image. It is directly a result of the

speaker's (and Dickinson's) isolation from the rest of society that she is able to maintain her uncorrupted identity.

As Dickinson's angelic image suggests, seclusion from the corrupting influence of sexuality and masculinity can allow individual women to rise above others who are immersed in patriarchal society. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* strongly supports this concept. When Woolf contemplates the relationship between women and the act of writing fiction, she concludes that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."⁸⁰ She explains the need for money because of women's economic dependence on men: "to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble."⁸¹ As for the more complex need for "a room of one's own," Woolf declares women's domestic role as interfering with creativity. Without the isolation from domestic responsibility, women are unable to focus, to dispel patriarchal influence, and to nurture their creative voice.

Fuller's description of saint-like isolated women and Dickinson's life and poems exemplify Woolf's insistence on female seclusion. Despite the fact that Woolf's 1929 essay contains seemingly unprecedented claims, Dickinson's poems, written some fifty-odd years before *A Room of One's Own*, reflect the same themes. Two stanzas in poem 470 assert, for example, the speaker's reliance on her own, separate room:

I am alive – because
I do not own a House –
Entitled to myself – precise –
And fitting no one else –

And marked my Girlhood's name –
So Visitors may know
Which Door is mine – and not mistake –
And try another Key –

Here, the speaker does not “own a House,” and so the stanzas are merely a fantasy of what she cannot have. Nonetheless, she recognizes the importance of a space that “fit[s] no one else,” and so cannot be disturbed. As ownership is an important theme in the feminist theory used in this chapter, it follows that male authority negates the possibility for women to own physical space, and consequently, intellectual space. Though she does find freedom in isolation in her father’s house, Dickinson is also subject to her father’s patriarchal ownership.

However, when separated from patriarchal influence, Dickinson is able to write. Her joy in isolation becomes apparent in her poem 636:

The Way I read a Letter’s – this –
‘Tis first – I lock the Door –
And push it with my fingers – next –
For transport it be sure –

And then I go the furthest off
To counteract a knock –
Then draw my little Letter forth
And slowly pick the lock –

Then – glancing narrow, at the Wall –
And narrow at the floor
For firm Conviction of a Mouse
Not exorcised before –

Peruse how infinite I am
To no one that You – know –
And sigh for lack of Heaven – but not
The Heaven God bestow –

The intensely private experience⁸² described here of opening a letter represents the speaker’s intensely private relationship with words. The letter symbolizes both a connection to another person and the joy the speaker receives in reading, and so opening it signifies the speaker’s indulgence in anti-patriarchal pursuits. She ensures her complete isolation by being able to “lock the Door,” after which she moves on to “pick the lock” of the letter. In a room of her own, she is

not only able to experience the joy of mental stimulation, but also she is able release her true self. For example, though it sounds silly and superficial, the speaker's "firm Conviction of a Mouse / Not exorcised before" displays a release from feminine characteristics. While she is reading alone, she becomes "infinite" and reaches toward "Heaven." The poem also reveals the speaker's sexual experience during the reading of the letter, a quality that would be limited by patriarchal influence had the speaker not been isolated. Clearly, in poem 636, Dickinson champions Woolf's idea of isolation from society as beneficial to the free development of female identity. She finds a room of her own, and within it her female intellect, sexuality, and creativity flourish.

The advantages and disadvantages of women's isolation from their social roles may be confusing at times. Both Fuller and Dickinson describe negative and positive instances of female seclusion; so, do the writers remain ambivalent on the subject, resulting in contradictory theories? While at first glance the ideas may seem contradictory, there is in fact an important distinction that clarifies this question. Forced female isolation can never be positive. Furthermore, insanity and madness in isolation arise from the irreconcilable concepts of woman's social duty and her *voluntary* isolation. Even if a woman secludes herself willingly, she must completely reject patriarchal influence and her socially-defined role. If she isolates herself and retains the normative ideals about her social role, she risks her mind's deterioration and endless contradictory experiences. If, however, she can achieve true separation from patriarchal influence, according to Fuller and Dickinson, she will reach transcendental, feminist, ideal existence.

This chapter has demonstrated the ways that Fuller works to uncover society's definition of women's roles, how first- and second-wave feminist theories shed light on these concepts, and

the ways that Dickinson's poems complement and complicate them. The general result of Fuller's theories is two-fold: she criticizes and champions different aspects of female social existence in relation to the transcendental feminine ideal. She deplors women's forced domestic roles that delimit their experience and symbolically imprison them. She wishes for the expansion of female social experience in order to incite "a much greater range of occupation than they have, to rouse their latent powers."⁸³ These negative aspects of women's social roles are easily understood through contemporary American society's more feminist-oriented perspective, and so Fuller's views of female liberation are almost universally accepted in American culture today.

The other side of Fuller's argument is less expected by contemporary readers. As her transcendental optimism dictates, Fuller views women's societal restraints as temporary and rather insignificant barriers that can easily be overcome. Instead of suggesting a radical redefinition of women's roles, Fuller remains close to normative female identities. She thus idealizes each aspect of women's social existence and presents this idealization as a solution to female subordination. Due to her belief in the possibilities for feminist reform in nineteenth-century America, Fuller proclaims that the prophetic, transcendent woman will soon appear.

Does Dickinson qualify as this female "prophet?" The analysis of her poems and biographical information reveals parallels with almost all of Fuller's theories about the social woman. Dickinson writes, energizes her genius, examines female social life, and emerges as incontestably unique. She meditates on both the injustices and triumphs of female existence, and often does so in ways that reach beyond Fuller's idealist tendencies. The very fact that she transcends Fuller's theories solidifies her position as the transcendental, feminine ideal.

¹ Fuller notes that she "sighs over" "A crowd of books having been sent me...on Woman's 'Sphere,' Woman's 'Mission,' and Woman's 'Destiny'" (Fuller 93).

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- ² Kenrick, William. *The Whole Duty of Woman*. Philadelphia., 1798. Web. 20 October, 2010.
- ³ Ibid 17.
- ⁴ Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex* . Tran., Ed. H. M. Parshely. New York: Knopf, 1993. Print, xl.
- ⁵ Fuller 22.
- ⁶ De Beauvoir 281.
- ⁷ Diana Fuss defines constructionist feminists as those who “are engaged in interrogating the intricate and interlacing processes which work together to produce all seemingly ‘natural’ or ‘given’ objects” (Fuss 666). In contrast, essentialism signifies a belief in “a pure and original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order” (Fuss 666).
- ⁸ Fuller 7.
- ⁹ Ibid 68.
- ¹⁰ Idem.
- ¹¹ Idem.
- ¹² “Nature” as a theoretical concept can be generally defined as including everything that is essentially nonhuman
- ¹³ Ortner, Sherry. “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” *Woman, Culture, and Society* . Eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, Louise Lamphere, and Joan Bamberger. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974. Print, 73.
- ¹⁴ Ortner 75.
- ¹⁵ De Beauvoir 3.
- ¹⁶ Idem.
- ¹⁷ Idem.
- ¹⁸ Fuller 68.
- ¹⁹ Fuller writes, “We admit as truth that woman seems destined by nature rather for the inner circle” (Fuller 19).
- ²⁰ “The egg, big with the future of the embryo, is stationary...it passively awaits fertilization” (de Beauvoir 12).
- ²¹ “Even when she is willing, or provocative, it is unquestionably the male who *takes* the female – she is *taken*” (de Beauvoir 22).
- ²² Fuller 27.
- ²³ Rich, Adrienne Cecile. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* . New York: Norton, 1986. Print, 11.
- ²⁴ Fuller 27.
- ²⁵ Ibid 32.
- ²⁶ Ibid 56.
- ²⁷ Ibid 28.
- ²⁸ Idem. This is a reference to the supposed power of the Rosicrucians, a 17th century occult religious sect, to create eternally burning lamps of truth.
- ²⁹ Rich, Adrienne Cecile. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* . New York: Norton, 1986. Print, 93.
- ³⁰ Rich makes sure to differentiate between “the institution of motherhood” and the “bearing and caring of children” (Rich 42).
- ³¹ For examples of Dickinson poems in which she directly mentions the correlation of motherhood and nature, see Poem 164, “Mama never forgets her birds,” and poem 790, “Nature – the Gentlest Mother is.”
- ³² Fuller 18.
- ³³ Idem.
- ³⁴ Rich explains the complexity of maternal emotion: “ I could remember little except anxiety, physical weariness, anger, self-blame, boredom, and division within myself: a division made more acute by the moments of passionate love, delight in my children’s spirited bodies and minds, amazement at how they went on loving me in spite of my failures to love them wholly and selflessly.” (Rich 15)
- ³⁵ Fuller 94, emphasis original.
- ³⁶ Idem.
- ³⁷ Ibid 41.
- ³⁸ Idem.
- ³⁹ De Beauvoir 447.
- ⁴⁰ In fact, de Beauvoir and many others argue that this concept of marriage for love is itself an artificial attempt at upholding the institution of marriage.
- ⁴¹ De Beauvoir 451.

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- ⁴² Ibid 42.
- ⁴³ Fuller 22.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid 42.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid 73.
- ⁴⁶ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *The Essential Swedenborg*. Ed. Sig Synnestvedt. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970. Print, 69.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, 75.
- ⁴⁸ Fuller 42.
- ⁴⁹ Idem.
- ⁵⁰ Godwin was a novelist and philosopher who married Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which is widely considered one of the first feminist texts.
- ⁵¹ A married couple of French revolutionaries opposing the Jacobins during the Reign of Terror.
- ⁵² Well-known French lovers from the 12th century. Their relationship is famously marked by Abelard's castration after the discovery of their affair.
- ⁵³ Ibid 46.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid 50.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid 54.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid 55.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid 17.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid 18.
- ⁵⁹ De Beauvoir 78.
- ⁶⁰ Idem.
- ⁶¹ Idem.
- ⁶² Typically pejorative stereotypes of femininity include women as overly sexual or whore-like, weak, petty, incapable of intellectual thought, overly emotional, etc.
- ⁶³ Fuller 17.
- ⁶⁴ John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* initially posited the concept of the harmful male gaze on the female body.
- ⁶⁵ Gilbert, Sandra M., and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Print, 52.
- ⁶⁶ Refer to the next subsection for a full analysis of poem 613.
- ⁶⁷ Fuller 20.
- ⁶⁸ Fuller, Margaret. *The Writings of Margaret Fuller*. Ed. Mason Wade. New York: The Viking Press, 1941. Print, 551.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid 554.
- ⁷⁰ Fuller describes a woman forced into an arranged marriage and a physician's evaluation of her depression as "sufficient proof of insanity" (Fuller 89). She also cites examples of women driven crazy by their obsession with appearances: "In excitement, more and more madly sought from day to day, they drowned the voice of conscience" (Fuller 86).
- ⁷¹ Foucault, Michel. "L'Implantation Perverse." *Histoire De La Sexualité: La Volonté De Savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976. 50-67. Print.
- ⁷² Ibid 35.
- ⁷³ Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wall-paper.'" *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*. Eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: Norton, 2007. Print, 119.
- ⁷⁴ Fuller 57.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid 58.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid 59.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid 60.
- ⁷⁸ Gilbert, Sandra M., and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Print, 583.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid 586.
- ⁸⁰ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1978. Print, 6.
- ⁸¹ Ibid 79.
- ⁸² The poem also undoubtedly contains many indicators of sexual experience, and so it will be analyzed again in the second chapter.
- ⁸³ Fuller 102.

CHAPTER 2: THE SEXUAL WOMAN

The passions, like fire, are a bad master; but confine them to the hearth and the altar, and they give life to social economy, and make each sacrifice meet for heaven.

- Margaret Fuller

The female social condition in nineteenth-century America was defined by patriarchy's attempt to control women primarily by exploiting biological status, and hence, sexual status. Almost all of women's social roles can be traced to their sexual purposes, many of which have been corrupted by patriarchal influence. Due to these manipulations, perspectives on feminine sexuality must remain in question in order to continue feminist advances. On the surface, Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* conforms to certain heteronormative definitions of female sexuality. Fuller addresses the subject by using euphemism and circumlocution, and her opinions on both male and female sexualities are conservative, perhaps as a result of her anomalous gender identity. In some ways, Fuller's life represents a highly untraditional gender experience for nineteenth-century society: she received the education of a man, resisted marriage, and led a generally intellectual life. This "public" Fuller, seemingly more "masculine" than "feminine," allowed her to understand gender-based injustices and to conceive of a sexually equal society. At the same time, she remained dependent on her father's household, on domesticity, and on conventional femininity. The conflicts of her dual identity, as masculine and feminine, perhaps prevented her development of an identity free from the influence of normative gender constructs.

As a result, many of the sexual theories in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* rest on the assumption of heterosexuality (validated by marriage) and on heteronormative ideals of sexual hierarchy. Due to her heteronormative emphasis, Fuller's approach to sexuality has been

criticized at times as almost anti-feminist in its conservatism. And yet, Fuller approaches the stigmatized subject with confidence, continuing to stress the importance of women's liberation from male sexual dominance.¹ *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* captures several progressive, modern-day feminist sexual theories, ideas that appear in *Woman* subtly, possibly even subconsciously for Fuller. For example, when contemplating female character, Fuller alludes to a mysticism, electricity, and indefinable femininity. In connection with other factors, it can be argued that Fuller acknowledges an exclusively female sexuality that flourishes within the individual and among women. Thus, despite her apparently steadfast sexual conservatism, Fuller broaches the radical subject of female homosexuality.

In many ways, Dickinson's poems result in different ideas about male and female sexuality than Fuller's *Woman*. Many of Dickinson's poems are charged with sexual language and demand a sexual interpretation, and so she provides a multifaceted view of female sexuality. Mirroring her own ambiguous sexuality, Dickinson's poems reveal a myriad of sexualities, some of which uphold and some of which challenge heteronormativity. The sexually-ambiguous quality of Dickinson's work thus challenges Fuller's denunciation of sex as a patriarchal institution, further complicating the question of Dickinson's poems as representing Fuller's female ideal. By reading the poems and the essay in tandem, Dickinson's work draws out the subtly progressive quality of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* to embody Fuller's careful feminism.

The “Loaded Gun” of Male Sexuality

Fuller’s views about female sexuality depend upon her ideas about male sexuality to a large extent. In the patriarchal nineteenth century, women symbolically did not exist independently from men, and thus Fuller’s conservative sexual perspective is defined by her opinion about male sexuality. Sexuality and sexual power often govern gender interactions, creating a system where women sexually submit due to their “subordinate” reproductive purpose, and men sexually dominate as a result of their “superior” reproductive role. Much of masculine power supposedly stems from the active, rather than passive, sexual role that male anatomy creates;² however, patriarchy exploits these biological characteristics to unjustly subject women to male sexual desires.

Perhaps as a result of female sexuality’s stigmatization, Fuller concentrates almost entirely on male sexuality in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, thereby emphasizing a disposition towards the idea of male sexual impulse dominating female sexual impulse. By analyzing the importance of sexuality in men’s lives, she indirectly suggests that women’s sexuality is unimportant in comparison. Despite this assumption, Fuller effectively counteracts public opinion about sexual hierarchies, arguing that “it has been inculcated on women for centuries, that men have not only stronger passions than they, but a sort that it would be shameful for them to share or even understand. That, therefore, they must ‘confide in their husbands, i.e., submit implicitly to their will.’”³ Clearly, Fuller denounces the concept of a marital sexual contract and questions the assumption that male sexuality is uncontrollable. In fact, she mocks those who use sexual impulse to validate patriarchy when ironically stating that “a man is so constituted that he must indulge his passions or die!”⁴ Implying that men hide behind their

“natural” desires, Fuller scorns male hyper-sexuality as a patriarchal construct and affirms that every man is capable of becoming an individual “in whom brute nature is entirely subject to the impulses of his better self.”⁵ At the same time, however, Fuller inherently legitimizes men’s sexual desires by acknowledging that the “brute passions of men”⁶ do exist, and that they play an important role in men’s lives.

Fuller also acknowledges male sexuality’s corrupting influence on female character. Her analysis of sexuality begins by angrily attacking men: “O men! I speak not to you. It is true that your wickedness... is its own punishment,”⁷ and continuing to explain that men’s sexual dominance manifests this male “wickedness:” “Your forms degraded and your eyes clouded by secret sin; natural harmony broken and fineness of perception destroyed in your mental and bodily organization.”⁸ Fuller’s tirade against male corruption vehemently deplores the “secret sin” of uncontrolled male sexuality and indicates the danger that male sexuality poses to both women and to society: “You have lost the world in losing yourselves. Who ruins another has admitted the worm to the root of his own tree, and the fuller ye fill the cup with evil, the deeper must be your own bitter draught.”⁹ Fuller’s fervor against male sexuality links all sexual impulse with sin and upholds conservative Christian notions of virginity as a solution. The use of biblical diction and archaic words also imbues Fuller’s attack with a sermon-like quality, channeling a typically masculine (religious) discourse and thus allying her opinions with patriarchy to some extent. She clearly continues to advocate feminist ideas, but her language and religious context betray the basis of her sexual theories within conservative, institutionalized ideals. Furthermore, Fuller’s anger originates in men’s misuse of sexual power, rather than in the concept of sexual power belonging to men in the first place. She asserts that sexual impulse defines men’s

“nature,” and that their job is to control this impulse in favor of intellect instead of equalizing sexual power distribution between the sexes.

Fuller’s identification with transcendentalism also reveals difficulties in her argument. With the exception of Walt Whitman, most of the traditional American transcendentalists ignore the importance of human sexuality; for a movement that places so much importance on the human body, transcendentalists’ erasure of sexuality reveals a theoretical imbalance. For example, Fuller’s attack on male sexuality disconnects her transcendental view of the human form as a gateway to the divine from her feminist idea of sexual interaction causing “God and love [to be] shut out from your hearts by the foul visitants you have permitted there.”¹⁰ In other words, she argues that sexuality undermines transcendental potential, though it can be argued that sexual enjoyment ultimately fulfills human natural existence. Furthermore, she works towards reconciling her reverence for marriage and purity with her beliefs about sexuality. She supports men who try to “help the erring by showing them the physical law,” which she believes is “wise and excellent.” This “physical law” enforces male purity before marriage in order to save men from spiritual corruption:

Cold bathing and exercise will not suffice to keep a life pure, without an inward baptism and noble and exhilarating employment for the thoughts and passions. Early marriages are desirable, but if... a man does not early, or at all, find the person to whom he can be united in the marriage of souls... can you find no way for him to lead a virtuous and happy life?¹¹

Here, the interaction of Fuller’s transcendentalism, feminism, and religious conservatism introduces conceptual tensions. This practical approach to marriage in order to prevent male (and female) sexual corruption contrasts with her idealized transcendental view of marriage discussed

in the first chapter. Is marriage a tool for controlling male sexuality, or is it a divine signal of human transcendence? Fuller's belief in ideal marriage would indicate that both of these definitions cannot coexist.

Each of Fuller's concepts about male sexual identity assumes sexual difference, in which "natural" male sexual desire causes gender inequality. Despite a few inconsistencies in her analysis, this essentialization does not mean that Fuller's essay fails in effectively analyzing male sexuality. Gender hierarchies based in sexual power dynamics are widely considered as a driving force behind patriarchal injustices, affirming that male sexuality truly threatens female existence. Subsequent feminist theorists, such as Adrienne Rich, continually establish the dangers of male sexuality. Rich demonstrates that men's power arises from the concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" within society, in which "heterosexuality is presumed the 'sexual preference' of 'most women,' either implicitly or explicitly."¹² Due to the nature of social and sexual interaction, "heterosexuality itself [is] a beachhead of male dominance"¹³ and undoubtedly causes female subordination. By portraying male sexuality as "wicked," Fuller also blames heterosexual interaction for gender inequality. Furthermore, Rich states that within normative heterosexual interaction, "sex is... equated with attention from the male, who is charismatic though brutal, infantile, or unreliable."¹⁴ Like Fuller's analysis, Rich characterizes male sexuality simultaneously through authority and error. If women realize this unfair sexual power structure, they can be afflicted by "profound skepticism, caution, and righteous paranoia about men," a quality common to "any healthy woman's response to the misogyny of male-dominated culture, to the forms assumed by 'normal' male sexuality."¹⁵ Fuller's irate tone in *Woman* is a result of a similar realization – despite her optimism, she is clearly discouraged by sexual injustice.

Another source of sexual injustice, mentioned at the beginning of this section, is patriarchy's use of human anatomy to define sexual development and power. Men legitimize their sexual power by viewing natural sexual intercourse as a factor in creating gender hierarchies. Patriarchal emphasis on the penis generates the idea of "phallogormorphism," thereby idealizing heteronormativity and masculine sexual dominance. Luce Irigaray, in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, indicates that men base sexual interaction in "the enactment of sadomasochistic fantasies" that generate "the desire to force entry, to penetrate, to appropriate for himself the mystery of the womb where he has been conceived,"¹⁶ thereby enabling male dominance. Irigaray attributes the active, almost violent quality of male sexual desire both to the physical purpose of the penis, and to men's unconscious need to strip women of the mystery of maternity. Though Fuller does not contemplate sex so unabashedly, Irigaray's theory connects to her idea about the male sexuality's demeaning influence. She recognizes the difficulty of keeping men "free from slavery to the body,"¹⁷ thus indicating the power that male anatomy holds over the individual and society.

The correlation between male anatomy and masculine sexual power also comes strongly into play in Dickinson's poems. Many of the poems center on male subjects, imagery, and masculine sexual energy; in fact, according to Joanne Dobson, "a particularly intense constellation of images, situations, and statement in her poetry reveals an intriguing preoccupation with masculinity."¹⁸ Maleness and masculinity is certainly a source of many poems' complexities, specifically through a "facet of masculinity that is perceived as simultaneously omnipotent, fascinating, and deadly."¹⁹ Like Fuller, Dickinson's views about men often depend on their sexual authority and the danger it poses to women; yet, unlike Fuller, Dickinson resists the type of abhorrence for male sexuality in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

Dickinson actually appropriates masculinity through poems such as “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun – ,” claiming and fearing male power simultaneously. Furthermore, Rich’s interpretation of Dickinson’s preoccupation with masculinity demonstrates that the experience of reading the poems themselves is masculine and sexual. Using “My life had stood – a Loaded Gun” to represent this quality, Rich explains Dickinson’s poems as inseminating, symbolically phallic in their aggressive, active, sexual language. Her poems sometimes embody an anti-feminine experience in Rich’s view, through which Dickinson internalizes “the danger of identifying and taking hold of her forces, not least that in doing so she risks defining herself – and being defined by – as aggressive, as unwomanly... and as potentially lethal.”²⁰ Thus, despite the impending threat of masculinity to her undefined identity, Dickinson acquires symbolically phallic power. Emerging from typically feminine language, Dickinson’s poems claim male sexual and creative power without denouncing female power. In this way, Dickinson tackles the same contradictions of patriarchal society, male sexuality, and female experience as does Fuller, though in a very different way.

Dickinson’s “Master” poems effectively demonstrate her interaction with masculinity and heteronormative sexuality. Interspersed in her body of work, Dickinson presents a series of poems that address or focus on a mysterious “Master,” whom she often also refers to as “Sir” or “Signor.” Many Dickinson scholars have investigated the presence of this “Master,” some of whom identify him as various men in Dickinson life. For this analysis, it is less important to prove a certain identity for the Master, but rather to examine his presence as it represents Dickinson’s rapport with masculinity and male sexuality. According to Adalaide Morris, the Master poems “can only exist in a world of hierarchy,” and the “structures of the Master’s world are predominantly vertical and its dramas are largely dramas of positioning: the prostration of the

woman, the exaltation of the man.”²¹ This interpretation initially indicates a straightforward, feminist perspective on sexual power distribution; however, Dickinson also marks the Master poems with sexual desire and “unreleased passion, passion that endangers everything around it.”²² Again, Dickinson connects pleasure with pain, a quality arising from her simultaneous desire for and subordination to the Master.

One example that displays these qualities is poem 151:

Mute thy Coronation –
Meek my Vive le roi,
Fold a tiny courtier
In thine Ermine, Sir,
There to rest revering
Till the pageant by,
I can murmur broken,
Master, It was I –

The contradictory language and vacillating dynamics reveal the complex relationship between the speaker and the Master. The opening lines introduce the Master as a king, yet the speaker immediately asks him to “Mute” and “Meek” expressions of his royalty. She places herself in a position of inferiority as she proclaims “Vive le roi” (a French expression meaning “long live the king”) but still desires equality through intimate interaction with the Master. Similarly, the speaker defines herself as a “tiny courtier” in comparison to the monarch. The word “tiny” contradicts with “courtier” in that a courtier maintains an upper-class position in a monarchical system. The poem also includes an expression of intimacy, and possible sexual desire, as the speaker asks to be “folded” into the Master’s “Ermine,” or the garment signifying the dignity of office. Containing both the images of physical contact and contact with the Master’s symbolic authority, the speaker’s words echo a desire for sexual power in lying close to the Master’s heart. The description of the ermine additionally connotes comfort, a place where the speaker can “rest revering / Till the pageant by,” protected by and intertwined with the Master’s body. And yet, the

final lines counteract her comfort as she admits to being “broken.” The last words, “Master, It was I – ” are unclear; for what is she responsible? Perhaps she expresses guilt for “muting” the Master’s importance, or perhaps her “broken” voice indicates her desire for the Master’s power. In either case, Dickinson suggests an unstable relationship between the Master and the speaker in which she simultaneously desires, fears, and resents her male sovereign.

As an abstract example, poem 151 establishes Dickinson’s complex rapport between female speakers and male subjects. Like Fuller in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Dickinson addresses power distribution as it relates to sexuality; however, unlike Fuller, some sexual desire characterizes the female as well as the male. The Master poems portray male sexuality and the pleasures it provides women despite patriarchal hierarchy, though such poems hardly ever describe heterosexual interaction without signifying unequal sexual power distributions. For example, the poem 391’s subtleties depict sexual interaction riddled with uncertainty:

A Visitor in Marl –
Who influences Flowers –
Till they are orderly as Busts –
And Elegant – as Glass –

Who visits in the Night –
And just before the Sun –
Concludes his glistening interview –
Caresses – and is gone –

But whom his fingers touched –
And where his feet have run –
And whatsoever Mouth he kissed –
Is as it had not been –

The poetic intrigue here originally derives from the apparent division of the first stanza with the rest of the poem. The subject, “A Visitor in Marl,” is immediately perplexing – how can an anthropomorphic figure be composed of “Marl,” or sedimentary mud? The rest of the stanza interprets the visitor as an organic body, the soil itself that nourishes and beautifies flowers. On

the surface, Dickinson characterizes the visitor like rain or morning dew; yet, Dickinson clearly emphasizes the visitor's masculinity, thus forming him into an indeterminate male figure.

Following his identification as masculine, the visitor causes somewhat abnormal occurrences in the flowers, forcing them to be "orderly as Busts" and "Elegant – as Glass –." The use of the word "Bust" introduces a human shape, while "Bust" and "Glass" both connote hard, cold, and unnatural qualities that the visitor creates in the flowers. The second stanza refocuses the poem to his "visit," which occurs only during the night. The darkness denotes deviant behavior, a quality specified as sexual by the words "glistening" and "caresses" to describe the visitor's actions. Dickinson's sexual diction begins to influence the poem as a whole, and thus curiously connects the organic, natural characteristics of the "Visitor in Marl" in the first stanza with his sexual characteristics in the second stanza. The end of the stanza indicates that the visitor departs with sunlight, remaining a mysterious and subversive figure.

The masculine form accentuates his sexual presence in the third stanza through images of someone "whom his fingers touched" and whose "Mouth he kissed." This person corresponds to either the speaker or an abstract female representative who becomes "as it had not been –" after interacting with the male visitor. Even the syntax of this last line is purposefully vague in order to mirror the speaker and reader's confusion, though a close analysis results in the "Visitor in Marl" representing the disrupting influence of male sexuality and the masculine form. At the beginning, the visitor seems natural and organic, the same way that nature and anatomy legitimize male sexual impulse. However, the male sexual figure disturbs its objects, characterized as feminine through the flower imagery. The female persona is forced into the unnatural, rigid forms of glass and stone, changed forever into something "it had not been" before. Yet, despite their distorting effect, these changes are delicate, beautiful, and "Elegant." In

this way, Dickinson illustrates the dangers of male sexuality, due less to its threat of gender-based authority, and more to its subtly transformative influence on pure femininity when tempting women sexually.

In considering Dickinson's conception of masculine sexuality, the abstracted masculine representative in poem 391 is significant poetic choice. Like Fuller, Dickinson often plays with language and imagery to connote sexuality without directly describing sexual experience. For both writers, nineteenth-century sexual conservatism may have influenced these choices. Yet where Fuller's euphemistic language likely results from her feminist view of patriarchal sexual interaction and from her more old-fashioned morals, Dickinson's abstraction suggests her perplexed interest in the power of sexuality, especially male sexuality. According to Dobson, it is in the poems that focus on "the indeterminate 'He,'" as opposed to an individual man, that "the pure energy of the *idea* of the masculine is most clearly observed, where we can see her fascination and her fear in their essence."²³ Poem 520 exemplifies Dickinson's preoccupation with an indeterminate male sexual figure:

I started Early – Took my Dog –
And visited the Sea –
The Mermaids in the Basement
Came out to look at me –

And Frigates – in the Upper Floor
Extended Hempen Hands –
Presuming Me to be a Mouse –
Aground – upon the Sands –

But no Man moved Me – till the Tide
Went past my simple Shoe –
And past my Apron – and my Belt
And past my Bodice – too –

And made as He would eat me up –
As wholly as a Dew
Upon a Dandelion's Sleeve –

And then – I started – too –

And He – He followed – close behind –
I felt his Silver Heel
Upon my Ankle – Then my Shoes
Would overflow with Pearl –

Until We met the Solid Town –
No One He seemed to know –
And bowing – with a Mighty look –
At me – The Sea withdrew –

Dickinson presents a ubiquitous masculine form personified by the sea. The first two stanzas introduce a type of fantasy world where the poem takes place – the atmosphere reveals such fantastic images as mermaids and gigantic ships, or “Frigates,” that dwarf the speaker to the size of a “Mouse.” The emphasis Dickinson places on the speaker’s solitude, except for the company of her dog, allows for isolation from invading patriarchal influence. The dog, a non-threatening companion, provides for the speaker’s ease, displaying her relaxed and playful state of mind. The second stanza ends with an invitation into the ocean, as the ships “Extended Hempen Hands –” in order to liberate the land-locked speaker.

In the transition to the third stanza, Dickinson shifts her focus with the word “But.” She indirectly links the figures in the first stanzas, the mermaids and the frigates, with the figure of “Man.” Mermaids, as often sexualized anthropomorphic creatures, symbolize the human body and sexuality, and “frigates” denote violent patriarchal society that necessitates war and warships. To this, Dickinson presents an opposing, non-anthropomorphic figure: the “Tide.” The sea slowly begins to envelop the speaker in a gentle, almost passive way, a quality that Dickinson achieves through the use of the phrase “Went past” as opposed to a more active or threatening verb linking to the danger of drowning. The advancing tide therefore remains a source of pleasure rather than fear. As the speaker becomes more and more immersed, Dickinson

characterizes her identity as feminine with the descriptors “simple Shoe,” “Apron,” “Belt,” and “Bodice.” Furthermore, the water’s progression from her “Belt” to her “Bodice” indicates her aroused sexuality; by drawing attention to these regions on the female body, Dickinson implies a sexual enjoyment of the water.

The fourth stanza determines the ocean to be masculine while producing language that contradicts the previous stanza’s gentleness. Immediately upon saying the ocean “made as He would eat me up,” Dickinson reveals sexual enjoyment and danger within masculinity with the water suggesting the possibility of drowning within it. The speaker’s sexual arousal intensifies as she realizes her danger, stating “And then – I started – too –.” As the ocean reciprocates (“And He – He followed – close behind –”), Dickinson’s language mirrors her speaker’s distracted, impassioned state as the dashes permeate the lines and more deeply affect the poem’s rhythm. All of these factors accumulate, building towards poetic and sexual climax in the reference to ejaculation in the lines “Then my Shoes / Would overflow with Pearl –.” Initially, the speaker’s sexual enjoyment could be construed as involuntary, once again emphasizing sexual hierarchy; however, the first line of the poem, which uses the same phrase as Dickinson’s allusion to orgasm in the fourth and fifth stanzas, attributes agency to the speaker. It was she who “started Early,” intending her own sexual exploration from the start.

Finally, the last stanza reverts back to concrete, human-based imagery. After returning to the “Solid Town,” or the influence of social norms, the sea retreats. The elusive, indeterminate sexual form is at odds with social constructs and human figures; therefore, except for one “Mighty look” at the speaker, the ocean pulls away. This poem therefore at once upholds and questions the following statement by Dobson: “[Dickinson] was dealing...with an enduring archetype lodged deep within her psychic makeup, envisioned in its compelling configurations

by her unique imagination.”²⁴ While poem 520 clearly constructs a vision of an indeterminate male figure, a type of masculine Dickinsonian archetype, it also separates from human masculinity. Dobson argues that abstract male figures mostly reflect Dickinson’s perspective on men in general; but, this poem deliberately divides masculine sexuality and human social experience. The male form echoes Dickinson’s commentary on women’s pleasure in heterosexual fantasy as opposed to literal heterosexual experience.

And yet, Dickinson does not focus exclusively on this type of imagined sexual experience. Her exploration of male sexuality extends further in poems concerning the physical male body. Irigaray’s theories about the phallus and its significance for male sexual authority relate extremely well to Dickinson’s poem 391:

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides –
You may have met him – did you not
His notice sudden is –

The Grass divides as with a Comb –
A spotted shaft is seen –
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on –

He likes a Boggy Acre
A Floor too cool for Corn –
Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot –
I more than once at Noon
Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled, and was gone –

Several of Nature’s People
I know, and they know me –
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality –

But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone

Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone –

The subject of this poem, a young man contemplating a snake in the grass, allows for many different interpretations. The speaker's voice fits with the playful yet complex tone of Dickinson's other poems; this time, Dickinson reveals in the third stanza that her speaker is a "Boy." A symbolic reading of the poem yields the snake as representative of the phallus, and thus, of male sexual identity. Originating with the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden where a serpent tempts Eve into tasting the forbidden fruit, Western culture associates the snake with, among other things, the penis.²⁵ Though Dickinson's poem does not concretely invoke this association, her words subtly legitimize a sexual interpretation of the snake.

The first two stanzas introduce the snake's agility, mystery, and disguise within the grass, still hiding the identity of the speaker as well as the "narrow Fellow." The phrase "spotted shaft" intimates both the snake's anatomy as well as its connection to the male sexual organ. It remains elusive, almost teasing the speaker by emerging then hiding again. The transition to the third stanza further details the snake and the male speaker – Dickinson attributes human emotions to the snake, such as preferring a "Boggy Acre," and creates a parallel between the snake and the boy with the misleading syntax of "Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot –." The previous two lines' description of the snake, followed by characterization as a "Boy," associates the snake's desires with the speaker's. The confusing image of the snake as "Whip lash / Unbraiding in the Sun" further complicates the relationship between the boy and the animal; the snake becomes even more mysterious to the speaker, whose language transforms with more and more bizarre metaphors. The climax occurs as the boy attempts to capture, or "secure," the snake, which then "wrinkle[s]" and disappears.

The fourth and fifth stanzas finally provide some insight into the speaker's opinion of the snake. He states that he has come into contact with "Several of Nature's People," or other animals, with whom he interacted contentedly and with "cordiality;" the snake, however, is not included. Dickinson's juxtaposition of the snake and the other animals indicates that the boy does not treat the snake with "cordiality," especially when he tries to capture it. In fact, each interaction with the snake causes the boy "tighter breathing," a physical reaction that could be attributed to the boy's anger, fear, or even sexual excitement. Finally, the last line, "And Zero at the Bone –," refers both to the snake and the boy's "bonelessness." The snake's anatomical structure is indeed composed only of muscle, while the snake's sexual symbolism suggests that "Zero at the Bone" refers to the boy's own male sexual anatomy. Furthermore, "Zero at the Bone" implies a lack of structure and substance at the center of the metaphor – perhaps Dickinson implies that after examining himself, the boy finds his sexual identity to be void. The many images associated with the speaker and the snake, which connect them and simultaneously posit them as independent, reveal the boy's struggle with his sexual development. Furthermore, the speaker's sexuality exists independent of a woman or any other person. His interaction with the snake signifies masturbatory exploration, an act that requires active, conscious sexual purpose. As stated by Irigaray, "In order to touch himself, man needs an instrument: his hand, a woman's body, language... And this self-caressing requires at least a minimum of activity."²⁶ Considering Irigaray's description, Dickinson's speaker is at odds with his own body due to his developing need for an outside source of sexual satisfaction.

Dickinson succeeds in employing a masculine voice even with the exclusively male subject of sexual identity and genitals, and she creates the boy to embody various possible perspectives, from both men and women, about the phallus' symbolic power. As Irigaray notes,

the male reproductive organ determines heterosexual physical interaction and patriarchal power structures, and so the speaker's interaction with the snake suggests the obscure power that male sexuality holds over individual men, women, and society. Furthermore, the boy's fascination with the snake mirrors Eve's interaction with the serpent in Genesis. Both characters are tempted by sexuality, experience, and knowledge of their bodies, perhaps signifying that Dickinson's male speaker also represents the original, feminine sexual desire that supposedly caused the human race to fall into sin and created gendered society. Represented in all these interpretations, Dickinson's view of male sexuality is complex, forgiving, and diversifies sexual interaction in a way that Fuller would not have approved of or attempted. Without exonerating men's corrupting sexual influence in patriarchal society, Dickinson attempts to understand masculine power and sexuality, and to claim it as her own.

Locating Female Sexuality within Patriarchy

As we have seen, Fuller conceptualizes male sexuality in a way that affirms men as corrupting sexual influences on women and society due to the "brute" nature of their sexuality. She vehemently proclaims that male sexuality must be controlled. Strangely, however, Fuller does not offer an equivalent analysis of female sexuality. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* requires a careful reading in order to determine Fuller's opinion about women's sexual identities, the result of which demonstrates her reliance on heteronormative, and even patriarchal, concepts despite her persistent feminism.

Though her presentation of male sexuality is harsh, Fuller does recognize, and thus, legitimize, the importance of male sexual identity. Therefore, her silence on female sexuality suggests her belief that it is less important to female experience. Fuller's lacuna can perhaps be attributed to opprobrious patriarchal influence that pathologized female sexuality as psychopathic and even criminal in the nineteenth century. The few cases of female "psychopaths," women who admitted to sexual identity and sexual enjoyment, were characterized as those who "could not restrain their boundless desires, [and] were to blame for slack sexual mores."²⁷ Furthermore, "men were at best the passive recipients, or, at worst, the unwitting victims of their unwanted attentions."²⁸ The myth of hypersexual women indicates, as we saw in chapter one, the power of the medical institution (as theorized by Foucault) in upholding patriarchal dominance when it is threatened by women. Fuller explains the "corruption" of female character by the fact that women are fundamentally prohibited from understanding sexuality:

Men have, indeed, been, for more than a hundred years, rating women for countenancing vice. But at the same time, they have carefully hid from them its nature, so that the preference often shown by women for bad men, arises rather from a confused idea that they are bold and adventurous, acquainted with regions which women are forbidden to explore, and the curiosity that ensures, than a corrupt heart in the woman.²⁹

Pathologization of female sexual interest, therefore, arises not from hypersexuality, but from the original delimitation of sexuality that women experience during childhood. Despite her guarded sexual analysis, Fuller recognizes the immense injustices steeped in patriarchy concerning female sexuality; thus, Fuller perpetuates her feminist perspective even in face of pathologization.

In its discussion of male sexual experience, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* reveals some disguised theories about female heterosexual interaction. To begin, Fuller focuses briefly on the Western ideas about the so-called “Madonna-whore” complex.³⁰ Though this twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory emerged after Fuller’s time, the same concept has existed throughout history in patriarchal stereotypes that illustrate female sexuality through two extremes: the virginal “Madonna” and the debauched “whore.” No matter the motivation behind this demarcation, the binary limits female sexual identity to male ideals of purity and temptation, while also providing a constant method for keeping women symbolically subservient. Fuller introduces the theme when presenting another facet of her ideal woman, one who is able to transcend such binaries. Fuller states that “it was not the opinion of woman current among Jewish men that formed the character of the mother of Jesus.”³¹ She suggests that Western idealization of the Madonna arose from the institutionalized Church’s influence. Considering Fuller’s idealized opinion of the Virgin Mary,³² this quotation questions the portrayal of the Madonna as the perfect woman; she implies that the virginal experience of the Madonna is compatible neither with true womanhood nor what Mary actually experienced – marriage and motherhood necessitate sexual interaction.³³

In the succeeding paragraph, Fuller presents Mary’s opposite, the sexually “corrupt” Eve, and recognizes a belief that “as through woman man was lost, so through woman must man be redeemed.”³⁴ Simultaneously declaring that woman (Eve) created original sin, and that woman will soon provide the human race’s salvation, Fuller seems to present women with the possibility of a sexual identity. Combined with her previous statement about the Madonna, this moment declares that women must find a sexual balance between Mary and Eve, between the Madonna and the whore. Fuller wishes for women to become “immortal Eve,”³⁵ one who influences men

but refrains from exploiting sexual power: “As an immortal, she may also know and inspire immortal love.”³⁶ This “immortal love,” however, is defined by purity, in that the soul’s immortality necessitates absolution from sin, and therefore, resistance to sex. The “immortal Eve” also signifies Eve before sexual knowledge, temptation, and the fall; so, “immortal Eve” is not truly a sexual woman. Due to these contradictions, Fuller in fact reinforces the idea that women cannot effectively implement a sexual identity dependent on association with the Madonna/whore construct, despite her attempt to allow for a “balanced” sexual Eve.

The confusing interaction between sexuality, virginity and purity, and immortality continues in *Woman* with Fuller’s analysis of the myth of the marital sexual contract. She indicates that men have “inculcated on women for centuries” that men’s sexual desires are innate to their nature, and thus require women to “submit implicitly to their will.”³⁷ By suggesting that women have been tricked into sexual submission, Fuller implies that the majority of married women would prefer a cold marriage bed in place of obligated sexual intercourse. Undoubtedly, Fuller’s nineteenth-century society was riddled with many instances of marital sexual abuse, and so this claim could be correct; however, she ignores female sexual desire, whether within or outside of marriage. Tending more towards Mary Wollstonecraft’s conservative idea of replacing romantic love with friendship,³⁸ Fuller views male sexuality’s threat as greater than the pleasures for women it represents. Furthermore, Fuller’s transcendental beliefs in favor of an equal marriage union influence her analysis of sexuality. The perfect “religious union,” discussed in chapter one, signifies the ultimate elevation of female status due to its basis in gender equality. Therefore, the profanation of such a marriage by sexual dynamics (male sexual dominance and female sexual submission) undermines Fuller’s ideal. Her idealization of the heterosexual marriage, therefore, delimits her theories about female sexuality to a submissive role.

With submission comes powerlessness. Men possess all social, political, economic, and personal power over women. The completeness of patriarchal rule is such that women seek the only type of power that they have a chance of assuming – sexual power. Fuller disparages women’s attempts at gaining sexual power through “coquetry” and physical adornment, instead presenting her transcendental feminine ideal as the solution. Bluntly, she advises women: “clear your souls of the taint of vanity. Do not rejoice in conquests, either that your power to allure may be seen by other women, or for the pleasure of rousing passionate feelings that gratify your love of excitement.”³⁹ Fuller recognizes artificially-enhanced sexuality as a tool that not only depreciates women’s modesty, but that also bolsters male authority by rendering female sexual identity contingent upon male approval.

The danger artificial female sexuality poses to Fuller’s goal of gender equality thus explains why she discounts the importance of sexuality in women’s lives. Due to normative sexual dynamics in the nineteenth century, Fuller most likely could not conceive of a society in which female sexuality flourishes without subjecting women to men. As a result, Fuller names chastity as her solution to sexual and moral corruption:

Many minds, deprived of the traditionary [sic] or instinctive means of passing a cheerful existence, must find help in self-impulse, or perish. It is therefore that, while any elevation, in the view of union, is to be hailed with joy, we shall not decline celibacy as the great fact of the time.⁴⁰

Celibacy, Fuller declares, triumphs over “self-impulse” in order to elevate human nature; thus, women must sacrifice sexual desire for the betterment of all. She allies her theory with the commonly-held Christian belief that female chastity was the ultimate and most important path towards complete female virtue. In its denial of women’s sexual identities, this belief is

seemingly anti-feminist; however, preceding female writers have argued in favor of female chastity not only to preserve virtue but also to legitimize women's capacity for rational thought. In her analysis of early-modern women writers, Joan Gibson discusses the widespread belief that rationality and chastity were irreconcilable,⁴¹ and therefore that society's emphasis on female chastity triumphed over female rationality in the public opinion. However, Gibson explains that by arguing that women's sexual independence and rational intellect were compatible, writers and philosophers such as Louisa Sigea, Sor Juana, and Tullia D'Argona "began to authorize their own more extensive educations, public displays of their learning and a desire for acknowledgment of it, and to make possible the same consideration for other women."⁴² The potential to be virtuous and rational thus established a precedent for Fuller: as a highly academic thinker advocating women's intellectual respect, she presents the solution of chastity in order to promote women's public selves.

The early-modern writers in Gibson's article focused both on literal celibacy and feminine intellectual purity as a way of legitimizing rational identity. Though this approach resembles Fuller's, she believes that female sexuality negatively influences her transcendental ideal woman for the most part. Once again, Fuller's idealization of marriage becomes relevant when she describes that she has "many, many times seen the image of a future life, of a destined spouse, painted on the tablets of a virgin heart."⁴³ She sees the virginal purity of both man and woman before marriage as entirely necessary in creating the perfect union. Specifically, Fuller addresses a "youth and a maiden,"⁴⁴ that is, a pure woman whom she describes in an example of her most transcendently-inspired language: "Thou, child of an unprofaned wedlock, brought up amid the teachings of the woods and fields, kept fancy-free by useful employment and a free flight into the heaven of thought, loving to please only those whom thou wouldst not be ashamed

to love.”⁴⁵ The image of this nymph-like young girl reverts back to the preaching tone displayed in her condemnation of male sexual impulse. Though the image illustrates Fuller’s transcendentalism through the emphasis on “the teachings of the woods and fields,” and some of her feminism through her insistence on “the heaven of thought,” her formal, traditional prose contextualizes the description within patriarchal influence, in which her words themselves betray her feminist intent and imbue the passage a condescending perspective on the young girl. Furthermore, Fuller addresses only this type of “pure” woman: “Not of you whose character is tainted with vanity... who have early learnt the love of coquettish excitement, and whose eyes rove restlessly in search of a ‘conquest’ or ‘beau’... To such I do not speak.”⁴⁶ Here, Fuller views sexually-aware women with contempt and dismisses them from her conception of female transcendence due to their sexuality, whether it is faked or genuine.

Finally, Fuller’s insistence on chastity as a solution focuses mostly on how it could improve male existence. Her ideal virgins, she states, could become “the harbingers and leaders of a new era;” this “new era,” however, involves providing men with salvation. Fuller wishes for every woman to abstain and protect her purity, and to

see whether she does not suppose virtue possible and necessary to man, and whether she would not desire for her son a virtue which aimed at a fitness for a divine life, and involved, if not asceticism, that degree of power over the lower self, which shall ‘not exterminate the passions, but keep them chained at the feet of reason.’⁴⁷

Thus, female chastity becomes a model for male behavior, piety, and intellectual pursuits, through which men can learn to control sexuality and even delve into “asceticism.” Fuller recognizes the importance of sexual desire in that she does not want “the passions” to be “exterminated,” but she also employs female sexuality as a tool for the betterment of men,

women, and society. Considering her criticism of women who use their sexuality as a tool in gaining power, Fuller's manipulation of sexuality is somewhat hypocritical. Nonetheless, she explains this moment of hypocrisy when clarifying that her essay remains within patriarchal limitations for a reason: "we must anxiously avoid any thing that can be misconstrued into expression of the contrary opinion, else the men will be alarmed, and combine to defeat our efforts."⁴⁸ Pertaining to sexuality, perhaps Fuller suggests that the "contrary opinion," or that which encourages independent female sexual identity, continues to be too dangerous to be revealed.

The danger of questioning sexual power structures also arises in countless Dickinson poems, revealing that Dickinson's conceptions of heteronormative sexuality both adhere to and challenge patriarchal influence in ways similar to Fuller's. Many poems describe female sexuality in terms of interaction with men, thus conforming to the heterosexual norm of the nineteenth century. For different reasons, both Dickinson and Fuller's writing reveals the tension between a female (or feminist) sexual perspective and the patriarchal norm. While Fuller's moral conservatism accounts for this tension, Dickinson's female speakers experience moments when heterosexual interaction results in a perilous relationship, an outcome of their simultaneous desire for and fear of male sexuality. Often, these instances of sexual inequality arise from dependence on ideal, sexualized images constructed by patriarchy, such as those in poem 1722:

Her face was in a bed of hair,
Like flowers in a plot –
Her hand was whiter than the sperm
That feeds the sacred light.
Her tongue more tender than the tune
That totters in the leaves –
Who hears may be incredulous,
Who witnesses, believes.

Here, Dickinson describes an ideal sexual woman based in heteronormative parameters. The images of the woman's "bed of hair" and "tongue more tender" are basic, familiar symbols of female sexuality; women's hair often connotes essential sexuality, while any mention of women's "tongues" blatantly elicits sexual associations. The poem departs from basic sexualized imagery, however, when stating that "Her hand was whiter than the sperm / That feeds the sacred light." Where the other metaphors apply to any sexual women, Dickinson's comparison between the subject's pallor to "sperm" concretely roots the poem in heterosexuality. The semen is idealized and characterized by the "sacred light," thereby referring to the act of conceiving a child. Thus, Dickinson's poem positions its ideal woman within a specifically heterosexual experience.

While poem 1722 connects to Fuller's idea of heterosexuality as the ideal state, it also subtly critiques of this assumption. Mainly, Dickinson's superlative portraying the woman's hand as "whiter than the sperm," indicates that she acquires both typically masculine and feminine characteristics. "Whiteness" often symbolizes purity and virginity, one signifier of a "perfect" female self. At the same time, Dickinson allies this feminine sexuality with "sperm," the symbol of masculine sexuality, and in fact reveals that the woman embodies masculinity to greater extent. Perhaps it is due to this perplexing pairing in a mostly straightforward poem that Dickinson concludes: "Who hears may be incredulous, / Who witnesses, believes." She suggests that the existence of an ideal heterosexual woman, possessing masculine and feminine sexual attributes, is dubious. And yet, she does exist. In this way, Dickinson's poems reveal her gentle critique of certain heteronormative assumptions – she often supports, yet complicates, Fuller's theories.

Dickinson's poems critique such normative sexual concepts in context with many of the same subjects in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. As we have seen, Fuller often comments on sexual norms, such as the pathologization of female sexuality, and combats the idea of women being ostracized for sexual "vice" due to differences in gender-based education. Dickinson likewise confronts the pathologization of feminine sexual impulse in poem 277:

What if I say I shall not wait!
What if I burst the fleshy Gate –
And pass, escaped, - to thee!

What if I file this Mortal – off –
See where it hurt me – That's enough –
And wade in Liberty!

They cannot take me – any more!
Dungeons can call – and Guns implore
Unmeaning – now – to me –

As laughter – was – an hour ago –
Or Laces – or a Travelling Show –
Or who died – yesterday!

This poem, like all of Dickinson's, warrants many interpretations. A less subversive reading would propose that the speaker desires to die in order to rejoin a loved one, an interpretation legitimized by the speaker's focus mortality and transitory human life. However, a sexual interpretation of this poem yields distinctly feminist conclusions about sexuality.

To begin, Dickinson's speaker suggests that she "shall not wait" in order to "burst the fleshy Gate." This "fleshy Gate" could simply represent the human body and thus symbolize life; however, it also connotes female sexual identity, where the hymen, or "fleshy Gate," symbolizes the divide between virginity and sexual experience. In addition, the expression "burst the fleshy Gate" could be a euphemism for orgasm, even without the presence of a male sexual partner. The exclamation point in the first line emphasizes the urgency of the speaker's desire to break

through the “fleshy Gate” into sexual satisfaction. Furthermore, “burst” signifies an intense physical moment relating strongly to the potent experience of sexual intercourse. After traversing the “gate” between sexual inexperience and experience, the speaker has “escaped” and is thus able to rejoin her lover. The speaker’s language in describing her break from socially-obligated virginity mirrors a release from the patriarchal pressure for female virginity in the nineteenth century. Her elation continues in the second stanza, describing her newfound sexual identity as immortal through its opposition with her previously “Mortal” state. Interestingly, Dickinson illustrates sexual experience in a way opposing many Christian assumptions of the time – while religion dictated sexual purity in order to protect the immortal soul, Dickinson implies that her speaker’s virginity was instead analogous to mortality and pain. With her acceptance and exploration of her sexual self, the speaker is able to “wade in Liberty.”

And yet, despite her newfound freedom, the speaker recognizes the persecution she faces. The third stanza, though continuing to affirm her sexual liberation by saying that “They cannot take me – any more!”, describes that “Dungeons can call – and Guns implore” in attempts to imprison her. Considering her sexual experience in the first stanza, these societal threats pathologize the speaker’s individual sexual exploration. Whether that exploration was inside or outside of heterosexual experience, society censures her enjoyment of her body and her freedom from virginity’s patriarchal confines. In the same way that Fuller analyzes society’s criticism of female sexuality, Dickinson comments on the injustices of gender-based, normative expectations. While Fuller disapproves of this sexual injustice, she does not glorify female sexual experience like Dickinson in poem 277. The poem actually transcends such limitations in the final lines, revealing that the persecution her speaker faces due to her sexuality are “unmeaning – now – .” In fact, her sexual exploration has reinvigorated human experience and

emotion, such as “laughter.” Dickinson not only eliminates the absurd social pathologization of female sexuality, but glorifies and immortalizes sexuality.

Female sexuality in poem 277 occurs within patriarchy but defies its influence. Other poems, meanwhile, oppose this specific sexual experience through a denunciation of all male-determined expressions of women’s heteronormative sexuality. For example, as seen in chapter one, Dickinson portrays marriage as the ultimate repressive, heterosexual state, thus allying with Fuller’s condemnation of the marital sexual contract. Manipulative and artificial expressions of female sexuality also occur in Dickinson’s poetry in ways similar to Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, such as the description of feminine coquetry in poem 401:

What Soft – Cherubic Creatures –
These Gentlewomen are –
One would as soon assault a Plush –
Or violate a Star –

Such Dimity Convictions –
A Horror so refined
Of freckled Human Nature –
Of Deity – ashamed –

It’s such a common – Glory –
A Fisherman’s – Degree –
Redemption – Brittle Lady –
Be so – ashamed of Thee –

The opening lines of this poem are doubtlessly ironic, denying that the “Gentlewomen” are “Soft – Cherubic Creatures –.” Considering the Dickinson family’s social circle, which included mostly the upper-class intellectual society surrounding Amherst College, the “Gentlewomen” of the poem most likely symbolize the wealthy, stuffy wives of Amherst’s high class men who seek sexual power, or “Glory.” Her sarcastic tone implies that these women attempt to be “Soft – Cherubic Creatures,” adorning themselves with expensive jewelry, makeup, and fine clothing, and fail at doing so in Dickinson’s eyes. The “Gentlewomen” are associated with the very fabrics

they cherish, such as “Plush” and “Dimity,” and thus Dickinson delimits their identity to the artificial feminine sexuality that they attempt to achieve in public.

Dickinson continues to mock the women, suggesting their false delicacy when proclaiming that “One would as soon assault a Plush – / Or violate a Star –.” She jokes that the coquettish ladies aim to attract male sexual attention, but even a harassing male suitor reject such “Creatures.” The transition to the second stanza further reveals Dickinson’s perspective, asserting that these “Gentlewomen’s” attempts at beautification result in “A Horror so refined.” The next lines deepen Dickinson’s disdain, declaring that they embody “freckled Human Nature,” or stained human beauty, and “Deity – ashamed –.” Dickinson posits women’s false sexuality, coquetry, and adornment as a corruption of God’s intent for women’s natural purity and beauty. The shame that Dickinson attributes to the “Gentlewomen” continues in the last stanza where she deprives the ladies of “Redemption.” Personified, “Redemption” scorns the women the same way as the poet, therefore concretely condemning the artificial, power-seeking tactics of the “Gentlewomen.” In this way, Dickinson’s poem denounces faked female sexuality with Fuller; both writers depreciate women who falsify sexual appearances in order to gain sway over men.

Another similarity between Dickinson and Fuller’s opinions occurs in Dickinson’s treatment of sexuality, virginity, and piety. As seen with poem 277, female sexual experience can symbolize release from patriarchal constraints. In other instances, Dickinson’s poems describe female purity leading to a deified and immortal identity. The conclusion of poem 277 remains ambiguous about the relationship between mortal experience, sexuality, and the afterlife, suggesting that sexual exploration both creates intense human emotions and relegates that

experience outside of religious piety. Conversely, poem 263 draws a parallel between female virginity and heaven:

A single Screw of Flesh
Is all that pins the Soul
That stands for Deity, to Mine,
Upon my side the Veil –

One witnessed of the Gauze –
Its name is put away
As far from mine, as if no plight
Had printed yesterday,

In tender – solemn Alphabet,
My eyes just turned to see,
When it was smuggled by my sight
Into Eternity –

More Hands – to hold – These are but Two –
One more new-mailed Nerve
Just granted, for the Peril's sake –
Some striding – Giant – Love –

So greater than the Gods can show,
They slink before the Clay,
That not for all their Heaven can boast
Will let its Keepsake – go

As with poem 277, Dickinson's words here are elusive and obscure. The abstract subject matter and language combine to create an extremely difficult poem to comprehend. Nonetheless, an interpretation of the poem's sexual elements illuminates its complexities.

Similar to the "fleshy Gate" in poem 277, Dickinson illustrates female sexuality through the image of "A single Screw of Flesh," a sexual reading defining it as the hymen. Connecting this symbol of feminine purity to religious belief, the speaker affirms that her virginity "Is all that pins the Soul / That stands for Deity, to Mine." In other words, the speaker renders her virginity essential to her immortal soul. The image of "the Veil" reinforces this symbolic reading in that a veil often represents virginity in religious rituals such as marriage and becoming a nun.

The poem retains the “Screw of Flesh” as its subject throughout, indicating its disguise with the phrases “put away,” and “smuggled by my sight / Into Eternity.” These moments suggest that the speaker’s virginity remains elusive to her, and that an overbearing “They” have taken ownership of her symbolic purity and hidden it from her. Concluding with an image of “the Gods,” Dickinson states: “That not for all their Heaven can boast / Will let its Keepsake – go.” Here, religious influence, often signifying patriarchal dominance, imprisons the speaker’s sexuality as its “Keepsake” so that she remains pure. The poem implies the same unadulterated feminine essence in chastity that Fuller advocates in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*; however, the poem signifies that with the enforcement of this patriarchal norm, the speaker is deprived of identity and agency. Dickinson depicts female chastity as similarly religious, yet where Fuller venerates women’s purity, Dickinson recognizes the negative influence that patriarchy imposes on the religious institution. She innately questions women’s chastity for religious purpose despite her own Christian faith.

Within each of Dickinson’s comments about women’s sexuality lies her subtle glorification of sincere female sexuality. Unlike Fuller, Dickinson portrays heterosexual feminine desire in ways that subvert patriarchal control without negating female sexual identity. She allows for examples in which heterosexual love accepts feminine sexuality, as in poem 208:

The Rose did caper on her cheek –
Her Bodice rose and fell –
Her pretty speech – like drunken men –
Did stagger pitiful –

Her fingers fumbled at her work –
Her needle would not go –
What ailed so smart a little Maid –
It puzzled me to know –

Till opposite – I spied a cheek
That bore *another* Rose –

Just opposite – Another speech
That like the Drunkard goes –

A Vest that like her Bodice, danced –
To the immortal tune –
Till those two troubled – little Clocks
Ticked softly into one.

These verses capture a scene of old-fashioned courtship accompanied by pleasure, uncomplicated romance, and sexual desire. This is not to say that the poem is simplistic; instead, the tone – playful, lyrical, and lighthearted – mirrors the effortless moment between the female subject and the object of her desire. The “Maid” is sexually aroused, blushing (“The Rose did caper on her cheek”) and breathing heavily (“Her Bodice rose and fell”). Meanwhile, Dickinson characterizes her masculine lover as her double, with a “Vest” as opposed to the woman’s “Bodice.” The poem does not, however, focus on differentiating the masculine from the feminine; in fact, both subjects display the same awkwardness, bashfulness, and excitement in their flirtation.

The beginning of the poem initially indicates a conflict: the description of the girl’s “pretty speech – like drunken men” that “Did stagger pitiful” could signify her sexual arousal dangerously intoxicating her. Nonetheless, Dickinson qualifies the “Maid’s” experience as separate from normative gender roles when she notices her male suitor and forgets her needlepoint. The speaker, a witness to this little love affair, jokingly wonders “What ailed so smart a little Maid,” as it is clear that the “Maid” is not “ail[ing]” at all. The third and fourth stanza establishes the man in the poem, yet does not shift the focus from the woman’s sexuality. Dickinson’s italicization of “another” and “just” stresses the man as a true counterpoint to the woman as opposed to her superior. Finally, the last line suggests a harmonious union of the two lovers as they “Ticked softly into one.” The poem conjoins a Fuller-esque, transcendental view

of an ideal union with female heterosexual desire; Dickinson thus recognizes that femininity and sexual impulse can flourish even within a male-dominated society. She suggests that female sexuality need not and should not be inhibited in order to subvert patriarchy.

To conclude, a well-known Dickinson poem (249) encapsulates her acceptance of and veneration for female sexuality:

Wild Nights – Wild Nights!
Were I with thee
Wild Nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile – the Winds –
To a Heart in port –
Done with the Compass –
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden –
Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor – Tonight –
In Thee!

Dickinson's speaker, now experiencing sexual arousal as opposed to witnessing it in poem 208, exclaims her desire to explore her sexual passions during these "Wild Nights" on the ocean. As seen previously with poem 520, the sea represents for Dickinson an exploration of sexuality and a fulfillment of desire; in this poem, however, the sea remains a genderless personification. Therefore, the speaker's release into her ocean of pleasure remains an individual, feminine experience. This liberated, wild sexuality becomes paradise, or "Eden," for the speaker.

The breadth of female passion, sexual impulse, and arousal in Dickinson's poems surpass Fuller's contemplations on sexuality in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Surely it was not Fuller's intention to explore female sexuality within a society limited to heteronormative assumptions; however, Dickinson manages to address many of the same pressures, dangers, and

threats imposed on female sexuality within heterosexual interaction, as well as to explore and venerate women's sexual identities.

Towards an Exclusively Female Sexuality

I. The "Mysterious Fluid": Individual Sexual Identity

Dickinson and Fuller's reformations of female sexuality demonstrate their critique of heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Both writers present ways that women can escape the confines of the patriarchal sexual system. Though they do so differently, Fuller and Dickinson both retreat from a conception of female sexual identity dependent on interaction with men. Despite her declarations against female sexual activity and advocating chastity, Fuller subtly promotes a feminine sexuality free from heteronormative ideals. Infusing moments of a radical feminism in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, perhaps subconsciously, she discusses a uniquely female and feminine essence that indicates her belief in the possibility for sexual passion outside of heterosexuality.

As we have seen, Fuller's transcendental idealism about marriage, as well as her moral conservatism, mostly binds her analysis of male and female sexuality to heterosexual assumptions. However, throughout the essay, she refers to a certain female "mysticism" that "cannot fail of its oracular promise as to woman."⁴⁹ Repeatedly, examples of this particularly female aura arise in *Woman*, giving strength to Fuller's prophetic statement about femininity's "oracular promise" to women, which, in the essay's optimistic feminist context, refers to liberation from patriarchy. Fuller continues to qualify this idea as "the electrical, the magnetic element in woman," the "mysterious fluid," and the "electric fluid" that is "found to invigorate

and embellish, not destroy life.”⁵⁰ Each of these descriptions amassed into one intimate a quality beyond Fuller’s actual words: sexuality. Thus, female sexuality becomes one of the ways through which women embody transcendental idealism. Women’s inimitable and innate sexual essence allows for the creation and recognition of “the fine invisible links which connect the forms of life around them,”⁵¹ a bodily, spiritual, and mental bond with nature that epitomizes transcendentalism.

Despite her attempts at advising chastity in the essay, Fuller’s vocabulary and unconscious description of women as innately sexual propose sexuality as a portal into ideal existence. Her words are not contradictory, however, considering she likely was unaware of the implications created by her analysis of essential feminine nature; in any case, she finds a way of transcending heteronormativity to explain the existence of an exclusively female sexual identity. In other words, Fuller individualizes women’s sexual experience, rendering it contingent upon the individual woman’s body and spirit. Her generalizations a necessary component of this type of feminist essay, Fuller clearly states that the “magnetic element in woman” relies entirely upon the woman’s connection to her own body and her body’s connection to nature and God.

These theories can be identified as individualized female sexuality. Without the presence of another person, women possess sexual identities that continually connect them to nature. Given the tenets of transcendentalism, individuality remains an important concept for Fuller’s ideal female being. Therefore, individual sexuality, sexual development, and female bodies all correlate to this concept of female “electrical fluid:” it is reliance on only the self, without interference from another mind or body, that “lead[s] the mind towards this side of universal growth.”⁵² Irigaray discusses a similar concept, depicting the female body as a symbol for the unique experience of feminine identity. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Irigaray explains

male sexual desire and “autoeroticism” as requiring contact with an outside source of pleasure, such as “a hand, a woman’s body, language.”⁵³ On the contrary, woman “touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman ‘touches herself’ all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact.”⁵⁴ Female anatomy and its constant sexual contact suggest that women do not need outside stimulation or male contact in order to experience the fullness of their sexuality. The self-contained autoeroticism described by Irigaray complements Fuller’s individualized feminine essence in that women connect to themselves, to each other, and to their natural qualities through their physical anatomy as well as through the mystery of their “electric fluid.”

Furthermore, Irigaray’s analysis of female sexuality completely rejects all masculine qualifiers of sexual identity. Where man is the “One,” the “Self” (represented by the “one” of the male sexual organ), woman resists such singularities: “[*Woman*] is neither one nor two. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified as one person, or two. She resists all adequate definition.”⁵⁵ Due to her biological anatomy, where her sexual organs “keep [her] in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched,”⁵⁶ woman eludes definitions based in patriarchal norms and language. Just as Fuller declares men, even those of “high intellect,” to be “absolutely stupid” with regard to the functioning of feminine essence,⁵⁷ so does Irigaray recognize that female sexuality exists completely outside of masculine experience. In fact, “[woman’s] sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is *plural*.”⁵⁸ Thus, the concept of “individual” female sexuality must be reformulated so that it contains the women’s plurality in their physical and figurative sexual experiences; as with

Fuller's re-conception of transcendental ideals to include experiences shared by all women, female sexuality is able to be simultaneously self-reliant, individual, and plural.

Dickinson's poems also comment on the radical subject of exclusive, individual female sexuality. Symbolically freeing women from patriarchal limits while still recognizing the presence of male-dominated society, Dickinson's sexual poems clearly eradicate a singular definition of female sexuality. Like Fuller and Irigaray, Dickinson promotes the plurality, obscurity, and mystery of women's sexual experience, while also proclaiming the type of unique femininity that Fuller defines as the "electrical fluid." This theme arises often in Dickinson's poems where a female subject or speaker explores identity, such as poem 1051:

I cannot meet the Spring unmoved –
I feel the old desire –
A Hurry with a lingering, mixed,
A Warrant to be fair –

A Competition in my sense
With something hid in Her –
And as she vanishes, Remorse
I saw no more of Her.

A sexual reading of the poem indicates the speaker's newly explored and aroused sexuality. The first two lines invoke the image of "Spring," the season associated with life and rebirth. Aligned with the speaker's revived "old desire," the spring symbolizes the speaker's sexual awakening triggered and represented by the proliferation of life brought by the season. She legitimizes her desires by qualifying them as a "Warrant," or a sanctioned emotion that the spring evokes. The language of the first stanza, such as the words "desire," "Hurry," and "lingering," signifies pent up, frustrated passion that requires release.

The second stanza introduces another feminine subject "Her" that remains abstract. This second being may represent the speaker's aroused sexuality, personified to correspond with her

repressed sexual identity. Dickinson creates tension between these two selves by describing their interaction as a “Competition” between the public, un-sexual speaker and the repressed, sexual figure. Though the poem concludes with discord between the speaker’s two halves when the sexual side “vanishes,” Dickinson nonetheless creates a complex sexual identity within an individual woman. Evoking sexual development and conflict within the feminine self, the poem comments on the same type of plural, even contradictory, sexual experience in an individual woman described by Irigaray.

Dickinson also explores female autoeroticism and private sexual exploration in some of her poems. Though signifiers of female masturbatory experience are subtle, Dickinson clearly meditates on the subject through euphemism and symbols. For example, the previously discussed poem 277 displays moments bordering on masturbation. The “fleshy Gate” through which the speaker desires to “burst” could represent orgasm through autoerotic behavior. Another example of Dickinson’s individualized female sexual exploration occurs in poem 636:⁵⁹

The Way I read a Letter’s – this –
‘Tis first – I lock the Door –
And push it with my fingers – next –
For transport it be sure –

And then I go the furthest off
To counteract a knock –
Then draw my little Letter forth
And slowly pick the lock –

Then – glancing narrow, at the Wall –
And narrow at the floor
For firm Conviction of a Mouse
Not exorcised before –

Peruse how infinite I am
To no one that You – know –
And sigh for lack of Heaven – but not
The Heaven God bestow –

In chapter one, this poem demonstrated the speaker's joy in her isolation behind a locked door. Pushing this interpretation further, highly sexualized imagery marks the speaker's pleasure in reading the letter. The first stanza sets up her isolation with her letter and indicates a bodily experience as she says "[I] push it with my fingers – next –." By rooting the moment in the speaker's own physicality, Dickinson implies autoerotic symbolism with the word "transport" in the fourth line suggesting a goal of climax. After having assured privacy ("to counteract a knock"), the speaker begins to "slowly pick the lock." Dickinson's syntax associates this "lock" with the letter, as if the speaker unravels the letter as she reads it; the image also connotes masturbation, the female speaker using her "fingers" to incite sexual arousal and reach orgasm.

The last stanza affirms Irigaray's description of women's plural sexual identity when the speaker commands us to "Peruse how infinite I am." Not only does she embody the simultaneous sexual "oneness" and duality theorized by Irigaray, she becomes "infinite" in masturbatory pleasure. In fact, Dickinson chooses to separate her speaker's identity from any definition, declaring that "no one that – You know –" could understand her experience. Assuming the "You" represents the societal, and thus, masculine, gaze onto the speaker, Dickinson separates her speaker from patriarchy. The last lines, in which the speaker differentiates between her "Heaven" and "The Heaven God bestow," emphasize her release from outside influence, even the ubiquitous influence of God.

Each example of Dickinson's autoerotic and individualized feminine sexuality in the poems associates joy, pleasure, and authenticity with this exclusively female sexual identity. As with Fuller and Irigaray, Dickinson recognizes a quality of natural, unique, and complex sexuality in women that, when allowed to flourish, idealizes feminine experience. And yet, each of the poems also contains tensions despite the female subjects' apparent elation. Why and from

where does this conflict originate? Due to Dickinson's poems' elusiveness, the answer is always uncertain; however, Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* provides one possible response. Though she encourages women's natural "mysticism," Fuller also presents a caveat: that women "who seem overladen with electricity... are very commonly unhappy at present."⁶⁰ In fact, exaggerated femininity poses a danger to society, and women who display it "frighten those around them."⁶¹ Fuller suggests that unbridled and unadulterated feminine essence cannot exist peacefully in a woman. The imbalance it causes for both the individual and humanity threatens Fuller's transcendental union among the individual, God, and nature; furthermore, she states that purely feminine identity is unnatural: "it is no more the order of nature that [the especially feminine element] should be incarnated pure in any form."⁶² Fuller's words here do not necessarily revert back to heteronormative idealism; on the contrary, Fuller desires simply the release of individualized female sexuality through another medium.

II. Transcending Hierarchy with Homoerotic Exploration

From the subject of women's individualized sexuality, Fuller inadvertently segues into a discussion of female homoeroticism and homosexuality. Considering her criticism of women's sexual interaction with men in patriarchy, Fuller must provide another way for female sexuality to balance itself. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* does not specifically allude to relationships with other women for this release; yet, speculation about Fuller's own private life possibly opens her conception of the ideal woman to include female homosexuality.

Nineteenth-century America witnessed an abundance of "romantic friendships" between women. A frequent subject of feminist and lesbian analysis, these "romantic friendships" often grew out of socially-accepted relationships among friends that bordered on romantic involvement.⁶³ According to Marylynne Diggs, conservative American society tolerated these

relationships because they were believed to be exclusively platonic friendships; however, with the turn of the century and the arrival of psychological sexual studies, critics began arguing for the existence of sexual interaction within these friendships,⁶⁴ also known as “Boston marriages.” The precedent for rapports between women was therefore strong during Fuller and Dickinson’s time. The idyllic era of romantic friendships, when women were able to take part in homosocial and homoerotic behavior without fearing social ostracism, was a platform upon which Fuller presented *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. In fact, though she does not mention personal relationships in the essay, many Fuller scholars conclude that she participated in sexually-ambiguous friendships with other women. According to Mary E. Wood, Fuller’s friendship with Caroline Sturgis, only partially documented through the few letters that remain of their correspondence, displays the qualities of vaguely erotic attraction mingled with friendly love. As we have seen, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* clearly advocates heterosexuality as Fuller’s transcendental ideal state; however, her personal life conflicts with her theoretical certainty. As Wood declares, “regardless of what Fuller and Sturgis may or may not have done in bed, Fuller’s writing both acknowledges an erotic attraction between women and expresses the social codes that prohibit that attraction.”⁶⁵

Conflating the descriptions of nineteenth-century “romantic friendships” with Wood’s view of Fuller, Fuller’s possibly homoerotic tendencies and her direct promotion of heterosexuality in *Woman* can be explained by the lack of contemporary sexual discourse analyzing the friendships at the time of their existence. Perhaps Fuller reconciled her heterosexual idealism with her own non-straight sexual orientation by mentally separating her relationships with women from her opinions about sexuality. Even so, the moments of progressive sexual analysis in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* suggest that, subconsciously at

least, Fuller recognized the importance of sexual and romantic bonds between. In a letter to Sturgis, quoted by Wood, Fuller writes: “I build on our friendship now with trust, for I think it is redeemed from “the search after Eros.” We may commune without exacting too much one from the other.”⁶⁶ Her description of her friendship with another woman illustrates her ideal transcendental union extremely well – a relationship with another person that enhances the individual without causing complete dependence.

Therefore, Fuller provides another outlet for female sexuality: relationships with other women. The quality of inter-female bonds remaining un-stigmatized allows for a flourishing feminine sexual identity in Fuller’s transcendental ideal state. As with Fuller’s idea of chastity, relationships among women in which men do not play a sexual role represent an ultimate subversion of patriarchy. By refusing to rely on men for sexual identity, lesbian women tending are released from all sex-based patriarchal stereotypes and the submission dictated by those stereotypes. In “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Rich calls these types of exclusively female women “woman-identified.” Rich explains that most women spend their childhood in a mostly feminine atmosphere among other women such as mothers, sisters, and female friends; however, with the advent of puberty, sexual development forces young girls into male-dominated spheres based on attention to heterosexual expectations. This “lie of compulsory female heterosexuality”⁶⁷ causes women to become “male-identified” and subject to patriarchal power structures. Therefore, in order to avoid the “pain of blocked options, broken connections, [and] lost access to self-definition”⁶⁸ that accompanies women’s psychological development in contrast with compulsory heterosexuality, Rich recommends “woman identification” through lesbianism:

Woman identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, curtailed and contained under the institution of heterosexuality. The denial of reality and visibility to women's passion for women, women's choice of women as allies, life companions, and community, the forcing of such relationships into dissimulation and their disintegration under intense pressure have meant an incalculable loss to the power of all women *to change the social relations of the sexes, to liberate ourselves and each other.*⁶⁹

Rich proclaims that "woman identification," whether it occurs through lesbian identity or through continual nonsexual female bonds during sexual development, will result not only in the elevation of female social status, but in the betterment of gender-based society as a whole. Female identity outside of patriarchy, a major tenet of Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, encouraged by female homosexuality, emerges as a true solution to gender inequality. By positing the value of heterosexual abstinence and implying the importance of female homosocial relationships through her letters to Sturgis, Fuller reaches the same conclusion:

I would have woman lay aside all thought, such as she habitually cherishes, of being taught and led by men. I would have her, like the Indian girl, dedicate herself to the Sun, the Sun of Truth, and go no where if his beams did not make clear the path. I would have her free from complaisance, from helplessness, because I would have her good enough and strong enough to love one and all beings, from the fullness, not the poverty of being.⁷⁰

Recalling Fuller's anecdote of the Indian girl devoting herself to the Sun discussed in the first chapter, Fuller necessitates women's rejection of traditions of "being taught and led by men" in order to achieve ideal existence. "Woman identification" thus represents one path toward the

ability to “love one and all beings,” toward being harmonious with the individual, nature, and God, and toward transcending gender limitations.

When considering homosexual and romantic affairs among women, Dickinson’s personal life also undoubtedly becomes relevant. Most Dickinson scholars agree that Dickinson’s relationship with her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert Dickinson, involved romantic entanglement and homoerotic desire between the two women. Some critics declare that the relationship was innocently loving, while others maintain a belief in Dickinson’s lesbianism or bisexuality. Given the poetic evidence and her correspondence with Sue, it seems that Dickinson was in love with her sister-in-law, possibly more so than with any man she knew. As stated by Martha Nell Smith, no matter what the truth about the two women is, “the most important characteristic about this powerfully sensual relationship was its very literary nature and the direct impact it had on Dickinson’s poetic compositions.”⁷¹ Susan and the character she embodies in Dickinson’s poems reveal Dickinson’s opinions about women, sex, and love.

Like the poems Dickinson addressed to the “Master,” the poems to Sue relate complex patterns of love and sexuality. According to Adalaide Morris, “both the Master and Sue evoke her passion; both are passionately solicited, courted with imagery chosen to convey their magnetic pull.”⁷² An immediately clear example of Dickinson’s passion for Susan occurs in a letter sent later in her life:

Susan knows
she is a Siren –
and that at a
word from her,
Emily would
forfeit Righteousness – ⁷³

Formatted like a poem on the page, Dickinson’s words associate Susan with a “Siren,” a typically sexualized woman tempting men (or in this case, women) with her song. Dickinson

recognizes herself as the one being tempted and admits that if she were allowed to, she would “forfeit Righteousness;” in other words, with Susan’s consent, Dickinson would abandon her morally “righteous” heterosexual identity in favor of experiencing Susan sexually and romantically. Her ardent desire for her sister-in-law, a desire prohibited not only by compulsory heterosexuality but also by her dedication to her brother and his marriage, clearly intensifies after her near forty-year relationship with Susan.

Meanwhile, an early Dickinson poem (17), though not directly addressed to Sue, may describe Dickinson’s emotions early in the relationship:

Baffled for just a day or two –
Embarrassed – not afraid –
Encounter in my garden
An unexpected Maid.

She beckons, and the woods start –
She nods, and all begin –
Surely, such a country
I was never in!

In an interpretation in which the “Maid” of this poem represents Sue, the image of “my garden” perhaps refers to the fact that Susan and Austin, Dickinson’s brother, lived next door. Thus, the “Encounter” may imply a meeting between Dickinson and Sue in the yard separating the two houses. The encounter suggests deviant behavior for which the speaker and the “Maid” are “Embarrassed – not afraid –.” In other words, the meeting implies a new, slightly uneasy though positive experience. The second stanza attributes immense power to the “Maid” and the emotions she arouses in the speaker; she causes everything surrounding them to “begin” and take life, including the speaker’s own identity. The interaction rejuvenates the garden, symbolizing the speaker, and leads the speaker to state that “Surely, such a country / I was never in!” A new side, possibly a sexual one, has come to life for the speaker.

Numerous other examples of poems invoking, mentioning, addressing, and alluding to Sue suggest a simultaneous fulfillment of identity and exploration of passion. Almost always marked by sexualized language, these poems also tend toward the type of equality in woman identification acknowledged by Fuller and Rich through homosexual relationships. Morris explains that the poems to Sue “inhabi[t] a world of similarity and equality”⁷⁴ as opposed to hierarchy. For instance, poem 586 describes a conversation exclusively between women. The second stanza demonstrates the women’s empowerment in subverting male-identification:

We handled Destinies, as cool –
As we – Disposers – be –
As God, a Quiet Party
To our Authority –

Within the completely woman-identified realm of the poem, the subject “We” represents equality and pluralism in woman identification, as opposed to the singular male self, represented here by “God.” In fact, the women’s relationship results in power surpassing even that of God, who submits to “our Authority.” At the same time, the power is not destructive to the patriarchal presence; God remains, accepted as a “Quiet Party,” and neither rejected nor venerated by the women.

The balance between the women and God in poem 586 relates to Dickinson’s frequent use of religion as a medium for conveying personal emotion. As mentioned earlier, God represents the ultimate patriarch, though not in an entirely negative sense. In poem 158, however, Dickinson incarnates Sue as her speaker’s savior when faith fails:

Dying! Dying in the night!
Won’t somebody bring the light
So I can see which way to go
Into the everlasting snow?

And “Jesus”! Where is *Jesus* gone?
They said that Jesus – always came –

Perhaps he doesn't know the House –
This way, Jesus, Let him pass!

Somebody run to the great gate
And see if Dollie's coming! Wait!
I hear her feet upon the stair!
Death won't hurt – now Dollie's here!

The first stanza establishes the speaker's anxious, desperate tone. The somewhat simple rhyme scheme the meter's consistency creates an even, song-like rhythm that contrasts with the subject matter of death. The poem opens with a clearly disjointed quality creating intense unease, the origin for which is provided in the second stanza – the speaker's abandonment by her faith. Specifically, by placing “Jesus” in both quotation marks and italics, Dickinson treats Jesus as a literal character as opposed to a symbol for faith and divinity, an idea reinforced by the mocking tone of second stanza's last two lines. Finally, the last stanza replaces Jesus with “Dollie,” Dickinson's nickname for Susan. Whereas Jesus abandons the speaker, Dollie arrives to protect her, even from the fear of death. Another interpretation of the poem draws upon the double meaning of the phrase “to die” in pre-twentieth-century English. “Dying” also refers to orgasm. Therefore, when the speaker declares that she is “Dying! Dying in the night!”, she also alludes to sexual interaction with Dollie. Hence, death, or sexuality, is no longer to be feared. Dickinson is free in Sue's presence and is able to transcend mortal fears, surmount sexual stigmas, and find pleasure when Sue, rather than patriarchal institutions, comforts and sexually satisfies her.

Either reading of poem 158 attributes great importance to the homoerotic relationship between Dickinson and Susan. An immensely important literary and personal influence, Sue reveals the breadth of Dickinson's sexuality and love for both men and women. Through the poems for Sue, Dickinson overcomes compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchal limitations without eliminating the importance of men and masculinity in her life and writings. By

presenting a spectrum of possible sexual identifications through the poems, Dickinson remains true to her own identity and refrains, for the most part, from denouncing foreign sexual experiences. Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, in contrast, does not contain quite such inclusive theories. Fuller mostly advocates heterosexuality, chastity, and a rejection of masculine sexual influence; at the same time, her introduction into a subconscious world of homoerotic exploration within feminine identity offers a glimpse of much more progressively feminist and transcendentalist concepts. By claiming ownership of female sexuality, both Fuller and Dickinson offer provocative critiques of gender expectations – both begin to advocate androgyny and role reversals in order to achieve ideal female identity. Epitomized by their identities as women and writers, Fuller and Dickinson's paths head toward female intellectuality as the way to achieve social and sexual transcendence.

¹ Furthermore, the feminist precedent (based in Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*) largely asserted these sexually-conservative notions. Wollstonecraft portrays sexuality as the ultimate enemy to gender equality due to the extremely oppressive power structures that exploited both male and female sexuality in order to maintain patriarchal control. Therefore, Wollstonecraft's denunciation of sex perhaps accounts for Fuller's similar critique.

² "Motionless, the egg waits; in contrast the sperm – free, slender, agile – typifies the impatience and restlessness of existence" (de Beauvoir 13).

³ Fuller, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticism*. Ed. Larry J. Reynolds. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. Print, 89.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Ibid 80.

⁶ Ibid 87.

⁷ Ibid 78.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Ibid 82-83.

¹² Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*. New York: Norton, 1986. Print, 28.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Ibid 62.

¹⁵ Ibid 65.

¹⁶ Irigaray, Luce. "This Sex Which Is Not One." *The Women and Language Debate*. Eds. Camille Roman, Suzanne

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- Juhasz, and Cristanne Miller. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994. Print, 95.
- ¹⁷ Fuller 79.
- ¹⁸ Dobson, Joanna A. "'Oh Susie, it is dangerous': Emily Dickinson and the Archetype of the Masculine." *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Suzanne Juhasz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Print, 80.
- ¹⁹ Idem.
- ²⁰ Rich, Adrienne. "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson." *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*. Eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979. Print, 112.
- ²¹ Morris, Adalaide. "'The Love of Thee – a Prism Be': Men and Women in the Love Poetry of Emily Dickinson." *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Suzanne Juhasz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Print, 102.
- ²² Ibid 100.
- ²³ Dobson 81, emphasis original.
- ²⁴ Ibid 84.
- ²⁵ The original symbolism of the serpent of course refers to the devil; 20th century sexual theory created this alternative interpretation.
- ²⁶ Irigaray 94.
- ²⁷ Lunbeck, Elizabeth. "'A New Generation of Women:' Progressive Psychiatrists and the Hypersexual Female." *Feminist Studies* 13.3 (1987): 513-543. *JSTOR*. Web. 11/30/2010. 513.
- ²⁸ Ibid 514.
- ²⁹ Fuller 89.
- ³⁰ This theory was originally presented in Freudian psychology to explain a man's inability to reconcile his sexual attraction to "whore-like" or promiscuous women with his emotional attachment to his wife, the mother of his children acting as the "Madonna" figure.
- ³¹ Fuller 92.
- ³² My first chapter discusses how Fuller views motherhood, idealized by the Virgin Mary, as a way to glorify female experience.
- ³³ The quotation also clearly comments on the difference between Jewish men and Christian men's opinions about the Madonna; the feminist interpretation arises more through extrapolation of Fuller's meaning.
- ³⁴ Idem.
- ³⁵ A phrase quoted from Milton.
- ³⁶ Idem.
- ³⁷ Fuller 89.
- ³⁸ Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* vehemently attacks love and romance due to their affirmation of sexual difference. She instead proposes friendship, which does not necessitate gender hierarchies.
- ³⁹ Ibid 93.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid 70.
- ⁴¹ Gibson, Joan. "The Logic of Chastity: Women, Sex, and the History of Philosophy in the Early Modern Period." *Hypatia* 21.4 (2006): 1-19. Print, 1.
- ⁴² Ibid 2.
- ⁴³ Fuller 80.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid 91.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid 79.
- ⁴⁶ Idem.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid 90-91.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid 93.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid 60.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid 61.
- ⁵¹ Idem.
- ⁵² Ibid 60.
- ⁵³ Irigaray 94.
- ⁵⁴ Idem.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid 96, emphasis original.
- ⁵⁶ Idem.
- ⁵⁷ Fuller 61.

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- ⁵⁸ Irigaray 97, emphasis original.
- ⁵⁹ This poem was also analyzed in the last section of the first chapter.
- ⁶⁰ Fuller 61.
- ⁶¹ Idem.
- ⁶² Ibid 68.
- ⁶³ Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America." *Signs* 1.1 (1975): 1-29. *JSTOR*. Web. 4.
- ⁶⁴ Diggs, Marylynne. "Romantic Friends Or a 'Different Race of Creatures'? the Representation of Lesbian Pathology in Nineteenth Century America." *Feminist Studies* 21.2 (1995): 317-340. Web. 11/29/2010. 317.
- ⁶⁵ Wood, Mary E. "'With Ready Eye:' Margaret Fuller and Lesbianism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature." *American Literature* 65.1 (1993): 1-18. Web. 11/29/2010. 4.
- ⁶⁶ Idem.
- ⁶⁷ Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*. New York: Norton, 1986. Print, 63.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid 64.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid 63, emphasis original.
- ⁷⁰ Fuller 71.
- ⁷¹ Smith, Martha Nell. "Reconstructing Dickinson's relationship with Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson." *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*. Eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: Norton, 2007. Print, 933.
- ⁷² Morris 100.
- ⁷³ *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Eds. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Wards. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1958. Print. Letter 554.
- ⁷⁴ Morris 106.

CHAPTER 3: THE INTELLECTUAL WOMAN

This is a Blossom of the Brain –
A small – italic Seed
Lodged by Design of Happening
The Spirit fructified –

- Emily Dickinson

He was much surprised when I disclosed my view
of my position and hopes, when I declared my faith
that the feminine side, the side of love, of beauty,
of holiness, was now to have its full chance, and that,
if either were better, it was better now to be a woman.

- Margaret Fuller

In contrast with women's social and sexual conditions, intellectual female experience perhaps represents the most subtly disguised, yet most restrictive, subjugating paradigm working against gender equality. For the purposes of this chapter, "intellectual" refers to women's minds, intelligence, expression, and language, the analysis of which demonstrates how patriarchy delimits female intellectual identity and how women must escape from this oppression. The previous two chapters inform female intellectuality in that women's mental development depends on the tangible, social and sexual aspects of identity. Therefore, Fuller's idealized conception of femininity is only complete when intellectual equality is achieved.

Traditionally, intellect, knowledge, and language have been associated with men. Patriarchal codes often differentiate femininity and masculinity based on mental ability. Women are designated roles based on their bodies, while men's roles are often defined by their intellectual capacity; however, this injustice remained somewhat overshadowed, even to feminists before the twentieth century. Preoccupied with addressing the more socially-pressing

issues of enfranchisement, legal rights, and other blatant signs of gender inequality, many early feminists refrained from seeking intellectual equality as well. Those who did usually placed it below social and sexual rights in order of importance. In fact, intellectual development and self-expression represent a vital step towards women's complete liberation. For Fuller, her identity as a writer and her theories in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* allowed her to recognize the importance of women's mental freedom as a gateway into existence free from male oppression.

The “Mighty Crack” of Written Expression

Considering Fuller's publicly intellectual identity as an editor, a writer, and an historian, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* reveals her desire for intelligent women to explore intellectuality. Despite her disdain for women's limited social and sexual roles, patriarchal restrictions on female intellect emerge for Fuller as the most unjust. In a paragraph summarizing what she believes women truly need, Fuller indicates that the use of intellect is the ultimate right denied to women: “It is for that which is the birthright of every being capable to receive it, – the freedom, the religious, the intelligent freedom of the universe, to use [the mind's] means; to learn its secret as far as nature has enabled them, with God alone for their guide and their judge.”¹ In transcendentalist doctrine, free use of the mind represents the only way of achieving communion with nature and God; thus, the patriarchy's crime against women's intellectuality is the most crucial denial of independent female existence.

Known by her contemporaries as one of the most intelligent and well-read scholars of her time, Fuller disseminated her knowledge through many different outlets, including essays,

literary criticism, and her work on the transcendental magazine *The Dial*. Indeed, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* contains many esoteric literary references and historical analyses, making the essay difficult to read and understand. In some ways, Fuller uses her essay as a way to boost her intellectual status in Boston's competitive literary atmosphere. Her intelligence and breadth of education are undeniable, deepening the impact of women scholars' social stigmatization for Fuller. As discussed in the first chapter, Fuller's psychological isolation due to the discrepancy between her internal intelligence and her external domesticity led to physical sickness, weakness, and depression.

Yet, despite her suffering, Fuller remains optimistic for female intellectual identity in *Woman*. A moment crucial to understanding Fuller's own identity, and thus her opinions on female intelligence, occurs in her description of a character named "Miranda." Despite Fuller's claim that Miranda is a friend, her background aligns so closely with Fuller's that critics generally recognize "Miranda" as representing Fuller herself. She describes Miranda as an ideal archetype of the intellectual woman, due mostly to the education she received from her father, who, "from the time she could speak and go alone, addressed her not as a plaything, but as a living mind."² As a result of her father's ability to supersede patriarchal norms of female education, Miranda symbolizes the high intellectual point that women can achieve:

[Her head] was to him the temple of immortal intellect. He respected his child, however, too much to be an indulgent parent. He called on her for clear judgment, for courage, for honor and fidelity... In so far as he possessed the keys to the wonders of this universe, he allowed free use of them to her.³

In this image, Miranda's father treats her as he would a son, relying on her intelligence, ability to reason ("good judgment"), and capacity for "immortal intellect." These typically masculine

attributes depict Miranda as a transcendental figure, one who is able to utilize “the keys of the universe” that her father, a reservoir of knowledge, provides. In reality, Miranda is an idealized portrayal of Fuller and her father. From her letters, we know that Fuller remained bound to a typically domestic role in her family, subject to her father’s authority despite her extensive education. Therefore, Fuller creates “Miranda” to dispel the negative aspects of her own experience and to provide a model of intellectuality, the true solution to female subordination. With the “keys of the universe,” Miranda can achieve the intellectual transcendence that Fuller could not.

Similarly, Fuller champions mental expansion in the early pages of the essay. She describes the currently conformist state of the world,⁴ and she contemplates various ways to return to individuality, equality, and human “divinity;” her final resolution is, of course, that women possess the key to transcendence. Before revealing this feminist intention, however, Fuller ponders “the way in which perfection will be sought,” and her first answer is “through the intellect:” “Gather from every growth of life its seed of thought; look behind every symbol for its law; if thou canst *see* clearly, the rest will follow.”⁵ She equates intellect with examination, observation, and analysis, all of which refer to the ability to “*see*,” this logical endeavor draws from ideal masculine intellectual tradition that focuses on reason and rationality in order to see truth. Intellect thus remains imperative to Fuller’s transcendentalism, specifically to female transcendence.

Self-expression, whether spoken or written, is also inextricably tied to an intellectual identity. For Fuller, women’s inability to express opinions in patriarchal society is as oppressive as the denial of female intelligence, an injustice she attempted to counteract by founding women’s “conversation classes” to foster mental stimulation and verbal expression of ideas. By

reclaiming self-expression for women, Fuller surmounts the barrier of patriarchal language that stands between women and intellectuality. Fuller recognizes language's oppressive aspects in *Woman*: "We sicken no less at the pomp than the strife of words... We are tempted to implore these 'word-heroes,' these word-Catos, word-Christis, to beware of cant above all things."⁶ The first sentence of the quotation recognizes language's potential evils, or "pomp" and "strife," implying that ostentatious language threatens the human condition as much as aggressive language. Therefore, Fuller cites the hypocrisy of those who employ language in order to exploit others, specifically the archetypically masculine "word-Christis." These oppressive masters of words, male writers and public orators, exploit masculine language with a goal of self-promotion, thereby menacing other men and women.

Fuller's analysis hints at the idea of language as inherently masculine, a theory that emerged in twentieth-century psychology and literary studies. Some linguists, such as Robin Lakoff in "Language and Women's Place," attribute the existence of patriarchal language to learned behaviors by girls and boys during childhood, when young girls learn a certain "women's language" of passivity and subservience, as opposed to young boys learning a universal language not characterized by gender.⁷ This sociological approach fits with Fuller's ideas in *Woman*, though masculine language also supersedes education and reveals itself most potently in words themselves. For example, Jacques Lacan, in "The Signification of the Phallus," uses a psychoanalytic description of the phallus to explain the masculinity of language. Lacan discusses the linguistic "signifier," referring to the phallus as it relates literally to the male body as well as symbolically to sexual development and castration complexes in both men and women. The phallus becomes interchangeably the signifier and the signified at certain stages of development, thereby causing the individual's identity to be defined based on the phallus. In

other words, men become tied to the existence of the phallus and therefore to its innate effect on the “structure of language;” conversely, women are tied to the lack of the phallus and therefore do not maintain the signifier/signified relationship with masculine language. The phallus as signifier does not “resound” within women’s “relation of speech.” This complex linguistic analysis solidifies the existence of intrinsically patriarchal qualities of human expression, and therefore, the silencing of female self-expression. Women are literally unable to communicate or are forced to use language that either does not apply to them or inherently signifies their inferiority.⁸

To argue that Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* presents a similarly complex view of gendered language would be reaching too far; however, the model of masculine language is necessary in understanding Fuller’s concept of female intellect. Though she does not analyze language in such detail, Fuller certainly comments on the importance for women to reclaim self-expression and writing. However, as noted by many feminist literary critics, the masculine linguistic and literary tradition is severely debilitating for female authors. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the tremendous obstacles placed in front of women writers due to the “overwhelmingly male – or, more accurately, patriarchal” literary history.⁹ They reformulate Harold Bloom’s theory of the “anxiety of influence” that faces male writers (the fear of being dependent on literary “precursors”) with the term “anxiety of authorship” for female writers:

Not only do these [male] precursors incarnate patriarchal authority...[,] they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of self – that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity.¹⁰

Clearly, this description of female authorship fits well with Lacan's theory of women's exclusion from masculine language; the combination of sexist tendencies in both literary tradition and language itself would seem to condemn all women writers to silence.

However, the successful, nineteenth-century female writers contradict such an assumption. Gilbert and Gubar provide various reasons for each writer's ability to surmount patriarchal obstacles; Fuller, on the other hand, presents femininity itself as the solution to subverting masculine tradition. As her commentary on the importance of intellect suggests, Fuller proclaims "the use of the pen" as the true "help to free agency."¹¹ Writing not only provides an outlet for intellectuality, it also legitimizes women's intellectual minds; men can less easily ignore a woman's intellectual prowess when she provides proof of her intelligence. Furthermore, Fuller cites writing as a way to "free agency," a characteristic continually denied women in the nineteenth century due to their material dependence on men. Again, Fuller's transcendental zeal becomes relevant to understanding the importance of "agency." The transcendental individual must unify herself with God and nature through her own self-reliance, authority, and autonomy; thus, female agency is integral to reaching transcendence.

For these reasons, Fuller insists on the importance of women to write. She refers to the many "triumphs of female authorship," where "the shining names of famous women have cast light upon the path of the sex, and many obstructions have been removed."¹² Even more specifically, she maintains that her nineteenth-century contemporaries possess unprecedented potential for further "triumphs of female authorship:"

In our own country, women are, in many respects, better situated than men. Good books are allowed, with more time to read them. They are not so early forced into the bustle of life, nor so weighed down by demands for outward success... They have time to think,

and no traditions to chain them, and few conventionalities compared with what must be met in other nations. There is no reason why they should not discover that the secrets of nature are open, the revelations of the spirit waiting for whoever will seek them. When the mind is once awakened to this consciousness, it will not be restrained by the habits of the past, but fly to seek the seeds of a heavenly future.¹³

Though clearly focused on a middle-class woman, Fuller nonetheless attempts to reverse the injustices of patriarchal order, insisting that female lifestyle facilitates intellectual expansion and written expression. Furthermore, Fuller suggests a positive spin on the masculine authorial tradition described by Gilbert and Gubar; she explains that women have “no traditions to chain them” and “few conventionalities” that must be respected. In a literary context, these words imply that the absence of a female intellectual tradition provides endless possibilities for creativity and originality, another ideal of transcendental thought. Once women are “awakened to this consciousness,” they will achieve infinite intellectual (and transcendental) freedom. As Virginia Woolf writes of Jane Austen and Emily Brontë, “they wrote as women wrote, not as men write... They alone entirely ignored the perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue – write this, think that.”¹⁴ The success of pre-twentieth-century women writers arises from their willful separation from and rejection of masculine tradition.

Feminist theorist Hélène Cixous views women’s potential for written expression similarly. Resolutely claiming writing as the portal to female liberation, Cixous desires the same type of emancipation from patriarchal limitations as does Fuller. In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” she views the 1970s, when second-wave feminism flourished, as “a time during which the new breaks away from the old, and, more precisely, the (feminine) new from the old (*la nouvelle de l’ancien*).”¹⁵ In its original French, this sentence emphasizes the gender of the words “nouvelle”

(new) and “ancien” (old), in which “new” is feminine and “old” is masculine. Therefore, both Cixous and Fuller recognize the vast creative possibilities for women who do not belong to the masculine tradition. Cixous also insists that women write due to their innate creative tendencies:

[W]hat strikes me is the infinite richness of [women’s] individual constitutions: you can’t talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women’s imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible.¹⁶

Like Luce Irigaray’s conception of women’s plurality, Cixous recognizes the femininity’s variegated and tractable qualities, and thus the potential for genius it provides. For Fuller, Cixous, and many other feminists, writing becomes the means by which women can not only achieve equality with men, but surpass men into a uniquely female discourse.

More than a century after her death, Dickinson is widely recognized as one of the most successful writers who counteracted male literary tradition and entered into this unique female discourse. As a writer, she fits well into the model of feminine intellect that Fuller, Woolf, and Cixous all advocate; however, her assumption of this role is marked by strife. Her biography, specifically the fact that she denied almost all requests to publish her poems, suggests that she internalized her battle against male literary precursors, resulting in a fragmented, self-denying poetic identity. Often, her poems refer to the obscure figure of the “Poet,” a subject negatively portrayed as representing institutionalized male expression. For example, poem 448 presents the “Poet” as a distant and untouchable force:

This was a Poet – It is That
Distills amazing sense
From ordinary Meanings –
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species

That perished by the Door –
We wonder it was not Ourselves
Arrested it – before –

Of Pictures, the Discloser –
The Poet – it is He –
Entitles Us – by Contrast –
To ceaseless Poverty –

Of Portion – so unconscious –
The Robbing – could not harm –
Himself – to Him – a Fortune –
Exterior – to Time –

The first stanza quickly and clearly identifies “a Poet” as the poem’s subject, the pronouns “This” and “It” characterizing the poet more as an object, or an abstract figure, than a person. The speaker also seems to find it difficult to express what or who the poet is. The rest of the stanza typifies poetic endeavor, in which the poet retrieves “amazing sense” from his quotidian surroundings. The speaker defines the “amazing sense” in the transition to the next stanza, so that the poet’s “distilling” of images becomes “Attar so immense / From the familiar species / That perished by the Door.” The image of pleasant “Attar,” or an aromatic oil extracted from roses, conflicts with the “species / That perished;” as a result, the poet receives a new, almost grotesque power of retrieving beauty from death, or originality from literary precursors who have “killed” poetic metaphors with overuse. The associations of extracting a perfume-like substance from a dead creature create a space of discomfort, revulsion, and intrigue, a quality further emphasized when the speaker identifies the “species / That perished” to be “Ourselves.” The poet has beautified human existence while simultaneously enervating it.

The third and fourth stanzas return to the speaker’s fascination with naming and characterizing the “Poet,” now defining him as a “Discloser.” He seems to strip the speaker (and all who identify with her) of her privacy, as well as force her into “ceaseless Poverty.” Again, it

is the poet's words, or "Pictures," that thrust the speaker into "Poverty," suggesting that he has deprived her of her own words with which to express herself. The "species / That perished" thus becomes the speaker's own self-expression that dissolves with the poet's possession of words and images. Similarly, the last stanza identifies the poet's action as "Robbing;" however, it is "unconscious," indicating that the poet's assumption of language is innate to his existence as a poet. Therefore, the result of his symbolic theft is "a Fortune – / Exterior – to Time;" in other words, the poet's ability to amass "Meanings," "Attar," and "Pictures" in his writing signifies his immortal poetic voice, as well as the unnoticed death of the speaker's own words.

Though this is only one interpretation of the poem, Dickinson clearly creates a distinct poetic space between the archetypal male "Poet" and her own speakers. Poem 448's anxious tone continues in other poems considering the figure of the poet, many of which also separate Dickinson and her speakers from poetic tradition.¹⁷ In the same vein, poem 441 confronts the speaker's distress at her own silence, this time using a first-person singular point of view to focus on individual experience rather than the collective "we" of the previous poem:

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me –
The simple News that Nature told –
With tender Majesty

Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see –
For love of Her – Sweet – countrymen –
Judge tenderly – of Me

Unlike poem 448, the language reveals less discomfort associated with the speaker's poetic anonymity. Though she clearly confronts "the World / That never wrote to Me" with her "letter" (or poem), the speaker still reveres the world of literary tradition. Affiliating poetic inspiration with the "simple News that Nature told" differentiates the speaker's experience in this poem

from the previous one; for Dickinson, “Nature” is often synonymous with truth, and thus nature somewhat validates the speaker’s betrayal by “the World.” The poem’s tone is therefore more sorrowful than angry, resentful, or distressed despite the fact that nature’s “Message is committed / To Hands I cannot see.” The speaker concludes by asking for lenience from her “Sweet – countrymen,” or her poetic contemporaries, due to her love for poetic truth. This poem could be read as a symbolic forfeit to the dominance of tradition; yet the speaker nevertheless presents her “letter to the World” despite her self-deprecating commentary.

This last poem therefore exemplifies Dickinson’s self-doubt, though this self-doubt remains questionable. Despite the obstacles she faces from the oppressive tradition of masculine poetics, she continues to have confidence in her writing. Just as Fuller wishes for women writers, Dickinson accepts her feminine nature and social position and utilizes the tensions that arise from this complicated identity to poetically counteract her anonymity. Dickinson’s poems certainly reveal the female “anxiety of authorship,” yet sometimes the sincerity of her “anxiety” is dubious. For example, poem 891 seems to epitomize her anxiety of authorship; however, Dickinson subtly counters this interpretation:

To my quick ear the Leaves – conferred –
The Bushes – they were Bells –
I could not find a Privacy
From Nature’s sentinels –

In Cave if I presumed to hide
The Walls – begun to tell –
Creation seemed a mighty Crack –
To make me visible –

Gilbert and Gubar use this poem as an example of anxiety of authorship. They argue that poetic inspiration contradicts women’s private social existence, so the speaker cannot hide from her desire for self-expression. Therefore, “Creation” becomes a dangerous, anxiety-provoking

“Crack” in the speaker’s identity. At the same time, a different reading of the poem emerges when comparing it to poem 441. In the previous poem, “Nature” defers poetic inspiration from the speaker to others, presumably men, but the speaker recognizes that nature creates a desire for self-expression within her. Both poems suggest that “Nature” is not threatening, but welcome. Though the speaker maintains that she desires “Privacy” from “Nature’s sentinels,” nature’s characterizations in the first stanza indicate an intimate relationship between the speaker and her poetic self. Furthermore, the “Cave” in the second stanza seems to be less a sanctuary and more a dungeon, signifying that the crack in the walls caused by “Creation” is actually liberating. The speaker now becomes “visible,” immortally inspired by nature to create and write.

This alternate reading of Dickinson’s “anxious” poems concerning authorship indicates her acknowledged separation from masculine literary tradition. Though Dickinson is alienated from language and literature, she embraces her distinctiveness like Fuller, Gilbert and Gubar, and other feminist writers advise. In fact, poem 288 mocks the publicly-revered male poet:

I’m Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – Too?
Then there’s a pair of us!
Don’t tell! they’d advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one’s name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!

This well-known poem serves as one of the best examples of Dickinson’s sarcasm and playfulness in light of her rejection from poetic tradition. Immediately, the speaker pronounces that she is “Nobody” when speaking to another unidentified figure. She adopts her forced poetic anonymity, transforming it into a point of solidarity with another “Nobody.” The speaker humorously advises that they maintain their anonymity, fearing that visibility would cause others

to “advertise” and destroy their protected namelessness. The second stanza creates a parallel between being “Somebody” and “a Frog,” suggesting that the “public” and “dreary” identities of socially-legitimized figures are undesirable and comical. Finally, the speaker belittles these “Somebodies” by portraying their desire for attention as inconsequential, childish, and egotistical: “To tell one’s name – the livelong June – / To an admiring Bog!” Clearly, Dickinson criticizes public literary men who use language and writing in order to become famous, a description that ties directly back to Fuller’s criticism of the deceitful “word-Christ.” These characters could include spectacle-driven writers such as Emerson and Whitman who typify the “pomp” and tradition of male literary precursors.

All in all, Fuller and her feminist successors designate intellectual expansion, specifically through writing, as the best path for women to legitimate their identities and achieve transcendental potential. Many obstacles remain for women writers in the nineteenth century and today, most notably the anxiety of authorship associated with oppressive masculine language. Nonetheless, Fuller maintains that women possess a unique ability to supersede male tradition and dissociate from it altogether, a quality demonstrated in Dickinson’s poems. Dickinson’s recognition of and willful separation from the barriers of male intellectuality allow her to progress towards exclusive and distinctive female discourse.

“Writing Woman” through Feminine Androgyny

Fuller explains how this female discourse is achieved in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Returning to her theory about female sexuality in which she declares “the especial

genius of woman I believe to be electrical in movement, intuitive in function, spiritual in tendency,”¹⁸ Fuller additionally states that female intellectual capacity relies on femininity’s innate qualities such as intuition and spirituality. Yet, as we have seen, she also stipulates a balance of the “especial genius of woman,” in which the “feminine element” must mingle with “masculine energy.”¹⁹ In fact, she confidently states that “Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another... There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.”²⁰ In other words, not only does the ideal woman possess masculine and feminine characteristics, but all humans inherently contain both gender attributes. This theory of women’s nature applies to each aspect of women’s character that Fuller discusses, but it relates most strongly to her intellectual ideal.

The mixing of femininity and masculinity within an individual can also be termed “androgyny.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines androgyny as “the union of the sexes in one individual; hermaphroditism.”²¹ Though she does not use the word androgynous, Fuller’s concept of fluid gender characteristics closely resembles this definition and was perhaps influenced by Samuel Coleridge’s statement that “a great mind must be androgynous.”²² Furthermore, Fuller’s own experience as “masculine” in her public intellectual identity and “feminine” in her private domestic identity explains her theory. Her attempts to reconcile her two identities suggest that her explanation of androgyny results from her own personal experience; in a letter to friend Sam Ward, Fuller reveals her conflicting identities: “One should be either private or public. I love best to be a woman; but womanhood is a present too straitly-bounded [sic] to give me scope.”²³ These statements are initially contradictory; she first recognizes the separation of “private and public” that normative gender roles dictate and maintains that she prefers her position as a woman. However, her intelligence counters her acceptance of the

“private” feminine sphere, and so she seems stuck and frustrated. While *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* shows no doubt about her theory of androgyny, her own inner conflict complicates her meaning. She desires for women to take ownership of their feminine roles and female natures in order to escape patriarchal oppression and yet acknowledges the incredible limitations of traditional femininity. Therefore, perhaps her only conclusion can be to include masculinity within femininity, and thus, androgyny emerges.

Prominent in feminist thought due largely to Woolf’s analysis in *A Room of One’s Own*, the concept of androgyny signifies a unified mind capable of succeeding in all intellectual pursuits. Woolf also describes the phenomenon in context of Coleridge’s statement: “He meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided.”²⁴ Woolf conceives of this sexually indistinct intellect as a way to liberate female writers from restrictive literary tradition, which had moved from a nineteenth-century lack of female precursors to the presence of limiting precursors up to the twentieth century. In other words, Woolf’s perspective almost a century later than Fuller’s focuses on the need to free women writers from the recently-created feminine tradition delimiting women to a certain rhetoric and form (the novel). *A Room of One’s Own* is often considered the primary source of intellectual androgyny; however, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* contains an unprecedented feminist employment of androgyny. Fuller not only advocates a certain type of androgyny as a solution to female oppression but presents it as a given for human nature; thus, she uses androgyny as a lens through which to examine feminine intellect and self-expression.

The theory of androgyny in feminist discourse has been interpreted in various ways by different critics. The employment of androgyny in early literary history was a device to mark

untraditional, feminist female characters. Rosemary Fithian Guruswamy notes of Elizabethan literature that “writers often portray the Queen, or characters who symbolize the Queen, through bisexual figures or mythical beings of mixed gender.”²⁵ Thus, characters who invoke female power become symbolically or literally androgynous, a pattern that creates a “sexually liberal and gender-bending discourse, applied to both issues of writing and female liberation.”²⁶ However, second-wave feminists tend to disparage androgyny due to its implications that an androgynous woman is “the same” as an androgynous man. Second-wave feminism’s goal of promoting women beyond an equality or similarity with men explains many feminists’ desire for women to be removed from categorization with men in order escape their inevitable “othering.” Cixous, for instance, might condemn androgyny since it opposes her glorification of the female creative self. So, the concept of androgyny at times renders femininity and masculinity indistinct, thus placing women simply on an equal plane with men; however, Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* promotes a conception of androgyny that achieves both gender equality and encourages specifically feminine development.

She does so by complicating androgyny’s traditional definition employed by Coleridge and Woolf. Though Woolf’s theories are certainly complex, she does suggest that the power of an androgynous mind stems from the elimination or surpassing of gender boundaries to encompass all human experience. This type of masculine and feminine unity takes form for Fuller in her idealization of the “religious union” of marriage; in terms of individual androgyny, however, Fuller clearly continues to value sexual difference through her belief in the transcendental power that women inherently possess. As the first chapter suggests, Fuller rejects the “mutual idolatry” form of marriage due to its elimination of individuality. Where Swedenborg champions total unity, Fuller recognizes that femininity remains subordinate to

masculinity when no gender distinction is made. She therefore disparages women's identification as masculine, and she states: "Let it not be said, wherever there is energy or creative genius, 'She has a masculine mind.'" ²⁷ This distinction is perhaps the reason that Fuller chooses not to use the word "androgyny" to define her complex idea of gender; hence, I will call Fuller's unique conception of androgyny "feminine androgyny." Instead of eliminating sexual difference, Fuller continues to value nature above all else, the characteristics of which dictate the fluidity of masculinity and femininity within the individual. In other words, she denies the idea of "natural" gender difference, where male and female are associated innately with masculinity and femininity, by claiming that "Nature provides exceptions to every rule. She sends women to battle, and sets Hercules spinning; she enables women to bear immense burdens, cold, and frost; she enables the man, who feels maternal love, to nourish his infant like a mother." ²⁸ Therefore, nature both differentiates between male and female and blends masculinity and femininity to some extent within the individual.

Acceptance of the masculine and feminine elements within human nature thus fosters the successful, "femininely androgynous" mind. As Cynthia J. Davis explains: "In Fuller's view, it is only after nature has been divested of the gendered attributes erroneously assigned to it that the fluid gender identities she values as 'natural' will be capable of realization." ²⁹ This endeavor represents both societal and personal attempts at redefining masculinity and femininity as they relate to sex. Fuller maintains that women specifically have the ability to recognize that "gendered attributes" are "erroneously" defined. Though she provides a few examples of successful, mentally androgynous men, she idealizes female nature and women who have achieved "fluid gender identities." As we have seen, Fuller declares that "there are two aspects of woman's nature, represented by the ancients as Muse and Minerva." ³⁰ These two sides initially

seem to oppose one another: “Muse” (or the goddess of inspiration) representing femininity, and “Minerva” (the goddess of wisdom) representing masculinity. However, Muse and Minerva do not create a binary because Minerva does not necessarily symbolize logic, knowledge, and reason, the traditionally masculine intellectual traits. Instead, she embodies wisdom, a concept that relates as much to intuition and instinctual judgment as it does to empirical knowledge; thus, Minerva is both feminine and masculine. In this way, the Muse/Minerva image incarnates the idea that “every life has, in its sphere, a totality or wholeness of the animating powers of the other spheres; having only, as its own characteristic, a predominance of some one power.”³¹ In other words, women’s Muse/Minerva nature facilitates a union of opposing masculine and feminine characteristics while preserving the holistic, governing power of femininity. Women thus can have “one creative energy” that is “in harmony with the central soul.”³² In this way, women’s potential for feminine androgyny emerges for Fuller as a way into unique female discourse and intellectual success.

In order to further illustrate feminine androgyny, Fuller provides examples of female intellectuals and writers that demonstrate these qualities. Initially, Fuller cites George Sand when describing the “triumphs of female authorship,” focusing on Sand’s rejection of erroneous gender attributes: “George Sand smokes, wears male attire, wishes to be addressed as ‘Mon frère.’”³³ Yet, despite her gender-bending tactics, Sand pushes her androgyny too far into masculinity for Fuller. She recognizes Sand’s extreme approach as a result of extreme patriarchal order; however, she wishes instead that “[Sand] would not care whether she were brother or sister.”³⁴ Sand exemplifies the femininely androgynous mind in her writing, but betrays “the especial genius of woman” in her public behavior.

In Sand's place, Fuller celebrates Catherine Maria Sedgwick, an early American novelist, as her femininely androgynous ideal. Her description of Sedgwick illuminates the ways that women are able to transcend sexual difference while maintaining feminine natures:

Herself a fine example of the independent and beneficent existence that intellect and character can give to woman, no less than man, if she know how to seek and prize it; also that the intellect need not absorb or weaken, but rather will refine and invigorate the affections, the teachings of her practical good sense come with great force, and cannot fail to avail much.³⁵

Here, Fuller characterizes "intellect," "independence," and "practical good sense" as masculine and "affections" as feminine. She displays how each of these qualities maintain a symbiosis within Sedgwick's writing, resulting in her "invigorated" feminine attributes and a mind that "sets limits nowhere" and whose "objects and inducements are pure."³⁶ Her feminine nature also stimulates "the free and careful cultivation of the powers that have been given, with an aim at moral and intellectual perfection."³⁷ Her masculine/feminine mind represents these "powers," the recognition of which results in Sedgwick's intellectual "perfection." Fuller's idealization of Sedgwick's moral character again reveals her conservative perspective on women's moral duties; this critique is less significant, however, when applying the theory of feminine androgyny to other, less conventional female examples. In this sense, the example of Sedgwick is irrelevant for a progressive feminist critique; she serves only to prove Fuller's belief in the existence of such femininely androgynous writers.

Fuller's use of Sedgwick as her ideal woman writer initially distances Dickinson from her ideal. Sedgwick's prose is calm, almost docile, certainly commenting on women in the nineteenth century, yet without Dickinson's scandalous poetic originality. By recognizing that

Fuller's values female modesty and decorum, a progressive feminist critique legitimizes Dickinson's place as a successful, femininely androgynous writer as well. As we have seen, Dickinson's poems convey a desire for separation from masculine literary tradition. They undoubtedly display moments of anxiety of authorship, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, but Dickinson employs tools to combat it. One such tool is her assertion of dual identity, a theme taking form in her creation of both male and female speakers and these speakers' internal gender difference or gender blending. Renee L. Bergland argues that Dickinson actually saw herself as partially male during her childhood due to her scientifically-oriented education:

Dickinson was literally a woman who had once been a boy in terms of her education...

From the perspective of the later nineteenth century, science students were, by definition, boys, even if they were girls who had 'lost their distinctive feminine traits' (Clarke 1873, 45) and become 'hermaphroditic in mind' (115).³⁸

Bergland considers Dickinson's poems that use the phrase "when a boy"³⁹ as proof of her male (scientific) identity; while this interpretation is somewhat extreme, Bergland's analysis indicates that Dickinson does poetically identify with masculinity as well as femininity. Her double poetic identity surfaces sometimes in anxiety-ridden poems, and other times in poems of harmony and acceptance. In both cases, Dickinson's internalized duality, specifically sexual duality, signifies that her mind is "androgynous," in both Fuller and Woolf's definition of the term. She employs androgyny in order to resolve the tensions of her woman/poet self, to encompass all human experience in her poetry, and to enter into original female discourse. Dickinson's "mighty Crack" of "Creation" (poem 891) thus allows not only for her visibility, but also for her legitimization as a poet.

While Bergland argues that the poems directly stating Dickinson's multiple "genders" best exemplify her androgyny, the poems centering on a more metaphoric dual identity better demonstrate Dickinson's feminine, poetic androgyny. For example, poem 642's anxious voice portrays the difficulty in resisting double identity:

Me from Myself – to banish –
Had I Art –
Impregnable my Fortress
Unto All Heart –

But since Myself – assault Me –
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch
How this be
Except by Abdication –
Me – of Me?

The poem's duality is evident through Dickinson's repetition of "Me" and "Myself" to qualify the different sides of her "Consciousness." Like in many other poems, Dickinson's uses disjointed and obscure diction; unlike in other poems, her awkward language purposely inhibits the poem's fluidity. For example, the lines "Except by subjugating / Consciousness" read like formal analytic prose, while "How this be" is both grammatically questionable and disrupts the poem's meter. These stylistic choices highlight the speaker's anxiety and tension resulting from her inability to reconcile her two identities.

The poem begins by suggesting that the speaker must "banish" one of these identities, yet she also recognizes the impossibility of doing so. Her "Fortress" is "Impregnable," thus implying that she can neither summon a new identity nor expel her existent one. This first stanza, though marked with uncertainty, describes the speaker's protected self, safe from internal or external invasion; in contrast, the second stanza indicates that the dual identities conflict, "since Myself –

assault Me –.” Her seemingly splintered self causes a lack of “peace,” during which she desires only to suppress her double identity in favor of a unified self. She also reveals that the only way of doing so is “by subjugating / Consciousness,” signifying that her “Consciousness” (her intelligent, poetic mind) relies on both sides of her dual identity.

Through the first and second stanzas, the speaker uses “Me” and “Myself” to designate each of her selves; the two pronouns are used interchangeably, yet maintain an opposition. The third stanza, on the other hand, transitions to a new formula of using “we” to represent both “Me” and “Myself.” Arriving after the speaker’s realization that a singular identity would necessitate a subjugated consciousness, this pronoun shift signifies the beginning of her self-acceptance. She admits her duality to be a “mutual Monarch,” in which “Monarch” is singular to emphasize the unity of the two selves. Again, the speaker notes that “Abdication” of one half of the “mutual Monarch” is a solution; however, she comes to realize that the “mutual Monarch” cannot be broken apart, a moment indicated by the last line, “Me – of Me?” No longer does the speaker see the conflict between “Me” and “Myself,” nor does she define a plural identity (“we”). Her double identity has become one “Me.” While this poem’s abstractions resist definite conclusions about the two sides of the speaker’s self, it is fair to conclude that they represent the sides of her poetic mind, her “Art” and her “Consciousness.”

After an acceptance of dual identity, Dickinson turns to androgyny to assert her poetic self. As Woolf and Fuller believe, androgyny informs intellect and especially enhances self-expression. In poem 835, Dickinson demonstrates a similar conception of masculinity and femininity within dual identity:

Nature and God – I neither knew
Yet Both so well knew me
They startled, like Executors
Of My Identity.

Yet Neither told – that I could learn –
My Secret as secure
As Herschel’s private interest
Or Mercury’s affair –

The first stanza presents the subjects “Nature” and “God” as the two powers in the poem. Immediately, all connotations of these forces complicate Dickinson’s meaning. As we have seen, “Nature” can represent both a liberating transcendental power and a source of oppressive patriarchal influence when men use women’s “natural” purposes to create gender hierarchy. Meanwhile, “God” connotes divine inspiration and transcendental power as well as represents the ultimate patriarch; so, Dickinson allows for either a negative or positive interpretation of the poem’s opening lines. In many ways, the rest of the poem could support the nature and God’s patriarchal associations as they seem to oppose the speaker in many ways, such as not allowing her to comprehend them and becoming “Executors” of her “Identity.” On the other hand, the poem elicits a positive interpretation. Despite the fact that the speaker does not understand “Nature and God,” she admits that “they so well knew me.” Nature, representing femininity and “natural” identity, and God, representing masculinity and divine inspiration, do not delimit the speaker; in fact, the speaker is “startled” by their knowledge of her “Identity.” Therefore, the description of nature and God as “Executors” of her identity refers not to the denial, or execution, of self, and rather to nature and God’s power to fulfill her identity.

The second stanza emphasizes the speaker’s acceptance of “Nature and God” as she realizes that “Neither told” her “Secret.” Interpreting nature and God to symbolize gendered attributes and natural/divine inspiration leads to the conclusion that the speaker’s “Secret” is her poetic identity. In this way, the speaker is synonymous with Dickinson. Her identity is therefore truly defined by her androgynous mind, a quality that allows her to feel “secure” even if she does

not truly understand it. Finally, the last lines compare the speaker's "Secret" to both "Herschel's private interest" and "Mercury's affair," strengthening the idea of the secret as an intellectual endeavor. William Herschel was the astronomer who discovered Uranus, while "Mercury" can refer to either the planet or the Roman messenger god. These allusions position Dickinson's poem within a scientific realm, a typically masculine intellectual area, and within mythology and fiction, imparting human experience onto the speaker's identity. Furthermore, the speaker's "Secret" ranks among the complex mysteries of the universe. The speaker's acceptance of "Nature and God" thus results in a cosmically-important intellectual and poetic identity.

The "Nature and God" metaphor in poem 835 abstractly invokes masculinity and femininity in relation to poetic inspiration. Dickinson often uses this tactic, constructing gendered symbols rather than directly acknowledging her speakers' androgyny. Poem 449 further exemplifies a symbolic duality of Dickinson's androgynous speaker:

I died for Beauty – but was scarce
Adjusted in the Tomb
When One who died for Truth, was lain
In an adjoining Room –

He questioned softly "Why I failed"?
"For Beauty", I replied –
"And I – for Truth – Themselves are One –
We Brethren, are", He said –

And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night –
We talked between the Rooms –
Until the Moss had reached our lips –
And covered up – our names –

As with the previous poem, the first stanza initially signals a pejorative reading of the poem. The line "I died for Beauty – but was scarce" positions the speaker as both a martyr-like figure and as inconsequential. With the transition to the next line, however, Dickinson reveals hope for the speaker's revival: she is "scarce / Adjusted in the Tomb," recently resigned to her fate, but

receives a companion “who died for Truth.” As with “Nature and God” in poem 835, “Beauty” and “Truth” now symbolically qualify feminine and masculine poetic identity, respectively. Though she seems to create a gendered binary, Dickinson in fact illustrates the two concepts as inextricably linked and interchangeable. For Dickinson especially, whose poems so often center on an attempt to grasp truth through the beauty of poetry, these ideas become unified.

In the second stanza, Dickinson assigns a masculine pronoun to “Truth.” The male “Truth” recognizes that he and the speaker have “failed,” perhaps referring to their tasks in upholding beauty and truth. He reinforces beauty and truth’s unity by declaring “Themselves are One” and that “We Brethren, are.” Beauty and truth become halves of one concept, poetry, but maintain a type of harmonious distinction from each other as “Brethren.” The masculine and feminine selves are at once singular, emphasized by the word “One” and Dickinson’s manipulation of the pronoun “themselves” into the singular “Themselves,” and plural, as “Brethren.” The speaker and her masculine counterpart’s “adjoining Room[s]” also symbolize this separate but unified quality; the speaker is thus able to embrace masculine “Truth” into her identity without being overcome by it. In other words, she achieves Fuller’s feminine androgyny. The last stanza concludes with a continuous discourse between beauty and truth. Dickinson’s use of the word “Room” again becomes important, marking the shift from the speaker’s original space within a “Tomb.” Where the tomb symbolizes limitation and imprisonment, Dickinson’s room often signifies a safe space for individual development.⁴⁰ The addition of the masculine self has thus expanded the speaker’s identity and poetic success. The last lines, “Until the Moss had reached our lips – / And covered up – our names” reemphasize the same type of intellectual expansion; though the lines initially denote that the two identities are forcibly silenced, Dickinson actually suggests that the “covering up” of the “Beauty” and “Truth” unifies the two

concepts enough to nullify the importance of their distinction. In the poem, beauty and truth have become one, and therefore the speaker's has achieved both a femininely androgynous mind as well as ultimate poetic success.

While poems 835 and 449 use abstract symbols to stand for poetic masculinity and femininity, other poems create more clearly gendered dual identities. Dickinson often utilizes masculine counterparts to illustrate her speakers, as with poem 449, a choice that signifies her tendency towards androgyny. Poem 679 clearly demonstrates the interaction between masculine and feminine sides of the self:

Conscious am I in my Chamber,
Of a shapeless friend –
He doth not attest by Posture –
Nor Confirm – by Word –

Neither Place – need I present Him –
Fitter Courtesy
Hospitable intuition
Of His Company –

Presence – is His furthest license –
Neither He to Me
Nor Myself to Him – by Accent –
Forfeit Probity –

Weariness of Him, were quainter
Than Monotony
Knew a Particle – of Space's
Vast Society –

Neither if He visit Other –
Do He dwell – or Nay – know I –
But Instinct esteem Him
Immortality –

The speaker immediately claims ownership of her identity by describing it as “my Chamber” (again invoking the importance of a room for Dickinson). She bemusedly acknowledges her “shapeless friend,” whom Dickinson qualifies as male, and indicates her “Conscious” acceptance

of his presence within herself. He does not require control over her, as the speaker's second identity does in the beginning of poem 642; in fact, her "Hospitable intuition" welcomes his existence. The speaker and her masculine half also exists peacefully due to the fact that he remains abstract and intangible, not requiring to be "Confirm[ed]" by "Word" or "Place;" therefore, he lives completely within her mind. Unlike the patriarchy's definition of femininity in relation to masculinity, the poem suggests that the feminine self defines the masculine self without "othering" him, thus achieving true harmony in feminine androgyny. The speaker's abstract masculine and concrete feminine selves are thus able to uphold "Probity" and explore "Space's / Vast Society." The speaker's "instinct" accepts her dual identity and glorifies it in "Immortality."

Due to these poems' emphasis on poetic identity, each of Dickinson's speakers can be considered as a facet of her own poetic self. Through her ability to write as either a male or female speaker and to create speakers containing both masculinity and femininity, Dickinson demonstrates effective feminine androgyny. As a portal into intellectual success and self-expression, Fuller encourages feminine androgyny for women writers who are able to internalize masculinity without becoming "manlike." Therefore, Dickinson's entirely unique approach to poetic form and content, both separate yet acknowledging of male literary tradition, symbolizes her flourishing, femininely androgynous mind. In order to further elucidate the breadth and complexities of feminine androgyny for women writers, it is necessary to study both Fuller and Dickinson's literary schematics and writing styles.

Reclaiming Language: Fuller and Dickinson's Styles

Fuller and Dickinson's literary choices reveal the differing tactics each employs towards feminine androgyny. As we have seen, due to the male-dominated literary tradition, women writers must find a way of either utilizing or successfully rejecting handed down by their male precursors. Each woman writer approaches this problem in a different way, either consciously or subconsciously, to be able to use masculine language within a feminine context or to reconfigure a feminine discourse. The relative success of each writer is therefore not as important as determining her means of achieving written expression within patriarchy. For Fuller, the common thread among women writers who demonstrate original creativity is the existence of a femininely androgynous mind; therefore, Fuller attempts to apply feminine androgyny to her writing style to express her belief in the women's transcendental power.

Woman in the Nineteenth Century has often been criticized for the difficulties its structure poses to understanding the essay. In fact, Fuller does not create a concrete organization; she jumps from subject to subject, style to style, without a clear structural goal. While the inconsistencies in the essay inhibit its fluidity to a small extent, they also represent Fuller's intentional stylistic choices in implementing feminine androgyny. The essay contains many different literary forms, each corresponding to a symbolically masculine or feminine writing style. Through her use of the essay form, her extensive literary references, conversational passages, and emotionally-charged tones, Fuller both internalizes male traditions and presents a female writing style.

Many aspects of *Woman* refer to literary tradition and the formulas of Fuller's American transcendental contemporaries. Julie Ellison explains that "Emerson's essays are constructed in a similar way [to Fuller's] ... [and] the status of philosophical discourse in Coleridge's prose... is

alike in the close link between its mania for quotation and its ambivalent drive for idealization.”⁴¹ Ellison argues that Fuller adheres to the transcendental style and content of contemporary Romantic male writers.⁴² In particular, Fuller constructs *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in an Emersonian way, framing her argument within philosophizing moments about human and divine existence. The essay begins with this type of transcendental, masculine rhetoric, one of Fuller’s most Emerson-like statements occurring in the first paragraph: “Often has the vein of gold displayed itself amid baser ores, and Man has appeared before us in princely promise worthy of his future.”⁴³ The clearly transcendental content of this sentence mirrors its clearly traditional formula, demonstrated in Fuller’s description of “Man” as a semi-divine being and her use of conventional poetic metaphor. Her prose continues with similarly grand statements, her generalizations and confident deification of man exemplifying her masculine rhetoric. She includes passages of logical analysis that also firmly locate her essay within a male context. Furthermore, the essay contains many literary and historical references, an effect that categorizes Fuller’s style within the male tradition from which these references were born. By signifying her intelligence and breadth of education, Fuller legitimizes her essay within the critical patriarchal literary sphere. The combination of these stylistic attributes suggests that Fuller desires to win over the reluctant male reader with her adherence to convention, as well as to establish her identity as a writer.

The masculine elements of Fuller’s rhetoric are interspersed with unexpected and informal moments, a style qualified as feminine. While *Woman* opens in a mostly traditional way, a decisive transition moment occurs after she focuses the essay specifically on women. She does so by establishing the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as central to her argument. Though she initially treats Orpheus as the hero, she then declares that “the time is come when

Eurydice is to call for an Orpheus, rather than Orpheus for Eurydice.”⁴⁴ The unexpected alteration of a well-known literary reference reflects the stylistic choices that follow; instead of completely adhering to masculine rhetoric, she exploits convention to reveal both masculine and feminine elements within her writing. Jeffrey Steele similarly highlights Fuller’s rhetoric, commenting that she “does not survey the docile expanse of a feminized nature; rather she situates herself – as she situates her writing – into a complicated inter-textual terrain that evokes the monuments of the past.”⁴⁵ Fuller’s writing thus signifies her androgynous tendencies. Specifically, Fuller explores the “inter-textual terrain” through the use of conversation within the essay to argue her points. From her involvement with women’s “conversation classes,” it can be argued that Fuller views dialogue as a type of female discourse. Like the epistolary form, conversation becomes a safe and successful outlet for female self-expression, associated with women writers because of their exclusion from the formal structures of male precursors.

Even more so than the epistolary form, Fuller’s unique use of conversations re-contextualizes a masculine philosophical tradition: the Socratic dialogue. Focusing on rationality and masculine intellect, the Socratic dialogue uses “conversation” to solve problems through reason. Fuller’s dialogue thus inherently invokes this masculine philosophical form, while also altering it. Whereas Plato’s dialogues use formal reasoning skills, Fuller’s dialogues contain emotional and informal language, thereby placing the dialogue within feminine context. As with her use of literary references, Fuller’s “conversations” simultaneously find a place in masculine tradition and incarnate femininity within that tradition.

Each of these “conversation” passages exists in a different context, the first of which begins soon after Fuller’s first obviously feminist statement. The opening “voice” of the conversation is male, a character who opposes Fuller’s feminism by saying ““you must be trying

to break up family union, to take my wife away from the cradle and the kitchen hearth to vote at polls, and preach from a pulpit.”⁴⁶ Like Dickinson’s use of male speakers, Fuller legitimizes male opinion by giving it voice. She does not ridicule this character, but instead creates a debate between the man and another voice that probably represents Fuller herself. Fuller does not necessarily classify the second character as female, thereby allowing for both men and women to identify with it. The two characters argue about women’s social roles, the male voice becoming weaker as the second voice gains strength. The conversation ends with a long, lecture-like speech from the Fuller character, the content of which outshines the man’s arguments concludes with a sense of feminist victory. In this way, both the content and the form of the conversation subtly but inherently persuades the reader in favor of Fuller’s opinion, and towards a feminine writing style.

The next important conversation arrives with Fuller’s presentation of the character “Miranda.” As we have seen, Miranda represents Fuller’s ideal intellectual woman, and so her voice is extremely important. Miranda symbolizes the educational benefits that Fuller experienced, embodies the feminine “electrical” nature that Fuller admires, and demonstrates a successful balance between feminist discontent and the “heat and bitterness of the position of her sex.”⁴⁷ After Fuller introduces Miranda, she begins a dialogue concerning the essay’s feminist, where Miranda focuses on the importance of “self dependence” and “self-reliance.” She neither attacks men nor criticizes patriarchal society, as Fuller does at times; instead, her voice rationally advocates for women’s resistance to subjugation. Without the conversation formula, Miranda would remain an intangible ideal. Another dialogue in the essay displays in a similar purpose to Miranda’s: Fuller uses an unidentified female speaker to describe the difficulties of motherhood,

a moment analyzed in the first chapter. By giving voice to the trials of womanhood, Fuller grounds her writing within female experience and within a feminine form of expression.

The majority of the other conversational passages in *Woman* occur within Fuller's literary and historical references. While the allusions partially demonstrate Fuller's masculine writing style, Fuller reformulates the each reference's traditional associations by placing it within her feminine conversational rhetoric. For example, she describes two different legends that emphasize the important female characters. In a "Rhine legend," a young maid is separated from her fiancé by war and waits for him until she dies; in "Cyropaedia," another woman experiences heartbreak when her husband dies. In both cases, Fuller insists that "never were the heroism of a true woman, and the purity of love, in a true marriage, painted in colors more delicate or lovely."⁴⁸ Therefore, she gives each woman a voice to explain her love and grief. By retelling these ancient stories, Fuller gives life to the feminine side of love stories instead of the masculine. Furthermore, she constructs these heroic women within a female conversational discourse, a choice that marks a decisive reclamation of literature and history for femininity.

Each of these conversations is rendered "feminine" through their use of emotion and their emphasis on female experience. The voices' informal style in comparison with much of the rest of the essay also contributes to their femininity, mixing typically masculine forms (Socratic dialogue) and content (literary allusions) with this femininity. Fuller's traditional, masculine rhetoric intertwined with her conversational stylistic choice comes to a head at the end of the essay when she uses lively, exclamatory language to promote her cause. The body of the essay also contains moments that are clearly saturated with emotion, a quality that Ellison describes as Fuller's "overburdened feelings of pain and pleasure and the necessary demonstrativeness to which they lead."⁴⁹ Though she avoids criticizing men too harshly for most of the text, Fuller

cannot refrain at one point from passionately proclaiming “O men! I speak not to you.”⁵⁰ More of her emotionally-charged declarations occur when she directly addresses women at the end of the essay, fervently desiring women to act against injustice:

Women of my country! – Exaltadas! ... have you nothing to do with this? You see the men, how they are willing to sell shamelessly, the happiness of countless generations of fellow-creatures, the honor of their country, and their immortal souls, for a money market and political power. Do you not feel within you that which can reprove them, which can check, which can convince them? You would not speak in vain; whether each in her own home, or banded in unison.⁵¹

Fuller’s oratorical style here prevents women from rejecting Fuller’s opinions due to her depth of emotion in conjunction with a well-reasoned argument. She appeals to all American women in a way that exudes both feminine compassion and masculine aggression and separates female readers from male readers. Fuller’s combination of traditional styles, as in this sermon-like passage, and emotion geared towards women represents another tactic of her female self-expression.

The simultaneous masculine and feminine rhetoric in *Woman* assumes various forms, culminating in heterogeneity and multiplicity by the end of the essay. By exploiting the forms of male literary precursors and imbuing them with her own feminine stylistic choices, Fuller demonstrates a type of intellectual androgyny. As we have seen, femininity often resists singular definition, and thus *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* displays the plurality of women’s nature. However, the essay does not quite reach feminine androgyny. She clearly employs masculinity within her feminine identity, but the result is not the harmonious balance she desires. *Woman* remains split between masculine literary convention and feminine informal rhetoric despite her

attempts at unifying the two. It seems that Fuller's writing choices in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* demonstrate her external acceptance of gender fluidity, but not her internalization of its balance. This was most likely a weakness in her writing that Fuller recognized.⁵²

Whereas Fuller's style cannot fully unify a femininely androgynous rhetoric, Dickinson's poetry achieves this unity. As we have seen, Dickinson's subjects often demonstrate androgynous tendencies. She crafts male and female speakers in a way that signals her ability to express a broad spectrum of human experience. Many of her poems also exhibit dual identities within one speaker, a quality reminiscent of Woolf's androgynous mind. While the dualities and gender distinctions within the poems could cause Dickinson's writing to be rifted similarly to Fuller's, her stylistic choices in fact create a holistic poesy. Dickinson's subjects and speakers demonstrate androgyny, while her unique exploitation of language, form, syntax, and poetic convention establish her specifically feminine androgyny. The following stylistic and formal analysis demonstrates this poetic effect.

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller affirms that feminine androgyny is achieved through the internalization of naturally masculine attributes within female experience, while maintaining the sole governing force of femininity. Dickinson's poems' content represents masculine/feminine duality, and the style in which they are written represents the holism of feminine androgyny. Many critics have studied the conundrum of Dickinson's language, reaching varying conclusions. I argue that through her manipulation of grammar, syntax, punctuation, emphasis, and diction, Dickinson's poetic style becomes an entirely unique rhetoric highlighting the comprehensive power of female self-expression: Fuller's feminine androgyny. Her formal manipulations occur in two ways: through a defamiliarization of language and through the creation of a consistent, holistic vocabulary and style.

Many feminist Dickinson critics have argued that her difficult poetic style mirrors her discontented perspective as a woman writing within patriarchal context. Joanne Feit Diehl reasons that Dickinson's unusual linguistic choices reflect "her reaction to such exclusions [from society], from her conversion of a potentially crippling alienation into a conception of language that serves as a defense against... an antipathetic society."⁵³ While this "language as defense" hypothesis has value in its treatment of language manipulation combating patriarchy, it ignores Dickinson's positive literary choices in place of an apophatic definition of her style.

Defamiliarization is the first way that Dickinson asserts her female style. As a literary device, defamiliarization functions as a method for presenting common subjects or language in an unexpected or unfamiliar way in order to create doubt about the accepted nature of the subject. Almost all of Dickinson's poems display some facet of this defamiliarization. As Cristianne Miller explains of Dickinson's word choices, she "disrupts our expectations that words will carry fixed, restricted reference to some time, quality, or thing."⁵⁴ Often, her defamiliarizing linguistic choices relate to some normative conception of language and society. Dickinson achieves defamiliarization subtly, through the use of unexpected italicization and capitalization, syntactical disruptions, and the misuse, omission, or overuse of punctuation.

First, Dickinson's implementation of visual emphasis, namely through italics and capitalization, draws the eye to specific words and phrases. Each poem employs mid-sentence capitalization, mostly of nouns, in order to highlight certain words over others. Though eighteenth-century women writers used incorrect capitalization, often signifying their lack of formal education, the practice was mostly obsolete by Dickinson's time. The reference to past tradition may suggest that Dickinson's capitalization attempts to reclaim linguistic history, as Fuller demonstrates in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. More importantly, however,

Dickinson's capitalized words, and conversely un-capitalized words, claim unexpected importance. For example, in poem 441 ("This is my letter to the World"), analyzed in the first subsection of this chapter, Dickinson uses capital letters in unconventional places. The emphasis on the words "World," "Me," "Nature," "Message," and others magnifies each of these words' significance and the part they play in the speaker's intellectual identity. Therefore, when one seemingly important noun, "countrymen," remains lower-case, Dickinson stresses the relative triviality of the "countrymen," who represent her poetic contemporaries with the ability to "Judge" the speaker. With this simple aesthetic difference, Dickinson disrupts expectations, defamiliarizes the reader, and thereby questions thematic and linguistic assumptions.

Examples of Dickinson's alternating and defamiliarizing capitalizations are numerous, thus becoming a consistent element of her unique style. These manipulations grow to be almost unconsciously accepted when perusing Dickinson's body of work, and therefore the meanings imparted through them are internalized as well. On the contrary, Dickinson's use of italics is much less frequently observed, and so italicized words or phrases result in a much more defamiliarizing experience. For example, poem 365 displays only one instance of italicization in an otherwise straightforward Dickinsonian form:

Dare you see a Soul *at the White Heat?*
Then crouch within the door –
Red – is the Fire's common tint –
But when the vivid Ore
Has vanquished Flame's conditions,
It quivers from the Forge
Of unanointed Blaze.
Least Village has its Blacksmith
Whose Anvil's even ring
Stands symbol for the finer Forge
That soundless tugs – within –
Refining these impatient Ores
With Hammer, and with Blaze
Until the Designated Light

Repudiate the Forge –

The italics arrive in the first line, immediately requiring attention. Despite the capitalizations, dashes, and poem’s other strange grammatical choices, the italics focus the entire poem on the phrase “at the White Heat.” Furthermore, had Dickinson only highlighted “White Heat,” perhaps a perfunctory interpretation of the image could still occur. Choosing to italicize “at the White Heat” defamiliarizes the connotations of “white heat” because of the unusual use of the preposition “at.” The italics demand an interpretation based entirely on how the poem relates to “White Heat.” Another example of Dickinson’s use of italics contrasts with poem 365 in that each of its seven stanzas contains multiple italics. The last stanza of poem 663 reads:

I’d give – to live that hour – *again* –
The *purple* – *in my Vein* –
But *He* must *count the drops* – *himself* –
My price for *every stain!*

The extreme variation in italics and normal text produces the opposite effect to poem 365. Instead of requiring a reading that focuses on the importance of one phrase (“*at the White Heat*”), this poem’s abundant italics create a sense of confusion about the subject, voice, and meaning of the poem. The italics promote defamiliarizing chaos and thereby insinuate the speaker’s deep, subconscious emotional distress. Without the italics, the poem could be simply read as a nostalgic lamentation for a lost relationship, an interpretation almost completely lost in the intensely confusing italics.

In the same way that Dickinson’s unexpected capitals and italics defamiliarize the reader’s assumptions and disrupt simple analysis, her exploitation of grammar and punctuation upsets traditional poetic verse. Though “artistic license” for poets’ grammar misuse is common, Dickinson almost always alters grammar and syntax to a specific end. Unlike the aesthetic quality of capital letters and italics, incorrect grammar disrupts all elements of poetic voice, even

if the poem is read aloud; therefore, this form of defamiliarization is deeply rooted in a reformation of linguistic conventions. For example, poem 642 (“Me from Myself – to banish –”), also analyzed earlier in the chapter, includes moments of grammatical “error” that convey crucial meaning. The last stanza begins: “And since We’re mutual Monarch / How this be,” the syntactical disruption clearly occurring in the phrase “How this be.” Dickinson’s simple omission of the word “can” or “could” that would correctly pull the phrase together necessitates a reexamination of the image. In this case, “How this be” refers to a separation of the speaker’s dual identity; therefore, the defamiliarizing grammar calls attention to the impossibility of rejecting one of the identities. Instances such as this not only question the poem’s meaning; they also signify Dickinson’s questioning of linguistic conventions themselves. Patriarchal language functions, for Dickinson, not only as a barrier to female expression, but as a barrier to intricate descriptions of all human experience. Breaking grammatical rules therefore becomes an outlet for unique female language and expression.

Another grammatical choice, perhaps Dickinson’s most famous, is her perplexing use of dashes. A guaranteed sign of Dickinson’s poetic style, the abundant dashes have puzzled critics since the poems’ publication. In fact, almost all of the original publishers eradicated the dash in her poems, seeing it as a blemish in her otherwise fluid work. Since then, however, the dash has been recognized as an enormously important, connotation-filled aspect of Dickinson’s work. A feminist interpretation of this stylistic choice often identifies the hesitant, rift-like quality that the dash creates in the poems, symbolizing Dickinson’s anxiety of authorship. This analysis reasonably identifies the dash’s disruptive effect. And yet, the dashes consistently mark the poems as a unifying stylistic element, and so assume more importance for Dickinson. As the ultimate defamiliarizing tool, the dashes break apart clauses, set off phrases, replace words and

other punctuation, and vaguely conclude the poems. Almost every Dickinson poem contains many of the little reminders of her poetic self, and therefore a comprehensive analysis the dash's defamiliarizing effect is nearly impossible. I will therefore revisit the last lines of poem 441 briefly, "For love of Her – Sweet – countrymen – / Judge tenderly – of Me," as one case exemplifying the important role Dickinson's dashes play. As we have seen, Dickinson's capitalization allows the reader to devalue the "countrymen" in face of the mighty poetic "Me." Meanwhile, the dashes create multiple meanings in the first line's syntax. Aloud, the line would read "For love of Her, Sweet countrymen;" however, the dashes question the association of "Sweet" and "countrymen." The rhythm promotes a smooth reading of "Sweet countrymen," a desire for fluidity that contrasts with the dashes' separation of the adjective from the noun. This results in a definitively defamiliarizing experience in which syntax, aesthetics, and rhythm all lead the poem in different directions.

Each defamiliarizing stylistic choice in Dickinson's poems is a product of her femininely androgynous poetics. Her ability to manipulate linguistic and grammatical rules demonstrates her use of symbolically masculine and feminine rhetoric, while explicitly drawing attention to the disruptions in language as evidence of her unconventional female voice. The way that she establishes her work's femininely androgynous quality is through the consistency of these poetic choices that creates a sense of stylistic completeness. Unlike Fuller, who is unable to harmoniously unify masculine and feminine literary devices, Dickinson reveals true holism. Miller reflects on a similar aspect of Dickinson's work, stating that "Dickinson's insistence that poetry manifests the universal and collective while the poet remains unobtrusively, even indistinguishably, singular also identifies the act of writing poetry with what she sees as the pattern of a woman's life in a male-dominated world."⁵⁵ Though Miller does not refer to

feminine androgyny in this conception of the “universal” and the “singular,” she touches on Dickinson’s complete, unique rhetoric as representative of true femininity. Referring back to Irigaray’s definition in the second chapter, I contend that female experience is not “singular,” and so I do not agree with Miller’s terms; however, to be *holistic* “within plural circumstances”⁵⁶ does signify successful feminine androgyny.

Dickinson often reinforces the idea of plural holism through her stylistic choices such as the use of a specific lexicon, word emphasis, neologism, and punctuation. To begin, Dickinson’s poetic vocabulary, often a subject of study for Dickinson scholars,⁵⁷ leads to a comprehensive and consistent poetic style. The same way that capitalization emphasizes the importance of certain words, her particular lexicon highlights different meanings of words, and consequently, the poems as a whole. Reviewing Dickinson’s body of work results in an accumulation of “trigger” words that she often uses in strange ways. For example, “Firmament,” “Circumference,” “Pod,” “Noon,” “Amplitude,” “Circuit,” “Axis,” and many more, represent a few of these trigger words that contain specific meaning for Dickinson.

Often, these words are abstract concepts employed in a confusing context. For example, the well-known poem 216 contains several of these Dickinson-specific words:

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –
Untouched by Morning –
And untouched by Noon –
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection –
Rafter of Satin – and Roof of Stone!

Grand go the Years – in the Crescent – above them –
Worlds scoop their Arcs –
And Firmaments – row –
Diadems – drop – and Doges – surrender –
Soundless as dots – on a Disc of Snow –

Here, “Noon,” “Crescent,” “Arcs,” “Firmaments,” “Diadems,” and “Disc” are all examples of Dickinson’s trigger words that evoke unexpected meanings. “Noon,” “Diadems,” and “Disc” seem to be concrete, tangible concepts with conventional associations. However, “Noon” within the Dickinson lexicon does not refer simply to the middle of the day; she often uses “Noon” to symbolize a culminating moment, the highest point in life, when the sun (the truth) is at its peak. At the same time, Dickinson utilizes “Noon” in numerous circumstances that do not always correspond to this definition. For instance, the last lines of poem 328 include an extremely abstract usage of the word: “Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon / Leap, plashless as they swim.” This example demonstrates that Dickinson’s lexicon is marked by specific words, yet the meaning of these words is fluid. Similarly, a word such as “Firmaments” in poem 216 reveals how obscure words also become specifically Dickinsonian. Literally, “firmament” refers to “the arch or vault of heaven overhead, in which the clouds and the stars appear; the sky or heavens.”⁵⁸ The definition refers to an intangible concept, therefore adding more room for multiple meanings in Dickinson’s poems. In the case of poem 216, “firmament” belongs in a grand, celestial context; however, she attributes action to it, asserting that “Firmaments – row – .” This usage further complicates the word’s straightforward associations, exemplifying that as with her defamiliarizing tactics, Dickinson’s complex redefinitions of words reclaim patriarchal language within a female context. The extensive use of each trigger word thus creates a multiplicity of meanings within a specifically feminine, Dickinsonian vocabulary, resulting ultimately in the creation of a holistic yet plural lexicon existing outside of patriarchal tradition.

Feminist literary criticism often focuses on how exploding linguistic conventions subverts patriarchy. Jane Hedley states in her article “Surviving to Speak New Language”: “the restoration of meanings that have been obscured by patriarchal usage is a crucial dimension of

the feminist repossession of language.”⁵⁹ However, Dickinson goes far beyond the simple “restoration of meanings.” By creating her own lexicon, Dickinson not only restores meaning, but creates meaning. Another tactic that creates meaning is her repeated use of neologism in the poems. The formation of new words allows for Dickinson’s lexicon to become entirely unique and to be imbued with exclusively feminine meanings. In a feminist study of a twentieth-century novel, Diane C. LeBlanc argues that “neologism suggests self-affirmation that transcends a compromise of patriarchal signifiers through new language,”⁶⁰ thereby indicating that neologism authorizes female language in face of masculine linguistic tradition. Dickinson’s use of new words aligns with this feminist argument, yet it also signifies more than a repossession of language because neologisms come to be as much a part of the Dickinson lexicon as other words. An example of a Dickinson neologism also occurs in the last lines of poem 328: “Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon / Leap, plashless as they swim.” Here, the word “plashless”⁶¹ is close to its origin word “splash;” however, the subtle word change from “splashless” to “plashless” better illustrates the image of butterflies “swimming” and leaping through the air (as opposed to water) through the softer onomatopoeic quality of “plash.” Dickinson uses “plash” elsewhere, such as in poem 243, “A plash of Oars, A Gaiety –,” each usage adding new meanings to the word.

Another easily understood instance of neologism that encourages holism is Dickinson’s frequent tactic of forcing plural pronouns to be singular. We have seen this approach earlier in the chapter in poem 449 (“I died for beauty – but was scarce”), the middle stanza containing the line “And I – for Truth – Themselves are One –.” In the context of the poem, this choice significantly enhances the two speakers’ unified, yet distinct, masculine and feminine identities. By forcing “themselves” to be singular, Dickinson maintains the speakers’ plurality while simultaneously emphasizing their connectedness. Many other poems use “themselves” or “ourselves”

in place of the grammatically correct plural form, and so this “neologism” becomes a part of Dickinson’s vocabulary. She also often attributes singular articles to plural subjects, such as poem 328’s lines: “And then he drank a Dew / from a convenient Grass –.” Here, both “Dew” and “Grass are inherently plural, yet Dickinson constructs a singular form through her use of a singular article, allowing “Dew” and “Grass” to exist as simultaneously singular and plural. These choices indicate that poem 449’s meaning applies to all poems containing these neologisms and grammar “misusages:” the importance of being holistic “within plural circumstances” within feminine experience. The consistency and pluralism of the Dickinson lexicon, including her neologisms, thereby promote the poems’ holism.

Finally, Dickinson’s dash exposes another aspect of her holistic writing style. As we have seen, the dash functions as a defamiliarizing tool, disrupting syntax and meter. Though it often disturbs a poem, the dash also takes on another unifying purpose. In their concluding essay on Dickinson in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar explain the importance of the theme of sewing in the poems. They argue that sewing refers not only to Dickinson’s typically feminine domestic duties, but also symbolizes the importance of Dickinson as a “silent craftswoman” sewing together her poetic self.⁶² Briefly, they mention the dash as a symbol of this endeavor: “Even those famous dashes – meant, we have speculated, to indicate rifts and rendings, hesitations and pauses – ... are elegant as ‘Tucks – of dainty interspersions,’ fine stitches joining split thoughts seam to seam.”⁶³ Gilbert and Gubar quickly bring up this idea to prove their point about the dash as a symbol for domesticity and craft; however, I believe that the argument is crucial to understanding Dickinson’s poetic choices. Where Gilbert and Gubar focus on the “rifting” quality the dashes create, it is equally important to view how the dash “stitches” together poems that contain tension too great to overcome without them. As a symbol of her own

place in poetic tradition, the dash mirrors Dickinson's feminine androgyny: a mind effectively existing between the masculine and feminine sides of the self.

The possible examples of the dash's function as a method for stitching poems together are almost endless, and so I will only focus briefly on the second stanza of poem 428 ("Taking up the fair Ideal"), a poem examined in the first chapter:

Cherishing – our poor Ideal –
Till in purer dress –
We behold her – glorified –
Comforts – search – like this –
Till the broken creatures –
We adored – for whole –
Stains – all washed –
Transfigured – mended –
Meet us – with a smile –

This stanza exemplifies Dickinson's need for and successful employment of dashes as a method for joining her poem together. The poem focuses on the feminine ideal's pressure to be perfect, or "whole," under male gaze. In this case, the dashes imitate attempts to superficially "mend" the ideal. If the dashes were taken out of the stanza, the falsity of the ideal's "wholeness" would not be apparent. Dickinson literally stitches together the opposing masculine and feminine symbols in the poem, yet leaves little reminders of that opposition with the dashes. The dash therefore symbolizes Dickinson's existence in between masculinity and femininity, her recognition of her place there, and the importance of directly confronting tensions created by that position (by leaving dashes). Furthermore, Dickinson's choice to often end poems with a dash, as in poem 428, indicates a resistance to simplified singularity. By concluding with a dash, she defies conclusion and resolution, denying a finite interpretation of her poem. Thus, Dickinson's dashes truly signify her "stitched-together," yet complete holism in face of the pluralism of female existence.

Fuller and Dickinson's extremely different writing styles reach towards the same goal: feminine androgyny. While both writers incorporate masculinity and femininity into their writing, Fuller does so without completely unifying the two. In contrast, Dickinson presents both masculine and feminine (separate yet unified) identities as subjects and themes in the poems, while her stylistic choices reveal her consistent poetic holism as femininely androgynous. The distinction between Fuller and Dickinson is certainly a result of their differing intellects and geniuses; thus, one final factor exists in defining feminine androgyny: the importance of the woman artist.

The Woman Artist Transcendent

Emerson said, "The True Artist has the planet for his pedestal; the adventurer, after years of strife, has nothing broader than his own shoes."⁶⁴ The transcendental desires to become one with the natural and divine worlds, to attain infinite, godlike knowledge, and to fulfill human potential clearly arise in Emerson's simple declaration that an artist "has the planet for his pedestal." The True Artist, one who reaches transcendence through vast knowledge and an innate understanding of the universe, accesses truths by beautifying and mirroring them in art. Numerous other historical examples of theories concerning the unique power of artistic expression exist. Of course, these famous literary men (and women) think highly of artistic ability with mental expansion and artistic expression as their chosen professions. Still, their words ring true for Fuller, for Dickinson, and for countless other women writers attempting to transcend not only gender injustices, but all human obstacles.

As a transcendentalist essay, Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* makes many extravagant claims about the potential for human "divinity;" perhaps the most important, however, is Fuller's glorification of the artist. The essay first introduces this subject with Fuller's emphasis on Orpheus.⁶⁵ A poet and musician, Orpheus represents the original embodiment of the "True Artist," and Fuller portrays him as such:

[Orpheus] understood nature, and made her forms move to his music. He told her secrets in the form of hymns, nature as seen in the mind of God. His soul went forth toward all beings, yet could remain sternly faithful to a chosen type of excellence. Seeking what he loved, he feared not death nor hell, neither could any shape of dread daunt his faith in the power of the celestial harmony that filled his soul.⁶⁶

Among the essay's abundant transcendental images, this description of Orpheus could be lost. And yet, a close analysis of Fuller's words reveals that the image conforms perfectly to her true transcendental ideal. In fact, Orpheus becomes the only male figure glorified so clearly in these transcendental terms. Not only does he comprehend nature, but his art enlivens it, making "[nature's] forms move to his music" without altering them. Furthermore, his music and poetry reflect the natural world, but specifically "nature as seen in the mind of God," therefore achieving an internal connection with the natural and the divine. From this connection comes Orpheus' ability to commune with all "beings." Finally, his transcendental power guides his human impulses, allowing him to overcome fears that could limit "the celestial harmony that filled his soul."

Each of these attributes directly positions Orpheus as the transcendental figure that Fuller hypothesizes. His unique power arises from the perfection and universality of his art, a quality that allows him to emulate natural and divine existence just as Emerson speculates of the True

Artist. And yet, one more factor places Orpheus above other artists for Fuller: his love for Eurydice. Though his attempt to bring Eurydice back from the dead ultimately fails, Fuller creates a parallel between Orpheus' reverence for art and his love for Eurydice: "Seeking what he loved" implies that he actually sought artistic perfection through his search for Eurydice. Orpheus' art and love become the two reasons for his transcendental success in Fuller's mind; supplementing her idealization of the poet/artist, Fuller states that "the lover, the poet, the artist, are likely to view [woman] nobly."⁶⁷ Orpheus, as all three, therefore champions Fuller's empowerment of women. Following Orpheus' description, Fuller inserts a poem of her own into the text, a decision suggesting Fuller's own desire to reach transcendental potential through art. She unfortunately realizes her own artistic ability is less successful than her analytical writing, and so she continues to adhere to the essay form.

Fuller's portrayal of Orpheus as the male transcendental ideal serves as a transition into the essay's feminist intent.⁶⁸ His perfection arises in his recognition of women's importance to life and art, thereby suggesting that the True Artist tends towards androgyny. In order to further solidify this idea, Fuller briefly refers to Percy Bysshe Shelley, the British Romantic poet: "I must mention Shelley, who, like all men of genius, shared the feminine development, and, unlike many, knew it."⁶⁹ Occurring directly before her statement that "There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman,"⁷⁰ the depiction of Shelley suggests that where Orpheus symbolizes male transcendental and artistic perfection, Shelley is closest to her ideal male androgynous artist: "[Shelley], too, abhorred blood and heat, and, by his system and his song, tended to reinstate a plant-like gentleness in the development of energy."⁷¹ Shelley, demonstrating feminine attributes, thus reaches near to androgyny, or as near as men can reach, performing his androgynous mind through his art.⁷²

The examples of male artists in *Woman* suggest Fuller's reverence for artistic expression above all else. She does not directly say as much in the essay, and so her belief in artistic power must be derived from these examples. Despite their masculinity, Orpheus and Shelley are able to surpass erroneous gender limitations through their art. Consequently, Fuller implies that the femininely androgynous woman artist, bolstered by her unique position as a woman and by her creative energy, can reach ultimate transcendence. Fuller illustrates the power of female artistic expression briefly when describing the "electrical" qualities of woman: "the intellect, cold, is ever more masculine than feminine; warmed by emotion, it rushes towards mother earth, and puts on the forms of beauty."⁷³ The first half of this sentence could initially indicate an anti-feminist position; declaring that "intellect" is more naturally masculine seems to confirm gender hierarchy. However, Fuller creates a new definition of "intellect" as one that is "warmed by emotion" and that "puts on the forms of beauty." In other words, femininity causes intellect and self-expression to become art.⁷⁴ Male artists, such as Shelley, who exercise feminine attributes, epitomize masculine potential for artistic expression. Nonetheless, it is the femininely androgynous woman who best possesses all qualities of a True Artist.

Fuller recognizes the patriarchal tendency to associate men with creativity and soon refutes the categorization of art as a "masculine pursuit."⁷⁵ Despite the long artistic history dominated by men, women who do develop creatively symbolize the natural connection femininity and art: "Who does not observe the immediate glow and serenity that is diffused over the life of women, before restless or fretful, by engaging in gardening, building, or the lowest department of art."⁷⁶ By providing base examples of creative pursuits, such as "gardening" or "building" and emphasizing the transformative effect that such low "department[s] of art" have on women's lives, Fuller implies that creativity and femininity are inherently connected. When

women enter into creative expression, their transcendental capacity, the “glow and serenity that is diffused over the life of women,” emerges. Fuller pushes this concept even further, stating that women’s creativity “is something that is not routine, something that draws forth life toward the infinite.”⁷⁷ In other words, artistic expression leads women towards their “infinite” potential, and women’s creativity is in fact itself “infinite.”

The link between women, art, and creative endeavors that Fuller conjectures here defies traditional conceptions of the True Artist as unquestionably male. During the nineteenth century, this view was extremely subversive, though now contemporary feminists often encourage it. From an essentialist perspective, the connection between the female body and creativity is undeniable, considering that bearing children represents the ultimate creative act. Perhaps it is due to this natural female biological role that men originally denied creativity as inherently female; the mystery of human creation within the womb poses an unknown, incomprehensible threat to male power, and so men claim mental creativity for themselves. However, Anaïs Nin, a twentieth-century poet and novelist, reclaims art and creativity as it relates to natural female existence, stating that “the art of woman must be born in the ‘womb-cells of the mind.’”⁷⁸ In explanation, Nin focuses on the fact that women alone possess the link between human existence and natural creativity (or reproduction): “The woman artist has to fuse creation and life in her own way or in her own womb... Man created a world cut off from nature. Woman has to create within the mystery, storms, terrors, the infernos of sex.”⁷⁹ As the link between nature and art, women artists must create from within femininity itself, rather than from masculine artistic tradition. Women’s innate ownership of creativity becomes the basis of feminine androgyny and subsequently for ideal androgynous art: “Woman’s role in creation should be paralleled to her role in life... She must descend into the real womb and expose its secrets and its labyrinths.”⁸⁰

The “real womb” of life, elucidated by female creativity, leads to Fuller’s female transcendence through art.

Due to the infinite quality of female artistic creativity, supported by natural femininity, women hold the power for true originality. Female existence outside of male artistic (literary) tradition at once constrains women artists who, like Fuller, attempt to toe the line between masculinity and femininity, and liberates those who endeavor to supersede male tradition all together. As we have seen previously, Hélène Cixous’ “The Laugh of the Medusa” also declares “women’s imaginary,” or artistic potential, to be “inexhaustible.”⁸¹ Cixous therefore repeatedly encourages women to “write woman”⁸² through their natural bodily and mental characteristics, terming the successful outcome of such writing “*écriture féminine*,” or “feminine writing.” Cixous and Nin’s concepts of essentialized femininity as a gateway to artistic success therefore align to with *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, with Fuller also requiring successful women artists to possess feminine androgyny. She insists only a few women artists, or in this case, writers, exemplify feminine androgyny through their art.

Thus we return to the problem of female anxiety of authorship. In order to effectively convey feminine androgyny through artistic expression, women artists must find a way of subverting male tradition’s oppressive influence. Feminist theorists have suggested many ways of achieving this mental and artistic liberation. Woolf calls for a completely androgynous mind in order to write fiction; Cixous and Rich encourage separation from male influence in order to retrieve the capacity for *écriture féminine*; Julia Kristeva maintains that female genius arises from breaking the sexual dichotomy and recognizing art as beyond the false semblances of sexual difference.⁸³

One theorist who nears Fuller's concept of feminine androgyny as a solution is Bracha Ettinger and her "Weaving a Woman Artist with-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event." Combining feminism, psychoanalytic theory, and queer theory, Ettinger considers the female artist's dilemma and attributes it to the negation of "the archaic m/Other," or the "othered" symbol of the mother, by phallogentric society in the psychoanalytic concept of the Genius-Hero complex. She argues that the "m/Other" represents the origin of creative impulse whose symbolic elimination by the phallogentric artist actually becomes "the basis for the creative process and the Birth of the Hero."⁸⁴ In other words, the male system of artistic development is paradoxically created by the elimination of the womb as a symbol for creation. A woman artist who conforms to this "Genius-Hero" configuration therefore "turns into a hero and *becomes a man-artist figure*."⁸⁵ At the same time, Ettinger argues for women's ability to experience creativity and art outside of this norm:

[Female subjects] experience the womb as an archaic out-side and past-site, as out of chronological time and of appropriated space, or as *anterior*. This is true for male subjects as well. But female subjects also experience the womb as an in-side and future-site as well, as an actual, potential or virtual space and as a future and possible, or potential, *posterior* time.⁸⁶

The metaphorically creative womb allows for multi-faceted artistic expression in female subjects. Ettinger avoids requiring women artists to reproduce in order to achieve this pluralism, instead indicating that the womb's simple existence, its "potential," allows women to exemplify both a male perspective on creativity and a female one. The woman artist who surpasses the male Genius-Hero configuration of creative development thus demonstrates that her masculine/feminine perspective results in a "subjectivity that is not confined to the contours of a

one-body with its inside versus outside polarity. This gives rise to an idea of the artist as working through traces coming from others to whom she is borderlinked [sic].”⁸⁷ And so, the holism “within plural circumstances” that Dickinson’s poetry reveals also nuances Ettinger’s arguments.

Comparing Fuller’s and Ettinger’s theories connects feminine androgyny and the woman artist. The previous subsection has explained that Dickinson’s writing style proves her feminine androgyny, thus introducing her as the ideal woman artist possessing feminine androgyny. With Ettinger’s ideas clarifying how women specifically achieve artistic potential, this type of feminine androgyny becomes the key to successful creativity without anxiety of authorship, and therefore to ultimate transcendence, with art and creativity as the means by which women reach it. These conclusions perhaps explain Fuller’s own artistic limitations; she clearly reveres art and indulges in it with poetry and fiction, and yet does not identify herself as an artist. In the last paragraphs of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller briefly portrays herself as a typical transcendental figure like Emerson and Thoreau:⁸⁸ “I stand in the sunny noon of life. Objects no longer glitter in the dews of morning, neither are yet softened by the shadows of evening. Every spot is seen, every chasm revealed.”⁸⁹ And yet, despite this sublime image, Fuller pulls away once again. She declares that she will speak “with the bard,”⁹⁰ creating a parallel between herself and “the bard” without allowing herself to be identified as a poet. She further demonstrates her complicated relationship with art when she concludes *Woman* with a poem of her own. Fuller clearly desires artistic self-expression but does not choose to be an artist. I argue that her inability to effectively employ her own concept of feminine androgyny accounts for this tension.

Where Fuller’s relationship with art persists in vain, Dickinson’s poems display the woman artist’s multifaceted existence. Concluding that Dickinson effectively employs Ettinger’s conditions of the woman artist, in conjunction with Fuller’s feminine androgyny, requires an

understanding of Dickinson's relationship with her creative genius. The wide range of subjects and speakers and the anxious, morbid, and even unhinged qualities of many of the poems suggest a complex internal rapport between Dickinson and her desire for artistic self-expression. For some critics, such as Gilbert, Gubar, and Rich,⁹¹ the poems reveal that Dickinson viewed her genius as a "creative demon" possessing her and invading her brain.⁹² It is true that Dickinson's words often evoke demonic and disruptive associations that for Gilbert and Gubar imply her creative genius leading to "madness attendant upon psychic alienation and fragmentation."⁹³ They explain that Dickinson internalizes and "poses" as countless characters in order to combat the anxiety of authorship, the "double bind" of the female poet;⁹⁴ however, her speakers and subjects conversely take possession of her, the result of which fractures and fragments her poetic self.

While these interpretations of Dickinson's "demonic" artistic genius explain some of her more frenzied poems, they also lead to a mostly negative reading of Dickinson's artistic development. So, I argue that Dickinson's battle with the anxiety of authorship does culminate in anxious poems, but it also leads to a journey of artistic development that encompasses Ettinger's theories and Fuller's feminine androgyny. I have already established that her writing style signifies her feminine androgyny; meanwhile, her relationship with her genius accounts for her rejection of the Genius-Hero configuration and repossession of the woman artist's multidimensional perspective.

In order to demonstrate my revision of Gilbert, Gubar, and Rich's concept of Dickinson's demonic poetic inspiration, I will provide alternate readings of two poems discussed in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Gilbert and Gubar employ poems that focus on madness and internal

fragmentation as proof their theories; yet, the two poems 280 and 937 actually suggest the opposite interpretation. To begin, Gilbert and Gubar present the well-known poem 280:

I Felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum –
Kept beating – beating – till I thought
My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down –
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing – then –

An initial reading of this poem supports an argument in favor of Dickinson's symbolic fragmentation, descent into madness, and final (poetic) death. And yet, the complex word choices and concepts near the end of the poem legitimize a different reading. Gilbert and Gubar equate the poem's overall feeling with the Gothic theme of being buried alive; I argue instead that the speaker's symbolic death in fact represents her freedom from the restrictive paradigm of a patriarchal artist.

The negative descriptions pervading the first few stanzas are undeniable. The repeated image of the "treading" and "beating" footsteps in particular, combined with the formulaic iambic rhythm, imbue the poem with a sense of a maddening monotony that the speaker is

powerless to stop. And yet, despite these obvious signs of death and insanity, Dickinson provides clues for an alternate reading. Beginning with the line “That Sense was breaking through,” Dickinson suggests that the “Funeral” actually allows for poetic revelation. Indeed, the images “Sense was breaking through,” “My Mind was going numb,” and “Space – began to toll” all conclude the stanzas with a transition from conventional cerebral processes into an abyssal intellectual space. The speaker’s liberated “Sense” indicates her natural senses overcoming her logical brain in a release of poetic inspiration. In addition, “Space” and “the Heavens” become accessible to the speaker as she, “an Ear,” recognizes their musicality. Therefore, the “Silence” that she claims accompanies her actually transforms into music; together, the speaker and her newfound “Sense” become unique, “some strange Race” in face of an artistically-restrictive reality. The feared “Silence” facing a female poet (that Gilbert and Gubar posit) is thus converted from forced silence into artistic inspiration. Finally, Gilbert and Gubar use the last stanza to prove Dickinson’s speaker’s madness when “a Plank in Reason, broke.” While this reading is valid, it also upholds the idea that “sanity” depends on reason and logic. This idea therefore requires the presence of reason, a traditionally masculine attribute, in order to be creative. In fact, after the speaker breaks from life, reality, and consequently “Reason,” she does not “drop ‘down and down’ into oblivion,”⁹⁵ as Gilbert and Gubar argue. Instead, she accesses an infinite bank of artistic knowledge not limited by reason: she “hit[s] a World, at every plunge.” These “Worlds” represent the enormity of poetic expression that was unattainable while she remained “alive” within masculine artistic tradition as Ettinger’s traditional Genius-Hero. The last line also creates two meanings: first, Gilbert and Gubar recognize that the speaker’s death caused her to “finish knowing” life; I, on the contrary, suggest that the line indicates a final rejection of traditional poetry and a gateway into independent, unique existence. By concluding with “then –,”

Dickinson allows for the poem to continue unresolved as we imagine what happens “then,” or next, for the speaker.

While my reading of poem 280 is less apparent than Gilbert and Gubar’s, the constant complexities in Dickinson’s poetry allow for the interpretation. By presenting a dissociating, poetic revelation within the negative funeral context, Dickinson reveals that overcoming deeply-rooted patriarchal traditions can be difficult, even painful. In a similar way, Dickinson’s words in poem 937 comment on the pain of dissociating from the traditional Genius-Hero configuration:

I felt a Cleaving in my Mind –
As if my Brain had split –
I tried to match it – Seam by Seam –
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind, I strove to join
Unto the thought before –
But Sequence ravelled out of Sound
Like Balls – upon a Floor.

Gilbert and Gubar declare that this poem clearly admits that “madness is its true subject, and that psychic fragmentation – an inability to connect one self with another – is the cause of this madness.”⁹⁶ I agree that the speaker reveals a type of self-fragmentation, and that this fragmentation is initially injurious; yet, I also argue that the speaker attempts to reconcile two falsely-constructed sides of her poetic self in a manner resembling traditional masculine intellect, and she consequently realizes this endeavor is inauthentic. She thus reaches the same transition from masculine rational thought into feminine artistic expression that occurs in poem 280.

The poem begins after what seems to be some sort of revelation that causes “a Cleaving” in the speaker’s mind. She emphasizes the subsequent fragmentation that occurs, suggesting that it feels “as if my Brain had split,” and thus invoking the negative imagery of mental destruction. Following this destruction, the speaker attempts to force her fragmented mind back together,

“Seam by Seam,” but is unsuccessful. The use of “Seam” refers to sewing described in the previous subsection as evidence of Dickinson’s poetic process; in this context, the speaker does not “stitch” a poem together with dashes, but rather attempts to falsely reconstruct an identity that can no longer exist. The second stanza continues the speaker’s endeavor though it is clear that she will not be successful. Now, Dickinson broadens the scope of the speaker’s fragmentation, indicating that the “Cleaving” affects her logical thought process: “The thought behind, I strove to join / Unto the thought before –.” Again, where Gilbert and Gubar argue that this destruction of logic symbolizes the speaker’s descent into madness, I maintain that her sequential thought process is a vestige of patriarchal intellectual norms. For a successful woman artist in Ettinger’s theory, the internalization of the multidimensional female relationship with the womb (as the symbolic source of creativity) leads to a rejection of the logical, chronological, and therefore masculine artistic perspective. In this poem, Dickinson’s speaker further demonstrates this rejection in the last two lines: “But Sequence ravelled out of Sound / Like Balls – upon a Floor.” This image seems to negatively connote the speaker’s “unraveling” mind; however, Dickinson indicates that “Sequence” is replaced with “Sound.” “Sequence” invokes masculine logical thought, while “Sound” refers to feminine artistic expression, or the “Sense” of poem 280; in this case, feminine “Sense” and “Sound” supersede masculine rationality. Furthermore, by using “ravelled” instead of “unraveled,” Dickinson subtly suggests that though her speaker’s past poetic self “unravels,” she actually generates a newly holistic identity. The unexpectedness of this change accounts for the poem’s negative and painful experience; nonetheless, we can infer that with her acceptance of her new artistic perspective, the speaker will transcend patriarchy and its bounds on artistic expression.

In revisiting poems that feminist critics have employed to argue for Dickinson's anxious relationship with her art, it is not my intention to suggest that these poems are based entirely in a positive, constructive formation of a new poetic self. Clearly, Dickinson's poems reveal torment, violence, horror, and death in ways that create a complex relationship with her creativity. At the same time, these poems also indicate that despite these difficulties, Dickinson overcomes the artist's traditional Genius-Hero formula, using feminine androgyny and originality to do so. This battle for artistic freedom results in Dickinson's entirely unique and comprehensive poetics. Furthermore, while many feminist critics focus on some poems' negativity, it is important to examine poems that positively portray Dickinson's entrance into holistic, femininely androgynous, unique artistic expression. One such example is poem 505:

I would not paint – a picture –
I'd rather by the One
Its bright impossibility
To dwell – delicious – on –
And wonder how the fingers feel
Whose rare – celestial – stir –
Evokes so sweet a Torment –
Such sumptuous – Despair –

I would not talk, like Cornets –
I'd rather by the One
Raised softly to the Ceilings –
And out, and easy on –
Through Villages of Ether –
Myself endued Balloon
By but a lip of Metal –
The pier to my Pontoon –

Nor would I be a Poet –
It's finer – own the Ear –
Enamored – impotent – content –
The License to revere,
A privilege so awful
What would the Dower be,
Had I the Art to stun myself
With Bolts of Melody!

In “Vesuvius at Home: the Power of Emily Dickinson,” Rich uses this poem to illustrate how Dickinson must choose to be the typically feminine, passive, receiver of art rather than its creator. Of course, Rich recognizes the tension inherent in this claim; as a poet, Dickinson is an artist no matter what her view on her own art. I push this interpretation further by arguing that the poem represents not only Dickinson’s conflict with her artistic self but her recognition of her poetry as outside any patriarchal concept of artistic expression. She becomes both the artist and the art itself by experiencing creativity in a multidimensional way.

This reading of poem 505 requires an examination of words and phrases beyond meanings governed by traditional poetic interpretation. Due to the first lines of each stanza, “I would not paint – a picture –,” “I would not talk, like Cornets –,” and “Nor would I be a Poet –,” and the fact that they seem to directly deny Dickinson’s artistic identity, we must consider how the poem reforms seemingly straightforward conceptions of art. In this light, these three lines differentiate Dickinson’s speaker from conventional artists who manipulate images, music, and words, respectively. Instead, the speaker experiences her art while producing it, acting as “the One” who encompasses the experience of artistic creation, the origins of creation, and the end products of creation all at once. For instance, the second stanza describes the speaker’s desire not to “talk, like Cornets,” or express art through the physical medium of an instrument; instead she wishes to be “Raised softly to the Ceilings” that are symbolically opened to her during artistic expression. During this elated experience when she floats “Through Villages of Ether” like a “Balloon,” she still remains connected to art, as it acts as the “pier to [her] Pontoon.” This image does not suggest that this connection is a burden; instead, it allows the speaker to reach far beyond the scope of a traditional artist into a world of “Ether”⁹⁷ without being lost in it.

Dickinson continues to describe the speaker's simultaneous position as art and artist, the poem culminating in Dickinson's direct confrontation of her specific brand of art: poetry. Perhaps the most perplexing of the three, the last stanza recalls Dickinson's contempt for supercilious public poets seen in the first section of this chapter, asserting that "It's finer – own the Ear –" instead of to own the words to create poetry. As with poem 280 in which the speaker is "but an Ear," the image indicates that the speaker's position outside of masculine poetic tradition, and the "silence" that arises from that position, allows her to internalize art in a way impossible to a conventional "Poet." The speaker apparently devalues this unique position, naming it "impotent;" and yet, this impotence arises from her claim that she does not have "the Art to stun myself / With Bolts of Melody!" In fact, the speaker possesses the "Bolts of Melody" through the very words of the poem that "stun" readers with their power; she thus claims "Art" for herself. Disguised by a normative female role as the passive artistic receiver, Dickinson's speaker proves that her artistic "silence" does not exist, and that through her identity as both art and artist, she surpasses patriarchal artistic experience.

As a result of these reinterpretations, the poems reveal Dickinson's effective, if painful and difficult, employment of feminine androgyny to escape patriarchal language barriers, and her transcendence from the one-dimensional Genius-Hero to the multidimensional woman artist existing outside of singular definition. "Artist" thus becomes less a title and more a unique identity for Dickinson. In light of Fuller's belief in women's transcendental power, specifically that of the woman artist, Dickinson relays the truths of a gendered society (resulting in poems of strife and conflict) as well as the possibility for undefined, plural yet holistic, artistic identity. The subject of poem 508 demonstrates this well. Dickinson assumes an identity, "The name They dropped upon my face / With water, in the country church," attributed to her as a woman in

patriarchy; at the same time, this identity “Is finished using” her. Instead, when facing the possibility for self-affirmation, she reclaims female identity: “With Will to choose, or to reject, / And I choose, just a Crown –” (poem 508).

The complexities of women’s intellectuality in society and within the individual reveal themselves in Fuller and Dickinson’s writings. Two very different women writers, both struggled against masculine literary and intellectual paradigms, and both yielded different literary works as a result. Fuller successfully theorizes an original concept of feminine androgyny as a way to escape such paradigms while maintaining the unique female potential for transcendence. It has become clear that Fuller’s true feminine androgyny relies on artistic expression; therefore, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* cannot effectively attain it in the essay form. Yet, Fuller’s theory allows for women artists, such as Dickinson, to be recognized as femininely androgynous. With feminine androgyny comes the transcendence of patriarchal limitations, thereby facilitating a new type of feminist artistic liberation. By writing holistic yet plural poems, Dickinson consequently exemplifies a new type of liberation. In this way, my joint analysis of Dickinson and Fuller demonstrates that the two women writers surpass simple definitions of a feminine ideal. Together, they enter into unprecedented feminist discourse.

¹ Fuller, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticism*. Ed. Larry J. Reynolds. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. Print, 36.

² Ibid 21.

³ Idem.

⁴ Transcendentalists viewed their contemporary America society as a let-down from previous ages in which individuality was encouraged over conformity.

⁵ Ibid 9, emphasis original.

⁶ Ibid 14.

⁷ Lakoff, Robin. “Language and Woman’s Place.” *The Women and Language Debate*. Eds. Camille Roman, Suzanne Juhasz, and Crisanne Miller. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994. Print, 282.

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- ⁸ Lacan, Jacques. "The Signification of the Phallus." *The Women and Language Debate*. Eds. Camille Roman, Suzanne Juhasz, and Cristanne Miller. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994. Print, 39.
- ⁹ Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Print, 47.
- ¹⁰ Ibid 48.
- ¹¹ Fuller 19.
- ¹² Fuller 55.
- ¹³ Ibid 64-65.
- ¹⁴ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1978. Print, 112.
- ¹⁵ Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *The Women and Language Debate*. Eds. Camille Roman, Suzanne Juhasz, and Cristanne Miller. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994. Print, 78.
- ¹⁶ Idem, emphasis original.
- ¹⁷ Also refer to poem 167, in which Dickinson contemplates her symbolic separation from the "Mysterious Bard" of poetic tradition.
- ¹⁸ Fuller 68.
- ¹⁹ Idem.
- ²⁰ Fuller 68-69.
- ²¹ "Androgyny." *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Web. 25 January 2011.
- ²² Coleridge quoted in: Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1978. Print, 148.
- ²³ Fuller, Margaret. *The Writings of Margaret Fuller*. Ed. Mason Wade. New York: The Viking Press, 1941. Print, 553.
- ²⁴ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1978. Print, 148.
- ²⁵ Guruswamy, Rosemary Fithian. "Queer Theory and Publication Anxiety: The Case of the Early American Woman Writer." *Early American Literature* 34.1 (1999): 103-112. *JSTOR*. Web. 1/16/11. 106.
- ²⁶ Idem.
- ²⁷ Fuller 23.
- ²⁸ Ibid 69.
- ²⁹ Davis, Cynthia J. "Margaret Fuller, Body and Soul." *American Literature* 71.1 (1999): 31-56. Print, 41.
- ³⁰ Fuller 68.
- ³¹ Ibid 70.
- ³² Ibid 69, 70.
- ³³ Ibid 44.
- ³⁴ Idem.
- ³⁵ Ibid 96.
- ³⁶ Idem.
- ³⁷ Idem.
- ³⁸ Bergland, Renée L. "Urania's Inversion: Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, and the Strange History of Women Scientists in Nineteenth-Century America." *Signs* 34.1 (2008): 75-99. *JSTOR*. Web. 1/16/11. 85. Citations original: Clarke, Edward H. 1873. *Sex in Education; Or, a Fair Chance for the Girls*. Boston: Osgood
- ³⁹ Such as in poem 986, "A narrow Fellow in the Grass."
- ⁴⁰ See poem 636, "The Way I read a Letter's – this –."
- ⁴¹ Ellison, Julie. "'A Crowd of Books to Sigh Over': Fuller's Method." *Woman in the Nineteenth Century: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticism*. Ed. Larry J. Reynolds. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. Print, 265.
- ⁴² Coleridge was a part of the British Romantic movement, the English counterpart to the American transcendental movement.
- ⁴³ Fuller 7.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid 12.
- ⁴⁵ Steele, Jeffrey. "Margaret Fuller's Rhetoric of Transformation." *Woman in the Nineteenth Century: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticism*. Ed. Larry J. Reynolds. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. Print, 296.
- ⁴⁶ Fuller 15.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid 21.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid 51.
- ⁴⁹ Ellison 265.
- ⁵⁰ Fuller 78.
- ⁵¹ Ibid 98.

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- ⁵² Fuller attempted poetry and fiction, yet struggled with it. In her correspondence with friends, she commented that she recognized that her strengths lay more in analytical and historical writing as opposed to artistic expression.
- ⁵³ Diehl, Joanne Feit. "'Ransom in a Voice': Language as Defense in Dickinson's Poetry." *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Suzanne Juhasz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Print, 156.
- ⁵⁴ Miller, Cristianne. "How 'Low Feet' Stagger: Disruptions of Language in Dickinson's Poetry." *Feminist Critics Read Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Suzanne Juhasz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Print, 151.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid 152.
- ⁵⁶ Dickinson quoted in Miller 141.
- ⁵⁷ In fact, a reference guide to "Emily Dickinson's Lexicon" is in process of publication.
- ⁵⁸ "Firmament." *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Web. 27 January 2011.
- ⁵⁹ Hedley, Jane. "Surviving to Speak New Language: Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich." *Hypatia* 7.2 (1992): 40-62. *JSTOR*. Web. 1/22/11. 55.
- ⁶⁰ LeBlanc, Diane C. "Neologism as Oppositional Language in Fae Myenne Ng's 'Bone'." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 54.1 (2000): 11-22. *JSTOR*. Web. 1/22/11, 12.
- ⁶¹ "Splash" is an archaic, obsolete alternative to "splash."
- ⁶² Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Print, 640.
- ⁶³ Ibid 641.
- ⁶⁴ Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Representative Men*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1876. Web, 12.
- ⁶⁵ In Greek mythology, Orpheus represents the ultimate poet, musician, and lover. His one true love, Eurydice, is poisoned and dies. Orpheus travels to the underworld and convinces Hades to release Eurydice, under the condition that he does not look back at her as the travel out of the underworld. As they near the surface, Orpheus looks back at Eurydice and she is lost forever.
- ⁶⁶ Fuller 11.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid 20.
- ⁶⁸ Following this section, Fuller moves to affirm woman as her true transcendental ideal.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid 67.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid 69.
- ⁷¹ Ibid 67.
- ⁷² Interestingly, Woolf also revered Shelley, perhaps for his androgynous qualities.
- ⁷³ Ibid 61.
- ⁷⁴ "Warmth," "emotion," and "beauty" are all qualities that separate artistic expression from analytical intelligence.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid 102.
- ⁷⁶ Idem.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid 103.
- ⁷⁸ "Nin, Anaïs. "The Diary." *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*. Eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: Norton, 2007. Print, 148.
- ⁷⁹ Idem.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid 149.
- ⁸¹ Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *The Women and Language Debate*. Eds. Camille Roman, Suzanne Juhasz, and Cristianne Miller. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994. Print, 78.
- ⁸² Ibid 79.
- ⁸³ Kristeva, Julia. "Is there a Feminine Genius?" *Critical Inquiry* 30.3 (2004): 493-504. *JSTOR*. Web. 1/25/11.
- ⁸⁴ Ettinger, Bracha. "Weaving a Woman Artist with-in the Matrixial Encounter-Event." *Theory, Culture and Society* 21.69 (2004): 69-93. Print, 76.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid 74, emphasis original.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid 77, emphasis original.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid 90.
- ⁸⁸ This passage highly resembles moments in Emerson and Thoreau's writing. In "Nature," Emerson reveals a moment of realization in which he calls himself a "transparent eyeball." In the final pages of *Walden*, Thoreau writes an almost psychedelic moment of self-comprehension and new perspective. Fuller's passage here takes part of typically transcendental effervescence.
- ⁸⁹ Fuller 104.
- ⁹⁰ Idem.
- ⁹¹ Rich's view rests in the externalization of poetic power for woman poets due to the tension between the

masculine/feminine poet/Muse relationship. See poem 273, “He put the Belt around my life –.”

⁹² Gilbert and Gubar 627.

⁹³ Idem.

⁹⁴ Ibid 584.

⁹⁵ Ibid 627.

⁹⁶ Ibid 628.

⁹⁷ “Ether” was believed to be a fifth element, a substance composing all heavenly bodies.

CONCLUSION

The many layers of feminist thought in Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* create a complex, original concept of the ideal woman. Fuller's unique combination of transcendental tenets, enlightened feminist essentialism, and glorification of female potential result in one core theory: that women possess unequalled power, and that women's liberation will transcend the limitations of human existence. This thesis has endeavored to determine if Emily Dickinson's poems symbolically fulfill this ideal. Through the synthesis of Fuller's critical theories, relevant feminist concepts, and Dickinson's poetry, a complicated answer to this question has emerged.

Due to contemporary feminism's tendency to resist any essentializing or generalizing statements about female nature, Fuller's brand of feminist optimism can often be misconstrued. Many critics acknowledge the groundbreaking concepts of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* for its time period, applaud Fuller's intelligence and courage, but relegate her to past feminist context. Fuller often symbolizes the beginnings of modern American feminism, but not its present or future. Through this thesis, I have attempted to challenge these assumptions by providing a new perspective on *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* through my readings of Fuller and Dickinson's writings. By extracting the subtleties of Fuller's arguments and Dickinson's poems in context of Fuller's ideal transcendental woman, I have demonstrated that Fuller does not necessarily rely only on a restrictive characterization of women. Instead, her theories contain an unprecedented, complex optimism that does not overlook the difficulties of female experience. Such an outlook is often missing from modern feminism.

While Dickinson's poems, unlike Fuller's essay, undoubtedly remain highly studied and venerated, her poems also benefit greatly from a new outlook. Granted, analyzing Dickinson through a feminist lens through has become somewhat commonplace; however, my approach to the poems, employing Fuller as a critical perspective, allows for new meaning in the poems to emerge. Fuller's stratified idealism highlights the positivity in many poems that other feminist critics have branded as inherently reflecting patriarchy's harsh influence on the woman poet. These more negative qualities in the poems are certainly present; nonetheless, an examination based on Fuller's theories allows for the coexistence of anxiety and brightness, morbidity and optimism, within a feminist conception of transcendence.

After my exploration of the social, sexual, and intellectual positions of women in each of the chapters, the question of Dickinson's embodiment of Fuller's ideals remains. The complexities of the argument show that a straightforward answer cannot exist, thereby reflecting that applying Fuller's critical theories to Dickinson's poems cannot exist without Dickinson's poems influencing Fuller's theories. A complicated exchange between theory and poetry thus arises in which Fuller's and Dickinson's works continuously impart meaning on each other. Due to this phenomenon, I argue that Dickinson does in fact symbolize Fuller's transcendental ideal, but not in such simple terms. Not only do the poems demonstrate many of Fuller's theories, they also enhance, deviate from, and create new meanings within those theories. Conversely, a more holistic comprehension of Dickinson's poems, and Dickinson herself, grows out of a perspective based in Fuller's ideas. The inconclusive and indefinite results of the comparison thus mirror Fuller and Dickinson's conception of female existence. Remaining holistic "within plural circumstances," a concept discussed in the third chapter, becomes vital to the thesis as a whole; Dickinson is holistic and plural, pushing the contours of Fuller's image of the ideal woman, and

therefore becoming that ideal. Transcendentalism's emphasis on communion with nature and the divine while simultaneously maintaining self-reliance further explicates how Dickinson and Fuller's works' reciprocal dialogue demonstrates transcendence; recognition of Dickinson's transcendental potential would not exist without Fuller's definition of it, and vice versa. Simply put, Dickinson's poems embody Fuller's feminine ideal, even those aspects of it that she did not foresee.

As a result of these conclusions, even more questions arise. What is the significance of these findings? How do they affect modern-day literature and art? Furthermore, what do they suggest about feminism, artistic expression, and gendered society today? As I have shown, the last fifty years of feminist criticism has analyzed Dickinson's poems in many different ways. Yet Dickinson too often becomes the victimized image of patriarchal society, the woman writer whose poetic voice operates as a result of burdens, limitations, and anxieties. This thesis discovers a new way of perceiving Dickinson's poems that does not necessitate this type of analysis; Fuller's perspective allows for the effective fusion of Dickinson's burdened, imprisoned self with her free, poetic self without focusing on the differences between the two. Viewed in this way, Dickinson's poetry demonstrates the incredible possibilities now open for feminist interpretations of literature and other art forms. Feminist critics often continue to employ the same debilitating binaries, standards of hierarchy, and masculine devices that they try to work against. Fuller's concept of the ideal transcendental woman, along with Dickinson's expansion of this concept, indicates a liberating point of view available for feminist literary critics. In this way, other woman artists and writers, if analyzed similarly, can further enlarge the breadth of this perspective, creating new and different ways of regarding female literature and art.

In addition to the potential impact that this perspective has on the artistic world, gendered society today also receives new meaning. My investigation of Fuller and Dickinson suggests that all women innately possess the ability to transcend patriarchal oppression, thus demonstrating that Fuller's feminist concepts remain relevant and significant for women in the twenty first century. Though her essentializing theories may seem out of date in the complex world of gender and sex that we live in today, the theories are intrinsically based not in sexual difference, but in redefinition of identity. The "feminine ideal," transcending patriarchal and human limitations, is no longer reserved for women only. It instead suggests a reclamation of identity, an acceptance of self, and the effective fusion of these attributes in order to reach individual potential. In place of focusing on what is "natural" or what is socially-constructed within the individual, it is important to retrieve, accept, and develop aspects of identity to reach "transcendence." Furthermore, this "transcendence" is not limited to the specific definitions of Emerson, Fuller, and the other nineteenth century thinkers; a redefinition of "transcendence" for twenty first-century society indicates the ability to overcome the multifaceted restrictions of hierarchical, gendered society in order to reach individual harmony.

Of course, these possibilities are far from accomplished. Perhaps a new transcendent society is inherently paradoxical and impossible to achieve. Nonetheless, literature and other art forms provide outlets for subversive self-expression as a way of nearing transcendental potential. Emily Dickinson, living reclusively and unobtrusively in patriarchal society, not only reached her potential but ensured her poetic immortality. Learning from such artists and recognizing their genius is perhaps the first, if small, step towards the new transcendence.

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