

THE TRANSCENDENTALIST'S MIND AND BODY: THE ROLE OF ILLNESS IN  
MARGARET FULLER'S WRITING

by

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## DEDICATION

To my loving parents, Jan and Bill, who have supported me through undergraduate, graduate school, and beyond. Thank you for putting up with my stress-filled phone calls and always inspiring me (at least half of this degree should go to you both). I love you.

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## ABSTRACT

Margaret Fuller's work is typically known for its influence on the American feminist movement between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* fostered a new way of looking at men and women as dual souls encompassing both male and female traits. While scholars recognize and draw attention to Margaret Fuller's mental and physical illness, few scholars directly analyze her works through the lens of her illness. My thesis analyzes her writing by considering her illness (both physical and mental) in order to understand how it affected her writing. Scholars such as Jeffrey Steele, Cynthia Davis, Rachel Blumenthal, and Deborah Manson provided invaluable analysis of Fuller's writing by considering her illness and the treatment of it through mesmerism. In my study, I analyze Fuller's rhetorical choice of specific words relating to sadness, the mind, and the body. I conclude that Fuller's revisions to "The Great Lawsuit," which became the expanded *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, depict a more dismal view of the lot of woman due to the higher frequency of melancholic/negative words. Using a more theoretical approach, I also analyze Fuller's short, unfinished work "Autobiographical Romance" through Sigmund Freud's theory of trauma and repetition, Jacques Lacan's mirror stage, and Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. I argue that she encountered the "Real" in remembering the corpse of her sister and repeating her childhood trauma through the act of writing. The combination of a historical/biographical analysis, a close-reading rhetorical analysis, and theoretical

analysis results in a well-rounded study of Fuller's life, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, and "Autobiographical Romance."

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## INTRODUCTION

*The lot of Woman is sad. She is constituted to expect and need a happiness that cannot exist on earth. She must stifle such aspirations within her secret heart, and fit herself, as well as she can, for a life of resignations and consolations* (Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, 93).

How did the American Transcendentalists reconcile their views of spiritual development with the realities of nineteenth century physical and mental illness? Margaret Fuller's vital role in the American Transcendentalist movement influenced both her writings and her health. In a dissertation from 1908, Harold Clarke Goddard writes that the American Transcendentalists wished to achieve "moral perfection" (194). However, this idea is closely linked with the body as Cynthia Davis suggests in a more recent article "Margaret Fuller: Body and Soul." Davis writes, "In Emerson's etiology, poor health arises directly from the body's insubordination to the soul" (33). She argues that although Emerson did not place importance on the body, "Fuller sought to extend transcendence to even the weak in body, and to do so without repudiating the flesh as a valid ground for inspiration" (Davis 49). According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Fuller's friend and contemporary in the American Transcendentalist movement, Fuller was never well. He writes that Fuller "was all her lifetime the victim of disease and pain. She read and wrote in bed, and believed that she could understand anything better when she was ill" (*Fuller in Her Own Time* 148). Along with Fuller's physical illness that included debilitating headaches, she classifies some of her emotional crises as bouts of "sadness

and morbidity,” which she began experiencing as a child (Von Mehren 73). After the death of Fuller’s father, she began to experience more physical ailments than were present during her childhood. In my thesis, I argue that Fuller’s mental and physical illness, which began in childhood and grew relatively worse throughout her adulthood, impacted her life and writing, particularly her works *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and “Autobiographical Romance.” I also consider the influence of Fuller’s mental and physical health on her Transcendentalist beliefs and how Fuller’s focus on the body ran counterintuitive to Transcendental idealism.

In my first chapter, I explore Fuller’s physical and mental illness in relation to historical and medical accounts of women’s illness in the nineteenth century. I identify Fuller’s illness through the use of contemporary accounts by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, and others. Although I do not diagnose Fuller with a particular mental illness, I choose to analyze Fuller’s writings and life through a lens of mental unrest. Her physical illness as well as her dark moods are well-documented by her friends and family and assist me in pinpointing key moments that Fuller experienced the greatest pain. I argue that this pain influenced her writing and created a more melancholic tone in her texts. Although Fuller believed that pain heightened her mental powers and gave her insight, she chose to treat her illness with mesmerism, a controversial form of nineteenth century hypnosis. For a Transcendentalist, Fuller possessed an unusual focus on the body and believed in the union of “body and soul.” Without illness (and the treatment of said illness), Fuller may have been a decidedly different author. However, trying to define women’s physical illness in the nineteenth century is a difficult task. While Fuller’s ill health could easily fall into the category of women’s nervous

conditions of the nineteenth century, her own preoccupation and written accounts of illness present a need for a more nuanced reading. My first chapter is, therefore, a historical and biographical account of Fuller's health and her writings on health.

In my second chapter, I analyze *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* specifically through a two-part methodology. As the first part of this methodology, I perform a close-reading of *Woman* using contemporary accounts, biographer's descriptions of Fuller's physical and mental illness, and analysis by other scholars including Cynthia J. Davis, Deborah Manson, and Rachel A. Blumenthal, who have written excellent articles regarding Fuller's mental and physical health. The second part of my methodology involves looking specifically at the melancholic/negative words related to sadness, the body, and illness that Fuller added to *Woman* when expanding it from "The Great Lawsuit." While "Lawsuit" promotes reform and hope for women and men, Fuller's added material to *Woman* implies a stark contrast relating to women's bleak place in the world. I conclude that Fuller's additions created a much more somber tone than her original article. According to biographers, Fuller experienced periods of depression in the same year that she wrote *Summer on the Lakes* and *Woman*. In both of these works, Fuller addresses animal magnetism, the state of racism and sexism in America, and the role of women in a man's world. Fuller writes, "But not only is man vain and fond of power, but the same want of development, which thus affects him morally, prevents his intellectually discerning the destiny of woman" (*Woman* 24). Fuller also visited Sing Sing prison while revising *Woman*. The conditions of the female prisoners affected her deeply. In *Woman*, Fuller concerned herself with how men viewed women, how women

viewed marriage, and the negative effects women faced as a result of these views. She continues this theme later in the work by stating:

The lot of Woman is sad. She is constituted to expect and need a happiness that cannot exist on earth. She must stifle such aspirations within her secret heart, and fit herself, as well as she can, for a life of resignations and consolations. (*Woman* 93)

This passage does not exist in her original article “Lawsuit.” Since Fuller adds that “the lot of Woman is sad,” I determine that she became more preoccupied with depressive or sad thoughts while revising and expanding “Lawsuit” and this seeped into her writing. Even if the more melancholic words are added unconsciously, Fuller’s beliefs about the lot of woman turned more cynical and changed the nature of *Woman*. I analyze the two works by considering the changes in her health, which Reynolds remarks on by saying that Fuller experienced more physical suffering after taking a job as a journalist in New York between the publication of the article and the revision and expansion of her work (26). The changes from article to book are also analyzed by Marie Urbanski in *Margaret Fuller’s Woman in the Nineteenth Century: A Literary Study of Form and Content, of Sources and Influence*. Urbanski, like Reynolds, discusses the change in audience but also the change in tone. Urbanski claims, “Fuller expressed a hope and an optimism in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* that events caused her to modify in her later writing” (124). However, Fuller’s added language of the “lot of Woman is sad” shows that perhaps Fuller’s mindset was not as “optimistic” as Urbanski identifies. Fuller’s own experiences with illness led her to write in a way that considered the sad lot of other women and the negative effects that lot had on their lives.

In my final chapter, I analyze Fuller's "Autobiographical Romance" using Sigmund Freud's theory of trauma and repetition, Jacques Lacan's mirror stage, and Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. In analyzing "Autobiographical Romance," I move from *Woman* in which Fuller relates the experiences of multiple women to an autobiographical work which Fuller wrote about herself specifically. I consider how Fuller viewed herself and her illness in relation to her childhood, and the long-lasting impact illness (and her preoccupation with it) had on her adult life and writings. "Autobiographical Romance" depicts the beginning of Fuller's illness and her experiences with trauma associated with her sister's death and her father's strict upbringing. Because of the multiple versions that Fuller wrote about her life, I engage with the opposing views presented by Fuller's autobiographical texts of the Miranda Fable in *Woman* and "Autobiographical Romance" by including other scholarly works such as Elaine Showalter's *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* and Phyllis McBride's "In Her Father's Library: Margaret Fuller and the Making of the American Miranda." While Fuller chooses to discuss both of her parents in "Autobiographical Romance," she leaves her mother out entirely in *Woman*. Regarding the former, Chevigny argues, "The autobiographical romance goes on to chart the effects of this early loneliness and rigor. In describing the two worlds of her divided self (her father's books and her mother's flowers), she all but names them masculine and feminine" (85). The latter work of *Woman*, however, separates Fuller entirely from her mother by denying her mother's existence. Fuller describes her mother's garden in "Autobiographical Romance" but she focuses the most on her father's study and teaching. She writes that her childhood studies "wasted my constitution, and will bring me, —even though I have learned to understand

and regulate my now morbid temperament,—to a premature grave” (“Autobiographical Romance” 145). With the assistance of her openness about her physical and mental health in “Autobiographical Romance” and her exploration of her childhood memories, I argue that she encountered the “Real” in remembering the corpse of her sister and repeating her childhood trauma through writing. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe the woman author: “Her battle, however, is not against her (male) precursor’s reading of the world but against his reading of *her*. In order to define herself as an author she must define the terms of her socialization” (49). Although the nightmares Fuller experienced as a child and an adult wreaked havoc on her mental health, Fuller wrote a narrative of self that subverted and rebelled against others’ reading of her.

## CHAPTER ONE: PAIN OF BODY AND MIND: FULLER'S HISTORY, LIFE, AND BELIEFS

Margaret Fuller's work is typically known for its influence on the American feminist movement between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* fostered a new way of looking at men and women as dual souls encompassing both male and female traits. However, even with her effect on women's equality of mind and body, few people acknowledge a key part of her life: her illness and its relationship to her identity and writing. Most scholars either gloss over the facts of her illness or address it slightly, but a few scholars<sup>1</sup> consider her illness and provide a foundation on which to expand my own study. In this first chapter, I explore three main ideas: women's health in the nineteenth century and its relation to gender and equity, Fuller's own health and her view of pain as a progenitor of intellectual and spiritual insight, and the effects of mesmerism on Fuller's writing and Transcendentalist beliefs. I conclude from this analysis of her life that her illness was a constant presence and a factor in her writing. By showing this presence, I set a foundation for the rest of my thesis, specifically my second chapter in which I analyze Fuller's expansion of "The Great Lawsuit" to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. In this chapter, I begin by examining her illness from childhood to adulthood and end by specifically considering the dates between when she first published her *Dial* article "The Great Lawsuit: Man

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<sup>1</sup> Cynthia Davis, Rachel A. Blumenthal, Jeffrey Steele, and Deborah Manson in particular.

versus Men. Woman versus Women" in 1843 and when she published the expanded version in the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in 1845. Although Fuller's illness is often described using terms typical of women's ill health in the nineteenth century, she often subverts these definitions and explores how illness stimulates her writing.

Margaret Fuller's physical illness is well-documented by both herself and her contemporaries. The evidence provided allows me to identify the presence of illness and its impact on her life. Beginning at an early age, Fuller was educated by her father Timothy Fuller, and Fuller believed that her illness began in her childhood because of her rigorous education. Her education was peculiar since she was educated in the nineteenth century not as a daughter but as a son. Fuller writes in "Autobiographical Romance" that her father "hoped to make me the heir of all he knew" (145). However, she critiques her early education and blames her father for her "premature development of the brain" that "prevented the harmonious development of [her] growth, while, later, [her studies] induced continual headache, weakness and nervous affections, of all kinds" (145). In a letter to her friend, Anna Barker Ward, Fuller mentions her childhood and her "constant bodily sufferings" and "powerful imagination" (*Letters 1842-44* 164-65). William Henry Channing in her *Memoir* remarks of the "sad feeling" she had because of her father's strict upbringing (*Fuller in Her Own Time* 119). Biographer Charles Capper suggests that Fuller's anxiety and ill health are linked not only to her unique education but also to the fact that her father was her educator.

Caroline Healey Dall, who knew Margaret Fuller for only three years, commented on Fuller and her father's relationship in her book *Margaret and Her Friends*. Dall repeats a conversation with Mrs. Spalding who knew Fuller as child:

She said that Wm. C. Todd [...] went to Cambridge to discuss some matter of importance with her father. Margaret sat apparently occupied with a book open on her knee. At some moment, Mr Fuller said ‘Margaret what have you to say about this?’ She lifted her eyes for a moment and gave him an answer, good, full of common sense, but such as many people might have given. ‘Is that the best that you can say?’ returned her father. She started, laid down her book, and instantly recast her thought, giving the same idea but a most eloquent statement! (*Fuller in Her Own Time* 199).

From this event that took place when Fuller was fourteen, it is apparent that her father enforced a strict, intellectual regimen for his daughter. Rather than accepting an ordinary but adequate answer, Fuller’s father required deeper comprehension and skill. Fuller’s strict upbringing influenced her opinions about her headaches and “nervous affections,” mimicking similar diagnoses given to other nineteenth century women deemed “overeducated” by physicians. Since women’s poor health and nervousness were prevalent symptoms in the nineteenth century patriarchal society, Fuller’s self-evaluation presents concerns particularly in the context of female education.

### **Nineteenth Century Women’s Health in America**

Due to the growing attention paid to women’s health issues in the nineteenth century, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg state in “The Female Animal” that “Many physicians were convinced that education was a major factor in bringing about [women’s physical] deterioration, especially education during puberty and adolescence” (115). Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg point out the changing role of women in the nineteenth century and how they “began to question[...]their constricted

place in society” (112). Because of this questioning, men “employed medical and biological arguments to rationalize traditional sex roles” (112). The medical arguments against women’s education socially conditioned women to experience illness and show that “American society was peculiarly equipped to encourage sickness” (Herndl 23). The medical argument against education is evident in Dr. Thomas Laycock’s “A Treatise on the Nervous Diseases of Women” written in 1840. Laycock argues, “The relations of hysteria to the present modes of education are of great importance. The anxiety to render a young lady accomplished, at all hazards, has originated a system of forced mental training, which greatly increases the irritability of the brain” (189). Hysteria, in this case, is grouped in the “nervousness” disease discussed by Diane Price Herndl in *Invalid Women*. Herndl states that “women were described as ‘hysteric’ and the blame for the disease was placed on their sexual organs” (117). Although the physician Laycock is referring to mental abilities (or disabilities as the case may be), he presents a similar argument that education leads to illness in women. John Conolly addresses this idea in *The Cyclopaedia of Practical Medicine* published in 1833. Conolly presents a more positive view of women’s education which should not be “solely directed to securing an advantageous establishment to young females” (185). However, he still blames women’s overeducation since hysteria “chiefly affects women, or men of a peculiar temperament, or whose constitutions have become enfeebled by intemperance, or by excessive study...” (186). Jenny Bourne Taylor and Susan Shuttleworth, editors of *Embodying Selves* in which this excerpt appears, argue that although some of the above authors had a more positive view of women and their plight, the authors still held to “their prior belief that women were in fact prisoners of their own body” (167). This view of education and

women's bodies reinforces the ideas that women should not be too educated due to the risk of hysteria and illness, which is indicative of Fuller's own views about her education.

Although Fuller might have partially agreed with the diagnosis of the overeducated, nervous woman, Fuller's critique of her education was also influenced by other education activists. Frances Wright and Lydia Sigourney argued for girls to be taught exercise in their education since girls were typically encouraged to sit quietly and be inactive. According to sports historian, Roberta Parks, Sigourney "objected to allowing fashion to impair health and advocated a balance between what she called the modern penchant for neglecting the body and making it a slave to the mind and the Spartan example of excessive concern for the physical" ("Embodied Selves" 1519). Sigourney believed in an equal balance of the two. Fuller also comments in "Autobiographical Romance" that "I do wish that I had read no books at all till later, — that I had lived with toys, and played in the open air" (155). When she wrote this, the concern for girls' health was rising among her contemporaries and it was influencing her own writings as well. Fuller's experiences with other Transcendentalist educations, who condemned the current state of education and pushed for bodily health and exercise, also indicate an effect on her beliefs. Transcendentalists' ideology influenced their views on the human body, which Park notes, "The Transcendentalists were interested, above all, in man's 'spiritual' nature. However, since the physical body provided the home for the spiritual body, it merited its own attention and care" ("Attitudes" 37). Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and William Henry Channing all had an interest in physical exercise and health to promote "each individual's total development" which can also be "attained through man's harmonious relationship with nature" (Park "Attitudes"

39, 43). Another Transcendentalist, educator Bronson Alcott, experimented with the integration of physical and mental exercise in the school he founded. Fuller taught at this school for a few months in 1836, which may have also influenced how she viewed her education when writing “Autobiographical Romance.” Park states that for the Transcendentalists “the body existed for the highest development of the soul” (43) and indicates that Fuller had the same belief about the mind, body, and soul (49).

Cynthia J. Davis, however, disagrees that Fuller’s beliefs about the body were completely similar to her contemporaries’ beliefs. Davis explores the chronic illnesses of Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller in the article “Margaret Fuller: Body and Soul.” Even though all three authors suffered from pain and disease, their differing views on the relationship of the soul to the body, especially in regards to transcendence, impacted how they treated and wrote about their illness. Davis claims that “Fuller’s struggle for transcendence over pain helps us to locate the place of the physical within Transcendental metaphysics” (32). Davis first examines Emerson’s tuberculosis in relation to his Transcendentalist writings: “In Emerson’s etiology, poor health arises directly from the body’s insubordination to the soul” (33). The body and soul are separate entities.

However, Thoreau’s opinion differs from Emerson’s. Davis argues that, like Fuller, Thoreau chooses to see the intellectual advantages associated with physical suffering, but he believes that Nature could heal the body (Davis 35). Davis writes, “For Thoreau, then, the body can be perfected, while for Emerson it can at best be ignored, shrugged off” (36). Whereas scholars might dispute Davis’ claim that Thoreau believed the body could be perfected, Davis clearly shows that Fuller’s beliefs about the body differ from other Transcendentalists’ views. Fuller focuses on the union of body and soul,

while Emerson and Thoreau focus on the soul without much consideration of the body. Davis theorizes that Fuller's "celebration of nature" is an argument against a "gendered assumption that a woman's nature is limited and essentially different from a man's" (41-42). Although Fuller connects her own illness to being a woman, she also "links the development of her mental powers to physical suffering" (42). Whereas Emerson argues against placing emphasis on the body, Fuller views her bodily suffering as a means of transcendence (43).

Although Fuller may have regretted her strict education, she presents a different view of her education in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* with her "Miranda fable" which scholars<sup>2</sup> believe to be an autobiographical portion of her work. Although illness may have been a result of Fuller's childhood studies, Fuller praises her father's education in *Woman*. "Her father was a man who cherished no sentimental reverence for woman, but a firm belief in the equality of the sexes" (21). Miranda had a "dignified self-dependence" and "her mind was often the leading one, always effective" (21). In this section of *Woman*, Fuller makes no mention of physical or mental health being affected by her education. Instead, she shows how Miranda's education gave her a strong intellect, which allowed her to enter intellectual conversations with men and be admired by them. While Fuller does not choose to focus on illness in this autobiographical section of *Woman*, illness is a part of the text. Fuller states, "Then women of genius, even more than men, are likely to be enslaved by impassioned sensibility. The world repels them more rudely, and they are of weaker bodily frame" (61). Fuller views women as emotional and

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<sup>2</sup>Chevigny, Bell Gale. "Daughters Writing: Toward a Theory of Women's Biography." McBride, Phyllis. "In Her Father's Library: Margaret Fuller and the Making of the American Miranda."

bodily beings and men as intellectual beings. Thus, she believes that women's intellectual pursuits, like Fuller's own, could lead to bodily illness as was the common belief in the nineteenth century.

### **Fuller's Physical and Emotional Pain**

Fuller's illness was a real condition despite the tendency for doctors and others to over diagnose women's illness in the nineteenth century. In Joel Myerson's introduction to *Fuller in Her Own Time*, he writes that "Fuller had physical ailments that had an effect on how others saw her. Virtually everyone who met her commented on her spinal curvature" (xxiii). She stayed in bed<sup>3</sup> for days at a time and many of her friends and acquaintances remarked on her illness. Fuller herself addresses it in a letter to Elizabeth Palmer Peabody when she writes of a "pain in the side or spine" that she had been experiencing (*Letters 1842-44* 253). Her spinal curvature was only one illness of many. Fuller suffered fatigue and headaches for much of her life; however, her illness increased in severity after her father's death in 1835 (when she was twenty-five), which Charles Capper and Jeffrey Steele both identify as significant. In *An American Romantic Life: The Private Years*, Capper explains that the "sudden death of her father marked a dark turning point in Fuller's life[...] It may have even contributed to the dramatic change in her physical health" (160). Capper also notes:

Robust boasts like the one she made four months before [her father's] death that she rode 'twenty two miles on horseback without any fatigue' abruptly disappear from her correspondence, replaced by constant complaints of illnesses and

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<sup>3</sup> Noted by Mary Moody Emerson, "She laid all the day and eve. on sofa" (*Time* 110); and Ralph Waldo Emerson, "[Fuller] read and wrote in bed" (*Time* 148).

chronic head and back pains that would continue for most of the rest of her life.

(160)

After Timothy Fuller's death, Margaret Fuller worked as a teacher to support her family. She taught for a few months at Bronson Alcott's school in Boston before taking a position in 1837 at the Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island founded by Hiram Fuller (no relation to Fuller). Fuller struggled with both the grief of her father's death and the responsibility associated with providing for her family.

Illness influenced not only her body but also her interactions with other people. In a letter copied by her student Mary Ware Allen, Margaret Fuller addresses her students at Greene Street School:

I often regret that you have not a teacher who has more heart, more health, more energy to spend upon you than I have[...]But my duties in life are at present so many, and my health so precarious, that I dare not be *generous* lest I should thus be unable to be *just*, dare not indulge my feelings lest I fail to discharge my duties (Time 15).

Fuller's illness created a dissonance in her life. While in many ways Fuller regarded her illness as a positive thing, which I will address in greater detail in the following pages, she also experienced the negative effects. Remarks on Fuller's ill health are echoed by another student of the Greene Street School, Ann Brown, who writes, "When she first commenced teaching us, her health was so very bad, that she feared she must soon die" (Time 24). These two statements put together present a picture of Fuller's bodily circumstances while teaching. Unlike her journal comments seven years later in which she described her improved thinking due to pain, her poor health at this time severely

affected her life<sup>4</sup>. The shift in thinking may have been due to her experimentation with mesmerism, the passing of years since her father's death and her fresh grief, and her later friendships with other Transcendentalists.

While Fuller is often described by others as inspirational, generous, and witty with her “profuse and racy humor” (*Time* 67, 159), Fuller did have a visible melancholic side. Another one of Fuller’s students at the Greene Street School wrote to a friend that Fuller “puts forth the effort, and her grief is hidden in her heart” (*Time* 34). William Ellery Channing the Younger also remarks on this grief and writes that Fuller portrayed “world-renowned sorrow” with her “Genius” and “private grief” (*Time* 113). Another acquaintance, Elizabeth Hoar, wrote of everything that Fuller had “overcome” in her life: “Her heart is helpfully sympathizing with all striving souls. And she has overcome so much extreme physical and mental pain, and such disappointments of external fortune...” (*Time* 51). Fuller endeavored to overcome the pain but at times was unsuccessful. Fuller comments on her sadness in a letter to Anna Barker Ward in 1843. “It is inevitable that I should suffer a good deal of sadness[...]I do never doubt the music of the universe amid seeming death or discord. But my spirits get tired out, and my mind refuses to sustain me at times” (*Letters 1842-44* 164). The “music of the universe” shows her connections to herself and the natural world. In all the things, she was seeking to transcend the “death or discord” but her mental health did not always allow this. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes that her “life concentrated itself on certain happy days, happy hours, happy moments. The rest was void” (*Time* 147). Fuller’s intertwined mental illness and physical illness is also

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, this is also when Fuller first tried animal magnetism/mesmerism (Manson 305).

noted by Capper, “But even if her illnesses were entirely physical, the recurrent states of depression into which she invariably plunged for many years...suggest something more than just a bodily problem” (160). The recurring theme of sadness in both her letters and remarks by contemporaries indicates that she suffered from depression as well as physical illness, a combination which influenced her belief system.

Fuller’s communication with people other than friends and families show the effects of her poor physical health on her life and work in 1843 (during the time she was writing and editing “The Great Lawsuit”). In a letter to Abigail Allyn Francis regarding teaching a class for two days a week, Fuller replies, “But I could not give to so small a class, on any terms they would be likely to accept, two days from the week. For my health is so unstable, and I am so much obliged to guard against fatigue, that to teach two half days would, with me, be giving two whole days” (*Letters 1842-44* 162). This communication occurred when Fuller was giving her “Conversations” in Boston. Similar to Fuller’s letter to her Greene Street class, Fuller regrets not being able to give more time and energy to teaching. Despite the fact that Fuller’s health was “unstable,” she continued her lectures. Margaret Fuller’s brother, Richard Frederick Fuller, wrote of this time:

Her literary efforts, especially the “Conversations” which she conducted in Boston, produced almost invariably torturing headaches in which her nervous agony was so great that she could not always refrain from screaming; yet she could not remit these efforts without giving up a home for Mother and me, and she bravely endured them. (*Time* 190)

In almost all that Fuller accomplished as part of her writing, traveling, and lecturing, she

experienced excruciating pain of body and mind. Yet as her brother states, “She bravely endured them.” Although Fuller was often in agonizing pain, she forced herself to continue her intellectual pursuits. Since her father’s death, Fuller was the sole supporter of family still living at home. In a letter to an unknown recipient, Fuller writes, “The tax on my mind is such, and I am so unwell, that I can scarcely keep up the spring of my spirits, and sometimes fear that I cannot go through the engagements of winter. But I have never stopped fulfilling what I have undertaken, I hope that I shall not be compelled to now” (*Letters 1842-44* 167). Fuller’s letter is probably referring to her last series of Conversations in Boston. Her pain at this point was affecting her physical health as well as her mental health.

Fuller was experiencing excruciating headaches during her Conversations and it affected her lecture topics as well as her Transcendentalist ideology. This is evident in a description by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody who attended Fuller’s lectures. Peabody writes:

The Idea of Perfection in a world of Imperfection must expose the one who had it to pain. But this pain was of value—it quickened thought and feeling to deeper and higher discoveries [...] She said besides that she did not love *pain*—nor should it ever be *coaxed*—but always triumphed over [...] Those who had not suffered had not *lived as yet*. (*Time* 45)

When taken in context of Fuller’s own health during this time, Peabody’s recount of this Conversation is noteworthy. Fuller was experiencing headaches that made her scream in pain; yet, she lectures on the value of pain. Fuller lived in a social climate that both maintained and exploited illness in women; however, women subverted illness for their own gains to take agency over their own bodies (Herndl). In saying that “those who had

not suffered had not *lived as yet*,” Fuller claims that pain brought her into full communion with life.

For the most part, Fuller thought positively about her physical illness. Fuller writes in her 1844 journal, “My head aches today, I can scarce do anything. Yet have been reading the books of Confucius with great edification. It seems to me my mind acts in a different way when I have this heat and pressure on the top of the head from what it does at other times” (“Margaret Fuller’s Journal” 92). Although Fuller could not complete physical tasks, she read books. Reminiscent of the quote by Emerson about Fuller’s experiences with pain, Fuller also values pain because “it quickened thought and feeling to deeper and higher discoveries.” While scholars such as Harold Goddard in 1908 state that the American Transcendentalists wished to achieve “moral perfection” (194), Transcendentalists lived in a “world of imperfection.” Fuller acknowledges this and Jeffrey Steele writes, “She was too deeply embedded in material existence that included frequent migraine headaches and other physical ailments, as well as the succession of traumatic personal losses” (*Transfiguring America* 99). Although Transcendentalists want to transcend an earthly existence, Fuller’s “spiritual ecstasy and pain are inextricably blended, although in varying proportions” (Steele 99). Her views of pain are evident in the quote by Peabody regarding Fuller’s Boston Conversations and the “Idea of Perfection in a world of Imperfection.” Pain is part of the human condition and should be “triumphed over” or transcended (*Time* 45). Paul Boller writes in *American Transcendentalism* that the Transcendentalists had one point in common: “there was a divine energy immanent in nature and in man, giving them meaning, purpose, and

direction" (66). For Fuller, part of this energy was the pain she experienced which had value and could even assist her intellectual pursuits.

### **Fuller and Mesmerism as a Treatment**

Although Fuller believed that her pain was valuable, she did seek out ways to treat her physical illness through mesmerism (also known as animal magnetism, spiritualism, or somnambulism) beginning in 1837 when she was a teacher at the Greene Street School. Mesmerism developed from the theories of German physician Franz Anton Mesmer in the late 1700s. In 1836 Charles Poyen visited New England to lecture on the power of mesmerism and published a book on the subject in 1837. Poyen describes somnambulism or mesmerism as "Suspension, more or less complete, of the external sensibility; intimate connexion [*sic*] with the magnetizer and with no other one; clairvoyance, or the faculty of seeing through various parts of the body, the eyes remaining closed" (63). People would be magnetized or put into a trance by the magnetizer. The magnetized could then communicate with the spirit world while the magnetizer retained control. The medical aspect of this method comes into effect because of "faculty for seizing the symptoms of diseases and prescribing the proper remedies for them" while being magnetized (Poyen 63). Poyen continues by describing a woman with both a pain in her back and rheumatism. After being magnetized, she slept soundly and performed her housework. Poyen also relates that she experienced somnambulism because on the third treatment she would only respond to the magnetizer and she remembered nothing when she awoke. Poyen advocates that only trained doctors should perform magnetism but acknowledges a mother who magnetized her children for their

health (59). According to Poyen, animal magnetism was “a branch of science highly important, in my mind, to psychology as well as physiology and medicine” (55). Samuel Coale, a present-day scholar in mesmerism and Nathaniel Hawthorne, remarks that in 1836 Elizabeth Palmer Peabody heard one of Poyen’s lectures in New England (“The Romance of Mesmerism” 275). As a friend of Peabody, Fuller’s interest in mesmerism grew as it became more accepted in the United States as a scientific method for treating illness. Robert Fuller in *Mesmerism and the Cure of the Soul* comments on the attraction mesmerism had as a treatment of “the whole person rather than isolated complaints” and that “patients believed themselves to be reestablishing inner harmony with the very source of physical and emotional well-being” (73). Since Margaret Fuller desired unity between body and soul, she would find mesmerism an enticing treatment.

Mesmerism’s influence on Fuller’s ideology and writing is also present in “‘The Trance of the Ecstatica’: Margaret Fuller, Animal Magnetism, and the Transcendent Female Body.” Deborah Manson argues that “mesmerism significantly influenced Fuller’s life and work, and a consideration of her involvement in the popular nineteenth-century science is instructive in understanding her formulation of a provocative feminist ideology” (298-299). Manson supports this claim by referencing Fuller’s mesmeric language in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and the *Dial* essay “Leila” that described one of her mesmeric experiences. Fuller discovered the power of mesmerism and the strong influence it had on women which “provided both physical healing and spiritual insight” (300). Mesmerism became a controversial issue, especially since the magnetizer was often male and the magnetized female. Manson remarks that the “sexual overtones” between the two people involved were “undeniable” (300). However, Manson argues that

this did not take away from Fuller's feminist principles because Fuller used her agency to bring healing to the mind and body. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Fuller disagreed on the benefits of mesmerism and Manson states, "Whereas Emerson saw the body as a mere vessel to the spirit, Fuller saw potential harmony and correspondence between the body and soul" (302). Manson asserts that Fuller's use of mesmerism assisted Fuller in distancing herself from Emerson. Through this distancing, Fuller began to develop other Transcendental ideals that differed from Emerson's and influenced her views on the blending of body and soul and affected her writing, spirituality, and feminism.

The importance of mesmerism in Fuller's life is also claimed by Rachael Blumenthal in "Margaret Fuller's Medical Transcendentalism." Blumenthal argues that "Fuller grounds her feminism in an electrical, neurological materialism that avoids the trap of sexual essentialism, on the one hand, and the temptation to transcend sexual difference in transcendental unification on the other" (554). In other words, Fuller's mesmerism fosters her writing about the dual female and male soul in *Woman*. While Fuller engages in the popular mesmerism, she uses it for "enhancing and channeling mental illness" (Blumenthal 559). Therefore, mental illness is not weakness but a powerful intellectual state. Blumenthal also claims that Fuller "complicates" the understanding of intellect in nineteenth-century through Fuller's writing of mesmerism and illness as "markers of genius" (566, 569). Although Fuller uses mesmerism as a treatment, Blumenthal asserts that Fuller also uses it because it "enhances and enlivens the symptoms of illness. It does not eradicate them" (570). Since Fuller used mesmerism as a treatment, Blumenthal argues that "Fuller disarms physicians and diagnostic practice by reframing psychiatric illness—and the medical patient—as a viable, and even

preferable, condition of human and, especially, female, existence" (559). Mesmerism not only treats her pain but also stimulates creative genius. Like Manson, Blumenthal focuses specifically on Fuller's *Woman* and "Leila." Fuller chooses to focus on the freedom mesmerism gives women rather than the health benefits or sexual elements.

Fuller's interest in mesmerism can also be linked to what her friends called her mesmeric personality; however, this could be coincidence due to the prolific use of mesmeric-related words and subject matter in nineteenth century literature. This fascination with mesmerism in Fuller's contemporaries is evident in *Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century Letters* where Russel Goldfarb and Clare Goldfarb explore the connection between literature and mesmerism in the works of authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Charles Dickens. Goldfarb and Goldfarb state, "While literary characters theorized about spiritualism, authors filled the pages of nineteenth-century books with images, metaphors, and atmosphere derived from spiritualist phenomena" (163). It is difficult to deduce whether Fuller's mesmerizing personality contributed to or was the result of her fascination with mesmerism. While the use of words such as "magnetism" or "magnetic" may be indicative of her friends' interest in the newest scientific and psychological fad that swept the nation, the fact that so many commented on her mesmeric personality is striking. Two of the men who worked on *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, William Henry Channing and James Freeman Clarke, both describe Fuller as a mesmerist in their writings for *Memoir*. Channing relates seeing Fuller at an "assembly" of friends and how she affected those around her (*Time* 121). He compares her to a medium when he writes that "she became a medium for the circulating of life. Only when thus in magnetic relations with all

present [...] did she seem prepared to rise to a higher stage of communion" (*Time* 122). By engaging in normal conversation, Fuller fostered dialogue through her mesmeric personality using wit, intelligence, and truth. Channing states, "I know not how otherwise to describe her subtle charm, than by saying that she was at once a clairvoyant and a magnetizer" (*Time* 124). While many women were often portrayed as the medium (Coale "Mysteries of Mesmerism"), Channing compares Fuller to the hypnotist as well. Clarke remarks similarly, "Margaret possessed, in a greater degree than any person I ever knew, the power of so magnetizing others, when she wished, by the power of her mind, that they would lay open to her all the secrets of their nature" (*Time* 133). Clarke held "Mesmeric experiments" at his home according to Fuller and encouraged those around him to use mesmerism (Manson 298). Other contemporaries such as George William Curtis and Amos Bronson Alcott, who did not work on *Memoir*, also describe Fuller's magnetism in positive terms. Curtis writes that her "magnetism [...] opened the hearts of men and women" (*Time* 160). Similar to Clarke's evaluation of Fuller's personality, Curtis and Alcott both observe Fuller's ability to magnetize or draw other people to herself (*Time* 169). Even her brother, Richard Frederick Fuller, remarks on Fuller's "magnetic power" (*Time* 189).

While both Channing and Clarke compare Fuller to a mesmerist, Ralph Waldo Emerson (another editor of *Memoir*) criticizes Fuller's magnetism and states that she was "pagan," thus condemning her mesmeric pursuits (*Time* 146). He describes that her ill health and pain "made her a willing listener to all the uncertain science of mesmerism and its goblin brood" (*Time* 148). As I explored earlier, Emerson was against animal magnetism (mesmerism) and tried to discourage Fuller from using it although Emerson

himself suffered from physical illness (Davis 31). Blumenthal explains, “Emerson often seems to believe that one accesses the soul by bypassing the body, and he dismisses Fuller’s particular notion of the (female) soul and its ‘magnetism’ as spurious science” (576). Goldfarb and Goldfarb state that Emerson disliked mesmerism for other reasons beyond its focus on the body: “Sensationalism, the trivial view of the supernatural, and what he considered the low characters of the spiritualists all influenced Emerson’s condemnation of the movement” (53). Although some of his Transcendentalist beliefs might overlap with spiritualism (as Fuller’s beliefs did), Emerson disapproved of the entire movement. One somnambulist asked Fuller to limit her reading and Manson explains that “she was seeking medical relief, but not at the expense of her independence and intellectual development[...]However, Fuller’s feminist ideals would not allow her to accept a remedy that limited her intellectual activity” (307). Fuller writes that the somnambulist “spoke most intelligently of the disorder of health and its causes, and gave advice, which, if followed at that time, I have every reason to believe would have remedied the ill” (qtd in Manson). While Fuller believed that the mesmerist treatments lessened her physical ailments and encouraged her intellectual insights, she did not experience complete or lasting healing.

### **Fuller’s Illness and Transcendentalism**

Fuller’s beliefs concerning the symbiotic relationship between the mind, body, and soul were heavily influenced by her Transcendentalist ideology. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes in an oft-quoted passage of *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*:

She was all her lifetime the victim of disease and pain. She read and wrote in bed, and believed that she could understand anything better when she was ill. Pain

acted like a girdle, to give tension to her powers. A lady, who was with her one day during a terrible attack of nervous headache, which made Margaret totally helpless, assured me that Margaret was yet in the finest vein of humor, and kept those who were assisting in a strange, painful excitement, between laughing and crying, by perpetual brilliant sallies. (*Time* 148)

According to this passage, Fuller did not regard her physical illness as a weakness. Interestingly, Emerson uses the word “girdle,” a women’s undergarment that restricted women which Transcendentalists and other activists advocated against (Parks “Embodied Selves”). Blumenthal discusses the significance of the “girdle” metaphor: “Emerson’s clothing metaphor is double-edged—a girdle at once supports and constricts bodily posture. By giving ‘tension to her powers,’ the girdle of pain enhances Fuller’s intellectual figure but also threatens to confine its reach” (575-576). Fuller did not seem to feel “confined” by her illness, only saddened by it. Blumenthal also criticizes the editors of Fuller’s *Memoirs*: “I read Margaret Fuller’s *Memoirs* as a ‘pathography’ of her childhood that aligns with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical inquiries into the relationship between psychology and pedagogy” (561). Even if the editors of her memoirs aimed to place Fuller in the nineteenth century mold of ill and nervous women, as Blumenthal argues, Fuller resists this mold in her writings and shows human transcendence through joining the soul and the body (Davis 48). Instead of becoming a static “victim” of pain, Fuller harnesses it for her intellectual and spiritual purposes. Pain may have kept Fuller in bed, yet she was engaging with those around her and did not allow it to her confine her.

Fuller's idea in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* of the dual soul is also representative of women moving beyond their frail constitutions. She posits in *Woman* the idea of a human where men's intellect and women's emotions could live simultaneously. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* consider Fuller's illness and argue that "Fuller's sense of paralysis and pain led her to counsel women to develop the 'masculine' side of their nature" (481). The masculine side of nature was that of the mind. While women's bodies were prone to illness due to education and overwork, men's bodies were not affected by education. Jeffrey Steele writes in *Transfiguring America* that "Fuller's mythmaking attempts to heal such psychic and social division by creating a new model of human potential that values *both* male and female being" (225). Fuller argues for a different view of women's bodies in *Woman* and employs an example from mythology that "Even victory wore a female form" (31). Although in some ways Fuller reinstated separation between men and women in her descriptions and examples of emotionally sensitive women, her Transcendental ideology broke down this false binary. She writes, "Woman the heart, man the head! Such divisions are only important when they are never to be transcended" (47). In transcending this division, Fuller also transcended the societal and patriarchal forces which insisted on her remaining ill and thus inactive.

### **Fuller's Move to New York**

The move from Boston to New York negatively affected Fuller's health and influenced her writing during this time. After moving to New York in 1844, Fuller wrote to her brother Richard that "I am not very well [...] The premature exhaustion of my forces makes me require a great deal of time now for the mind to lie fallow before it can

produce its natural harvest" (*Letters 1842-44* 235). During this time, Fuller resided with Horace Greeley and his wife. Greeley also pointed out her ill health and wrote:

She was addicted to strong tea and coffee, both which I rejected and contemned [sic] even in the most homoeopathic dilutions: while, my general health being sound, and hers sadly impaired, I could not fail to find in her dietetic habits the causes of her almost habitual illness; and once, while we were still barely acquainted, when she came to the breakfast-table with a very severe headache, I was tempted to attribute it to her strong potations of the Chinese leaf the night before. (*Time* 64-65)

Greeley's comments show the physical illness Fuller experienced as she edited "The Great Lawsuit" for publication as *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller's headaches and other pain influenced her New York writing as Jeffrey Steele points out in "Purifying America: Purity and Disability in Margaret Fuller's New York Reform." Steele discusses Fuller's New York writings (which include her *Dial Essays* and *Woman*) and how her disability affected her views on purity and political issues. "Using powerful metaphors of purity and impurity, sickness and health, Fuller began imagining the reform of America as the curing of a diseased body politic" (303). Steele argues that Fuller created an "inclusive model of purity" versus an "exclusive" one that denied the suffering of minorities (305). While Fuller's purity language could be problematic, Steele claims that it is more nuanced due to her own illness and that of her brother Lloyd and states, "By applying a single standard of conduct to *both* [class] groups, Fuller insisted that they were members of the same society—not opposed representatives of the pure and impure"

(310). This statement is true of both her writings of lower class and upper class and her views of the ill and healthy.

### **Conclusion**

Fuller's ill health contributed to her writing and her choice of mesmerism as a treatment. While Fuller's "nervous affections" may seem indicative of men's diagnosis of women's health in the nineteenth century, she subverted the diagnosis and used her pain to shape her beliefs about the dual soul of men and women. In her opinion, men's intellect and women's feelings are both present in every human soul. Combining the two encourages women to use their intellect despite physical illness or nervousness. Other Transcendentalists such as Emerson separated the soul and the body; however, Fuller's Transcendentalist beliefs linked pain to the "imperfection" that must be controlled and transcended. Fuller harnessed her pain and created a positivity surrounding illness that moved beyond the overeducated, nervous woman conditioned for illness to a woman in control and admired for her intellect.

CHAPTER TWO: “THE LOT OF WOMAN IS SAD”: THE EVOLUTION OF WOMAN  
*IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*

Margaret Fuller began developing some of her ideas for “The Great Lawsuit: Man vs Men. Woman vs Women” which eventually became the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* during her Boston “Conversations.” Fuller’s early ideas of the dual soul of men and women are evident in a piece by her contemporary Elizabeth Palmer Peabody which describes the contents of one of the Conversations that took place between 1839 and 1840. Peabody writes, “Miss Fuller thought that the man and the woman had each every faculty and element of mind—but that they were combined in different proportions” (*Fuller in Her Own Time* 43). Peabody also remarks on the “lot” of women, which I will explore more in the following pages. Peabody writes:

A great deal of talk arose here—and Margaret repelled the sentimentalism that took away woman’s moral power of performing stern duty. In answer to one thing she said that as soon as we began to calculate our condition and to make allowances for it, we sank into the depths of sentimentalism. And again. Nothing I [Peabody] hate to hear of so much as *woman’s lot*. (*Time* 44)

In Peabody’s statements, it would appear that she regards sentimentalism as the emotional appeal which took away from logical appeals and obligations of women. The “austere Transcendentalists” as Jeffrey Steele calls them, avoided sentimentality. In regards to “woman’s lot,” Nancy Theriot writes that in the nineteenth century “suffering and self-sacrifice were somehow inherent in femaleness” (26). This female suffering can

be related to bad marriages, pain in childbirth, and other painful experiences distinctly associated with the lives of women. Female suffering was protested in discussion but also praised in women's nineteenth century literature (Theriot 27). Although Peabody may have hated the discussion of woman's lot, Fuller pursued the phrase differently. During this same Conversation, Fuller spoke of suffering and "declared the belief that if women *wanted to have a good time* as the *first thing*, they must ignore their higher faculties. Thought and feeling brought exquisite pleasures—pleasures *worth* infinite sacrifices—but they inevitably brought suffering" (*Time* 45). Fuller was all too familiar with the suffering that "thought and feeling" brought. Despite the fact that mental over-work produced excruciating headaches for Fuller, she believed in the power of this suffering as "Those who had not suffered had not *lived as yet*" (45). Sentimentalism in writing functioned as an appeal to pathos and, at times, Christian values. In Shirley Samuels' introduction to *Culture of Sentiment*, she writes, "As a set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, sentimentality produces or reproduces spectacles that cross race, class, and gender boundaries" (4-5). Although Fuller argues against falling into the "depths of sentimentalism" in her Conversation, she does evoke empathy in discussing the "infinite sacrifices" that woman experienced in using their "higher faculties." The above Conversation indicates that although Fuller avoids sentimentalism, she uses it. She also includes minimal discussion of woman's lot except in transcending it.

In this chapter, I argue that Fuller's view of woman's lot and the effects it had on a woman's life changed from a minimal mention of it in her Conversations and "The Great Lawsuit" to a major emphasis in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller

published “The Great Lawsuit” in 1843 in the Transcendentalist magazine *The Dial*. As Fuller was developing her argument for *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and expanding it from “Lawsuit,” she continued her Conversations (which began in 1839 and ran until 1844). In 1843, Fuller traveled and wrote *Summer on the Lakes* and, as her biographers note, she suffered a severe depression after this trip. She visited Sing Sing prison in 1844 and published *Woman* in early 1845. I argue that her ill health, her depression/mental illness, and her visit to the women’s prison Sing Sing are strong influences on her writing, especially in her revisions to *Woman*. Fuller’s shift in ideas was a result of both biological and psychosocial issues, which many scholars omit when analyzing the transformation of *Woman*. I pinpoint this change from “Lawsuit” to *Woman* in a two-part methodology. First, I consider analysis by scholars and biographers, looking at Fuller’s own accounts of illness in journals and letters, and employing a close-reading to sections of *Woman*. This close-reading leads to the second part of my methodology which looks directly at the addition of melancholic/negative words in *Woman*. I conclude that Fuller’s tone in *Woman* is more somber than the tone of “Lawsuit,” which focuses on hope and reform.

### **The Evolution of Woman in the Nineteenth Century**

Transcendentalist scholar Larry Reynolds acknowledges Fuller’s broadened interest in social justice concerns and even mentions her illness after moving to New York; however, these aspects are not his main concern in his article “From Dial Essay to New York Book: The Making of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.” Although Reynolds does mention Fuller’s new ideas forming after moving to New York, he credits these new ideas for Fuller’s shift in intended audience rather than being directly correlated to her

emotional and physical distress as well as her pain in seeing the women prisoners at Sing Sing. Reynolds comments on the changes in Fuller's life during the autumn that she revised and expanded "The Great Lawsuit"; however, rather than focusing on some of these life circumstances, Reynolds addresses "Fuller's sense of audience during key stages of the book's composition" (19). Fuller's *Dial* essay is "an ongoing, intertextual conversation with a group of like-minded friends" of the Transcendentalist Club (21). According to journal excerpts that Reynolds provides, Fuller experienced a period of emotional pain and depression as she moved from Boston to New York to be the editor of Horace Greeley's newspaper the *New-York Tribune*. However, he does not expound on this emotional pain and illness. Reynolds argues that Fuller's change in audience is also evident in her publication of *Summer on the Lakes*, the article which greatly increased Fuller's readership. He continues and states that for *Woman* Fuller's "additions reveal a shift in imagined audience from a circle of male and female friends to American women in general, and *Woman* becomes a far more feminist work than the essay from which it originated" (29). According to Annette Kolodny, "Scholars have repeatedly recognized a connection between Fuller's teaching at the Greene Street School, her subsequent formalized 'conversations' for adult women in the Boston area, and the development of ["Lawsuit"]" and *Woman* (360). While Kolodny and Reynolds both note these connections, the connections are in regards to Fuller's rhetoric and not psychosocial experiences in the year between "Lawsuit" and *Woman*.

In revising "Lawsuit," Fuller had already begun her modifications to her writing that Maria Mitchell Oleson Urbanski argues happened after *Woman*'s publication as a

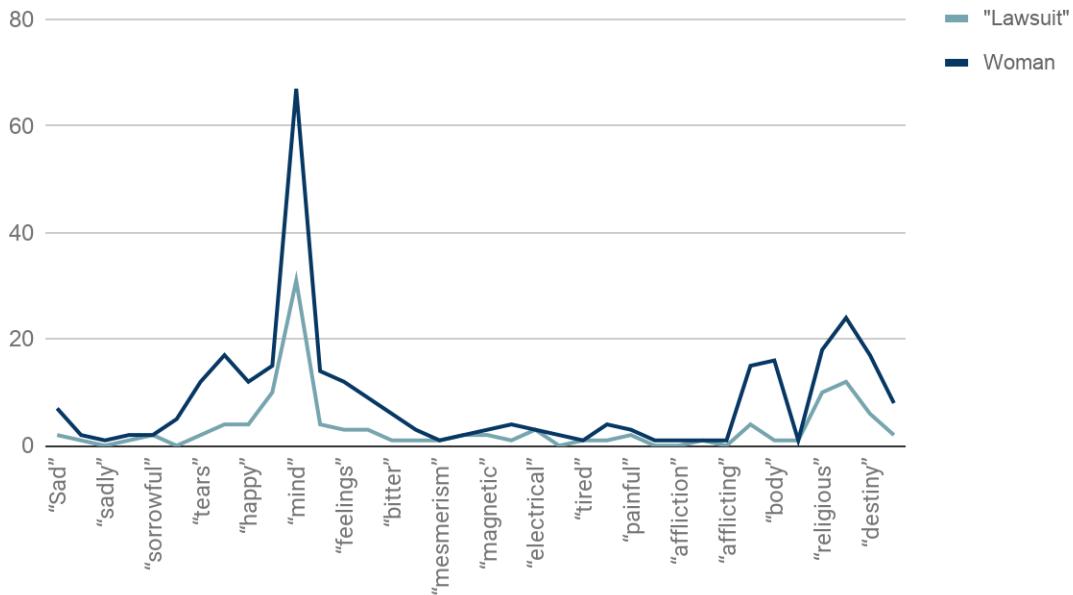
part of Fuller's New York writings. Urbanski's book supports the analysis<sup>5</sup> that Fuller's *Woman* is structured in a masculine form of a sermon or oration (131-32). Fuller uses a speaking voice rather than a writerly one and appropriates Transcendentalist methods of the "individual as center of the world" (135). Urbanski explores the rhetoric and form of *Woman* in its genesis and how Fuller gathered different methods of sermons, oration, and other rhetorical modes. Urbanski calls Fuller's piece "didactic" due to this Transcendental tone (137). However, Urbanski continues by saying, "Ultimately, *Woman* transcends the issue of woman's rights. Paradoxically, after preaching self-reliance for women, it becomes a philosophical message on the interdependence of all people" (144). Nonetheless, Urbanski also argues that *Woman* is separated from other feminist texts because of the influence of Transcendentalism (97). Urbanski writes, "Fuller expressed a hope and an optimism in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* that events caused her to modify in her later writing" (124). I disagree that Fuller expressed hope and optimism in *Woman*. The original sections from "Lawsuit" do present a penchant for hopeful reform; however, the additions in *Woman* reflect a melancholic, even cynical, view of the "lot of woman." The increase of melancholic or negative words in *Woman* marks a significant change. Urbanski's analysis addresses the spiritual, cultural, and feminist influences on *Woman*, but I want to move beyond this analysis to include emotional, physical, and intersocial factors.

Although *Woman* contains over 27, 000 more words due to Fuller's revisions and additions, the ratio of melancholic words from "Lawsuit" to *Woman* is not dependent on

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<sup>5</sup> Annette Kolodny shows that Fuller's friendship with pastors and her interest in Whately's rhetoric influenced and shaped the rhetoric of *Woman*.

the increased word count (see Appendix: Table 1). Since the two pieces are of different lengths, it is necessary to consider the proportion of increased melancholic words to total added words. While some words like “sorrowful” and “tired” appear in the same proportion to the total number of words in the text, other words increase exponentially [see Figure 1: Word Frequencies]. The addition of words concerning the mind is also noteworthy in pinpointing Fuller’s shift in ideas.



**Figure 1:** Word Frequencies

### Fuller’s Emotional and Physical Pain in 1844

Between publishing “Lawsuit” and editing *Woman*, Fuller experienced a greater amount of physical and mental pain which contributed to the change between the two works. After writing and publishing “Lawsuit,” Fuller departed for a trip West that later inspires *Summer on the Lakes*. However, Fuller’s return does not produce good mental or

physical health. Charles Capper writes in his second volume of *An American Romantic Life: The Public Years*:

Having been “almost restored” by her western trip, within a month she had come down with the flu and even after recovering in December, for several months she was plagued with headaches “day and night,” threatening to reverse her steadily brightening mood since her “crisis” depression and *Dial* resignation. (135)

Capper also describes further emotional and physical tolls on Fuller during her process of writing *Summer*. Following a visit in March from William Clarke (with whom she travelled and grew romantically attached while obtaining material for *Summer*), Capper describes Fuller’s mood: “Disappointed, sad, and, as usual, hypersensitive to rejection, she relapsed into painful retrospection” (136). Capper claims that Fuller’s sadness is inspired not only by being rejected by Clarke but also her “feeling envious toward her sister Ellen” and all the other women in her life who were married and pregnant at this time (136-137). Although she was feeling depressed due to these circumstances, Capper remarks that the depression was less severe than her “manicdepression [sic] episode of three years earlier” when her friends Sam and Anna Ward married (136). Fuller experienced deep pain over this marriage due to her friendship and romantic feelings toward both of them. While this depression may have been less severe than those in the past, Fuller’s mind was affected by these circumstances when revising *Woman* later that same year. After *Summer on the Lakes* was published in June 1844, Capper writes that Fuller experienced a time of struggling “to keep old emotional wounds firmly bandaged” (156) and she wrote in journals and letters about the pain involved with Sam and Anna and William Clarke. Meg Murray, another Fuller biographer, notes the character Mariana

in *Summer* by stating, “In a June letter to Channing she confesses that though her friends could see her as Miranda in ‘The Great Lawsuit,’ none dreamed that Mariana was also ‘like me’” (207). Murray continues with her analysis that “From the narrator’s perspective, Mariana’s ‘repression’ of her ‘powers’ destroyed her health; for want of love, she died” (207). In this section of *Summer*, Fuller describes herself as a young girl meeting another girl at boarding school named Mariana. She describes Mariana as a “strange bird” who “captivated” her schoolmates with her “love of wild dances and song, her freaks of passion and wit” (118). After an experience in which Mariana suffered from the “black despair,” she “returned to life, but it was as one who has passed through the valley of death. The heart of stone was quite broken in her. The fiery life fallen from flame to coal” (125). Fuller in writing that Mariana was like herself showed a depressed view of herself in which she felt more dead than alive. Fuller’s revelation to Channing and Murray’s subsequent analysis depict a Fuller who is focused on sadness and ill health. While Miranda in “Lawsuit” shows no signs of mental or physical weakness, Mariana presents a different autobiographical side to Fuller.

Fuller’s interest in reform is another aspect of *Summer*, specifically girls’ education reform. Fuller and other Transcendentalists supported the argument that girls as well as boys should experience freedom of movement and physical activity as part of their education.<sup>6</sup> Fuller writes that women should give up corsets and “all artificial means of distortion. Let life be healthy, pure, all of a piece” (*Woman* 96). Capper writes that Fuller pays more attention to the “constraints” women faced out West in *Summer*. Fuller

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1 concerning Roberta Parks “Embodied Selves.”

“proposes the establishment of western schools for girls” that would help young girls in the West and not inflict eastern standards of gentility on them (Capper 145). Fuller also mention of this in *Woman* when discussing young girls who wish to cut wood or do other “masculine” chores: “Fourier had observed these wants of women, as no one can fail to do who watches the desires of little girls, or knows the ennui that haunts grown women” (102). Women want the freedom to do whatever task they wish. Fuller’s first-hand experiences of seeing women in the West perhaps influenced her writing about women in *Summer on the Lakes* and *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

In September, Fuller accepted the offer by Horace Greeley and his wife Mary to become the *New-York Tribune* literary editor (163). After a month of nightmares and doubts, she chose to move to New York (165). The increase in nightmares and mental suffering is another indicator for the shift in emphasis concerning the mind and body in *Woman*. Before starting her new position at the *New-York Tribune* in December, she traveled and stayed in a boarding house at Fishkill Landing. It was during this interim between October to December that she began revising “Lawsuit”; however, as Capper notes, she suffered from headaches and writer’s block (167). Fuller’s physical illness is evident in her journal as well: “I felt a short time exhilarated [*sic*] by the open air, & passing rapidly by the green and growing things, but soon the pain came on. But thoughts and decisions were growing up in my mind. The pain is steady between the eyebrows, perhaps it bodes a prophet birth” (“Margaret Fuller’s Journal” 114). In the same way that other Transcendentalists had found peace in nature, Fuller also felt renewed and exhilarated by being out among “growing things.” Although the first part of her visit and the change in scenery allowed her to be free of pain for a time, this feeling did not last

long as her pain returned. However, Fuller moved beyond the pain and harnessed it for her own writing purposes. Despite Fuller's returning headaches, she again expresses that her pain gave her deeper insights<sup>7</sup> or a “prophet birth” in this case. The “prophet birth” is also suggestive of her beliefs about mesmerism and pain being the progenitor of insight. During the same fall when she began her revisions for *Woman*, Fuller was experiencing a “prophet birth” as a result of pain.

### **Fuller and Magnetic Women**

Fuller's own magnetic pull that was often discussed by her contemporaries is apparent in *Woman*. Steele positions Fuller's argument as “sentimental Transcendentalism” in his close analysis of her New York writings and states that she appealed to “her readers' heart as well as their minds” (“Sympathy and Prophecy” 168). Fuller drew her readers to herself in a magnetic way. Mesmerism was not only a way that Fuller treated her illness but also a source for empowerment. Both “Lawsuit” and *Woman* mention this magnetic and electrical energy surrounding women. However, *Woman* follows this discussion of mesmerism with illness. Fuller argues, “Sickness is the frequent result of this over-charged existence. To this region, however misunderstood, or interpreted with presumptuous carelessness, belong the phenomena of magnetism, or mesmerism” (*Woman* 62). “Lawsuit” contains only the information about mesmerism, but *Woman* attaches the ramifications of women's illness and pain due to the “magnetic” energy of women (*Woman* 61). The words “sick” or “sickness” are never used in “Lawsuit.” Fuller's increased headaches, nightmares, and other physical complaints while

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<sup>7</sup> See Rachel Blumenthal's article “Margaret Fuller's Medical Transcendentalism.”

considering the job in New York are an indication of Fuller's concern with the body. Fuller uses the word "body" in regards to "body politic" in "Lawsuit" and this passage also appears in *Woman*. However, Fuller uses the word "body" sixteen times in *Woman*. This increase is significant and demonstrates that Fuller was more focused on the body both physically and spiritually. As a result, *Woman* is more focused on women's illness and bodily pain.

While many of Fuller's contemporaries, specifically Emerson, believed in a division between body and soul, Fuller united the two ideas in her writing. Fuller writes of "Man" (referring to humankind) as pursuing a whole through God and nature: "As this whole has one soul and one body, any injury or obstruction to a part, or to the meanest member, affects the whole" (*Woman* 99). In this biblical allusion to St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he describes the individual members of the church as representative of a whole body, Fuller applies the wholeness concept to humanity itself and individuals. Sandra Gustafson discusses in "Choosing a Medium: Margaret Fuller and the Forms of Sentiment" Fuller's creation of a new form of written communication designed specifically for women and using sentimentality. Gustafson writes, "It is my contention that Fuller deliberately situated her experiments with voice and form within sentimentalism to address the problems of women's relationship to a public language shaped primarily by men" (39). She makes even stronger claims: "Similarly, in the oration that emerges from the sermonic exhortation, Fuller echoes the very male contemporaries that she later attacks for hypocrisy. Employing their own rhetorical genre, she challenges their moral leadership" (54). Fuller used Whately's rhetoric models and rhetoric of other pastors and orators to develop her original article but she avoided using

persuasion as a tactic and instead made the piece conversational and collaborative, which Annette Kolodny notes as interesting since Emerson focused so much on self-reliance (375-76). Once again, Fuller is subverting a man's field/style to make her point. Davis notes that Fuller's "aim is to make the body—any body—a viable, inspirational ground for revelations about the celestial *within* the mortal" (46). Davis also describes that Fuller's physical suffering influenced her views on the body (43). Fuller focused on the body in order to transcend beyond the frailty inherent in the body.

Fuller at times appears to contradict this transcendence due to her support of the union between body and soul. Rather than the soul only transcending, Fuller writes, "Only in a strong and clean body can the soul do its message fitly" (*Woman* 96). The "strong and clean body" rhetoric draws on Fuller's use of mesmerism, but also appears to be a cry from Fuller's own soul. Fuller did not always possess a strong body as the result of her spinal curvature, her migraines, and her overall poor health. The spike of "mind" and "body" related words in *Woman* also signifies Fuller's preoccupation with her mental and physical condition. Fuller argues, "Give the soul free course, let the organization, both of body and mind, be freely developed, and the being will be fit for any and every relation to which it may be called" (*Woman* 56). The original passage in "Lawsuit" reads differently: "Give the soul free course, let the organization be freely developed, and the being will be fit for any and every relation to which it may be called." The "Lawsuit" version is more focused on the soul of woman. A few lines before, Fuller argues against educating women for them to merely be "better companions and mothers of men." She communicates the need for women to be given "free course" in pursuing education for their own sakes. The *Woman* version of this passage add the aspect of "body and mind."

Women's bodies and minds are affected as well as their souls in the patriarchal society which does not value women as human beings but as companions.

### **Fuller's Emotions in Relation to Sing Sing Prison**

Fuller engages with multiple concepts in *Woman* that include loneliness, the body, sickness, and sadness in *Woman*. The word "lonely" occurs three times in "Lawsuit" and nine times in *Woman*. One passage of *Woman* includes both lonely and sickness words in the same section. This section followed Fuller's earlier mentioned discussion of changing the teaching of young girls. Fuller writes, "Another interesting sign of the time is the influence exercised by two women, Miss Martineau and Miss Barrett, from their sick-rooms" (*Woman* 97). Fuller intentionally mentions illness connected to the well-known women Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The image of the sick-room is feminine and powerful. Yet, Fuller compares the sick-room to a lonely prison: "The lamp of life which, if it had been fed only by the affections, depended on precarious human relations, would scarce have been able to maintain a feeble glare in the lonely prison" (97). Since Fuller had visited the female prisoners in Sing Sing prison recently, her comparison bears further analysis. It is possible that Fuller empathized with the women prisoners in Sing Sing as she also felt a prisoner to her own illness and body. However, as she believed that pain was a catalyst for inspiration, Fuller praises the results of the sick room by stating that the "lamp of life[...]now shines far and wide over the nations, cheering fellow-sufferers and hallowing the joy of the healthful" (97). Fuller exposes the literal confinement of the body and of the mind due to sickness. Women are confined both because of illness and incarceration in similar ways.

Fuller's visit to Sing Sing prison strongly influenced the development of *Woman*.

Her journal from June to October 1844 mentions visiting the prison in October. Although she had been communicating with Georgiana Bruce, an activist in prison reform and an assistant at the prison, this October visit was her first experience seeing the prisoners. Earlier that year in a July 1844 letter to Bruce, Fuller writes, “I must be glad to see you thrown so completely on yourself, both as to outward and inward life: thus shall you learn; thus shall you teach[...]The materials for future thought afforded by your life at Sing Sing are of rare value” (*Letters 1842-44* 210). Capper also discusses Fuller’s correspondence with Georgiana Bruce and how Fuller’s ideas that she was already mulling were supported by Bruce’s letters (172-173). Fuller continues in an August letter, “For these women in their degradation express most powerfully the present wants of the sex at large. What blasphemous in them must fret and murmur in the perfumed boudoir, for a society beats with one great heart” (223) In this letter, Fuller discloses that she is “soon to publish a more ample version of the Great Lawsuit and if I do, will you send you that...” (223). She then asks to visit and when would be an appropriate time and for how long. Fuller writes again in October:

I was prevented by attacks of headach [*sic*] from finishing the pamphlet on Women in August. I hope to do it here [Fishkill Landing], as I remain till Decr [*sic*] At present, however, I will pass all the fine weather in the open air, and grow strong daily. Meanwhile every hint from you will be of use to my thoughts. And I shall have every opporoy to talk with you, for if Mr Channing goes to Sing Sing next Sunday as he expects, I shall go too. (*Letters 1842-44* 236)

As the previous journal excerpt from Fishkill Landing describes Fuller’s bodily pain, this letter also shows that Fuller experienced headaches while revising *Woman*. Once again,

however, she is using the pain to gain more insight. In this state of illness, she writes to Bruce for information about the women's prison. Fuller's words "every hint from you will be of use to my thoughts" shows that she clearly pursued communication with Bruce in order to assist with her *Woman* revisions. After visiting Sing Sing, Fuller describes it in a letter to her brother Richard Fuller: "On Saturday we went up to Sing Sing [...] I talked with a circle of women and they showed the natural aptitude of the sex for refinement. These women, some black and all from the lowest haunts of vice, showed a sensibility and sense of propriety which would not have disgraced any place" (248). Fuller's analysis of the women in this passage clearly shows her views about women in the prisons. It is here that some of her ideas transformed for *Woman*. Steele comments that "Lawsuit" placed emphasis on the "reformation of self" while *Woman* emphasized "reformation of society" ("Sympathy and Prophecy" 162). I argue that Fuller's visit influenced a change of tone for *Woman* that not only focuses on the "reformation of society" but also on the sorrow that women faced as part of their "lot." Immediately following that first visit to Sing Sing, Fuller writes in her journal that she had "Sad thoughts beneath the full moon" (124). The visit to Sing Sing encouraged Fuller to write about the prison in *Woman*; however, seeing the women themselves saddened her.

Fuller's focus on sadness in *Woman* indicates a more negative view of woman's lot than is present in "Lawsuit." The term "saddens" is significant since it occurs 50% more times in *Woman* versus "Lawsuit" (while the increase of words from "Lawsuit" to *Woman* is only 40%). Fuller includes the passage and translation of a quote from

Allessandro Manzoni<sup>8</sup> in both “Lawsuit” and *Woman* but provides an analysis in *Woman* that states, “Accursed be he who willingly *saddens* an immortal spirit—doomed to infamy in later, wiser ages, doomed in future stages of his own being to deadly penance, only short of death. Accursed be he who sins in ignorance, if that ignorance be caused by sloth” (14). The previous section describes the oppression of the “sorrowful brother” by Americans who promote the ideal of independence (13 emphasis added). Fuller is addressing the state of enslaved black men and women in the United States. It is thought-provoking that she includes the “saddens” section considering her recent visit to Sing Sing prison which incarcerated mostly women of color and other minorities. In Christina Zwarg’s article “The Work of Trauma,” she analyzes trauma in Fuller’s life and how it related to her writing. Zwarg states, “In her attentiveness to shifting standards of reference Fuller is sensitive as well to psychic registrations of history emerging through experiences of trauma” (“The Work of Trauma” 67). Zwarg continues this train of thought by exploring how Fuller wrote about the Native Americans in *Summer on the Lakes*. Although Zwarg focuses on trauma in the lives of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Frederick Douglass, she shows that Fuller’s unique viewpoints enabled Fuller to write empathetically about trauma in the lives of Native Americans, black slaves, and other women. In a similar way, Fuller expresses the discouraging lot of women using her ability to identify trauma. Fuller is not only drawing on her own experiences as a woman (a physically and mentally ill woman at that) but also considering the experiences of the women prisoners at Sing Sing when she writes of her “sad thoughts” in her journal. These

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Norton edition of *Woman*, Manzoni was an Italian poet and novelist.

“sad thoughts” are indicative of her changing beliefs regarding the lot of woman.

### **Fuller and the “Lot of Woman”**

Fuller’s analysis of “woman’s lot” shifts drastically from “Lawsuit” to *Woman*.

Fuller uses the phrase (or a phrase similar) eight times in *Woman* and twice in “Lawsuit.”

In “Lawsuit” the phrase is used positively (both of these examples are also kept in *Woman*). The first is when discussing how woman if allowed to use her talents freely would “bless and rejoice in her earthly birth-place, her earthly lot” (*Woman* 20-21).

Fuller follows this revelation with her autobiographical scene about Miranda, who was educated and the “world was free to her and she lived freely in it” (21). Miranda was able to rejoice in her lot because of her access to education and being treated as an equal by men. It is used once again in a fairly positive way: “If there *is* a misfortune in woman’s lot, it is in obstacles being interposed by men, which do *not* mark her state; and, if they express her past ignorance, do not her present needs” (27). In this case, the misfortune is not inherent or natural in women but because of men’s imposed obstacles. However, in the additional discussions of woman’s lot in *Woman*, Fuller uses the term negatively.

The first occurs when Fuller details the story of woman caught up with “Satyrs” who were not pure: “Sometimes, I say, she was not true, and either *sadly* accommodated herself to ‘Woman’s lot,’ or acquired a taste for satyr-society, like some of the Nymphs, and all the Bacchanals of old” (80 emphasis added). Urbanski notes that Fuller supported the idea of purity or chastity for men as well as women which this section also illustrates (76). However, I wish to pay close attention to “sadly” and “Woman’s lot” in this passage. Fuller’s language condemns a woman who, in her view, should have remained chaste. On the other hand, the addition of “sadly” complicates Fuller’s condemnation.

The woman “sadly accommodated herself to ‘Woman’s lot’ which implies that a woman lacks the ability to choose a better life. Steele refers to Fuller’s evolving views on Purity in “Purifying America.” In this article, Steele discusses Fuller’s New York writings and how her disability affected her views on purity and political issues. Steele states, “Creating a potentially inclusive model of purity, Fuller attempted to counter such views by shifting the argument from questions of racial or ethnic contamination to those of public morality” (305). Fuller wanted to develop a more redeeming idea of purity, which Steele says was influenced by her interaction with female prisoners and showed itself in *Woman* through Fuller’s use of “powerful metaphors of purity and impurity, sickness and health, Fuller began imagining the reform of America as the curing of a diseased body politic” (303). Steele writes in his discussion of Lydia Maria Child and Fuller that they both “challenged their readers to weigh their investment in daily realities against utopian images of both human and social perfection” (“Sympathy and Prophecy” 164). As a Transcendentalist with her own unique ideas about transcendence and perfection, Fuller supported reform of woman’s circumstances or lot. However, the lot itself is one of sadness despite Fuller’s focus on reform.

According to Fuller, the negative view of woman’s lot is also connected to a troubled marriage or association with “bad men,” as she explains further. Fuller criticizes fathers for not warning their daughters about “bad men” and argues that women marry these men without knowing how their lives will turn out. Fuller writes, “The daughter is ignorant; something in the mind of the new spouse seems strange to her, but she supposes it is ‘woman’s lot’ not to be perfectly happy in her affections; she has always heard, ‘men could not understand women,’ so she weeps alone, or takes to dress and the duties of the

house” (*Woman* 90). This is similar to the example in “Lawsuit” when Fuller states that obstacles are imposed by men, but it also shows that without previous education and knowledge, the woman has no hope and assumes that this sad life is her “lot.” Zwarg comments on this passage regarding woman’s lot and states that “the relationship between husband and wife in marriage is the most obvious site of gender prescription” (*Feminist Conversations* 180). Fuller’s views about social issues in the domestic sphere were a result of multiple influences.

The most notable instance of “women’s lot” being associated with negativity and sadness is a long section of *Woman* which specifically considers women and their daughters and does not appear in “Lawsuit.” Fuller considers the effort of women to “make [their] lot tolerable” by staying away from men’s territory (93). As someone who had argued in previous pages about the importance of women like Miranda who conversed with men, Fuller’s argument of “staying away from men’s territory” conflicts with Miranda. The Miranda section is present in both “Lawsuit” and *Woman*; however, Fuller’s “we must sedulously avoid encroaching on the territory of Man” is new material to *Woman* (93). She even cautions, “But our names must not be known; and, to bring these labors to any result, we must take some man for our head, and be his hands” (93). While this supports Fuller’s dual soul argument from the beginning of “Lawsuit,” this new addition is less hopeful of women’s place in the world. Fuller follows by stating, “The lot of Woman is sad. She is constituted to expect and need a happiness that cannot exist on earth. She must stifle such aspirations within her secret heart, and fit herself, as well as she can, for a life of resignations and consolations” (93). The phrase “expect and need a happiness that cannot exist on earth” exemplifies Fuller’s spiritual beliefs of

transcendence. She may believe that the body and soul can be perfected but the lot of woman is a different story. As someone who was not married at this time, Fuller also has a negative view of marriage: “She will be very lonely while living with her husband. She must not expect to open her heart to him fully, or that, after marriage, he will be capable of the refined service of love” (94). The motivation for Fuller’s critique may be due to her disappointment in not forming a relationship with Clarke as well as her experience over the summer of staying with married couples (Capper). Fuller continues her pessimistic view: “The man is not born for the woman, only the woman for the man. ‘Men cannot understand the hearts of women.’ The life of Woman must be outwardly a well-intentioned, cheerful dissimulation of her real life” (94). While the inward life may be painful and non-fulfilling, the outward life must not appear so. The disconnect between inward thoughts and outward demeanor can be connected to depression, which Fuller was experiencing the year of writing this piece.

Fuller continues her discussion of the lot of woman and writes, “Similar sadness at the birth of a daughter I have heard mothers express not unfrequently” (94). Fuller compares the sadness of American women with “those of Paraguay women, described by Southey” (94). By referencing Robert Southey’s poem *A Tale of Paraguay* in this section, Fuller moves toward religious sentimentalism. According to David Simpson, “Contact and conversion are major themes in Southey’s *A Tale of Paraguay* (1825), where the strange women at the heart of the story are fully de-eroticized and made as unsusceptible as possible to any aspiringly prurient male gaze” (222). Simpson posits that Southey presents another imperialist view of the “noble savage” but a view that also criticizes interference from the outside, Christian world. In one regard, Fuller others the women in

Paraguay. She begins by mentioning how they are dissatisfied with a daughter instead of a son. Yet, Fuller shows that American women are instilled with the same misogynistic beliefs. In the passage's context due to the sad lot of women, women do not want to bring more daughters into the world and simultaneously wish for sons because of "the superiority of man in happiness and dignity" (94). Fuller severely censures women and states, "You who give yourselves 'to be supported,' or because 'one must love something,' are they who make the lot of the sex such that mothers are sad when daughters are born" (95). The Fuller who rebukes fathers for not protecting their daughters from "bad men" also rebukes women for marrying such men (90, 95). She argues for celibacy in women to avoid making the lot of women even worse. David Robinson argues that Fuller's view of celibacy for women indicated an independence from men, resulting in self-reliance. Robinson writes, "There is again an element of religious devotion here, but the model is more striking than that of the marriage of 'religious union' because it so clearly presents separation and celibacy as an alternative for women's self-culture" (92). Women should only marry a man who "has shown himself a hero" (95). Fuller states:

It marks the state of feeling on this subject that it was mentioned, as a bitter censure on a woman who had influence over those younger than herself.  
 "She makes those girls want to see heroes?"  
 "And will that hurt them?"

Certainly; how *can* you ask? They will find none, and so they will never be married." (95)

In a country focused on only educating a woman for the purpose of marriage

(Laycock), Fuller makes a bold move to admonish women not to marry. Zwarg posits that Fuller “turns celibacy into a site of feminist resistance, a place from which to critique the overwhelming forces moving women toward repressive and uncertain experiences in marriage” (*Feminist Conversations* 180). As I discussed in the beginning of this chapter that Fuller supports physical and mental suffering as a form transcendence, she also supports the cultural hardships of not having a husband as better than being in an unfortunate marriage. Fuller explores the dual soul of men and women but also encourages women to be separate from men, thereby threatening the family structure that imposes a woman’s dependence on a husband. In all areas of life, Fuller does not shy away from suffering.

Fuller includes another depiction of woman’s lot that includes mesmerism and illness: “I observe in her case, and in one known to me here, that what might have been a gradual and gentle disclosure of remarkable powers was broken and jarred into disease by an unsuitable marriage” (*Woman* 63). Fuller refers to the Seeress of Prevorst and is specifically concerned about the magnetic powers associated with the Seeress. Due to the importance Fuller places on mesmerism, the jarring of those magnetic powers is detrimental to the woman’s health. Fuller continues, “Both these persons were unfortunate in not understanding what was involved in this relation, but acted ignorantly, as their friends desired. They thought that this was the inevitable destiny of Woman” (63). In this case the destiny of woman is marriage, which Fuller advocates against (as I analyzed in the previous passage). Fuller’s mental unrest after her interaction with Clarke may influence this passage since Fuller herself was not married but experienced illness. Fuller writes, “But when engaged in the false position, it was impossible for them to

endure its dissonances, as those of less delicate perceptions can; and the fine flow of life was checked and sullied. They grew sick; but, even so, learned and disclosed more than those in health are wont to do" (63). The first sentence can be Fuller's analysis of herself. She also struggled with dissonances that her physical and mental health produced in her life as she pursued intellectual ideals and was punished with headaches and pain. But despite growing sick, Fuller "learned and disclosed" as the Seeress was able to do. Illness was not the end.

### **Conclusion**

Much of Margaret Fuller's adult life was spent rebelling against the condition of her body and mind. While she may not have intentionally emphasized or increased the mind, body, and sorrow words in *Woman*, the effect is clear and creates a much different tone in *Woman* than in "Lawsuit." We as readers become acquainted with the sad lot of woman that is not only the result of bad interactions with men but also the toll of the physical world on the mind and body. As Fuller rebelled against her own physical and mental suffering, she witnessed the suffering of other women in the West and in prisons. The revisions Fuller made to *Woman* express both the influence of rhetoric and audience on her writing as well as the poignant presence of suffering.

### CHAPTER THREE: IN HER OWN EYES: THE ABJECT, REFLECTION, AND ILLNESS IN MARGARET FULLER'S "AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ROMANCE"

Literary scholarship has largely neglected critical analysis of Margaret Fuller's unfinished work "Autobiographical Romance," which provides another way to understand Fuller as a writer, woman, and Transcendentalist. Fuller never published "Autobiographical Romance" during her lifetime. After her death in 1850, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Freeman Clark, and William Henry Channing publicized the short work in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852). In this final chapter I move from a biographical and historical close-reading approach toward a theoretical approach as I analyze "Autobiographical Romance" using Julia Kristeva's abject theory; Jacques Lacan's theories on reflection; Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; feminist autobiography; and feminist theory, particularly from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

While scholars may think of Fuller's autobiography as inaccurate or fictional, I argue that it is a useful text for analyzing Fuller's self-proclaimed identity that was rooted in childhood trauma. Bell Gale Chevigny establishes the validity of Fuller's autobiographical works in "Daughters Writing: Toward a Theory of Women's Biography" by stating, "Turning to Fuller's autobiographical texts, I interpret them, like those of other writers, as imaginative constructions" (83). The "imaginative constructions" are in part due to Fuller's Transcendentalist values. According to Larry Reynolds, the Transcendentalists were not focused on objective truth. He writes, "The issue of objectivity versus subjectivity [...] did not seriously perplex Fuller and her

contemporaries, because they believed it impossible to ‘present’ any actuality in art or language, given the intervention of time and mediation” (3). Even though the Transcendentalists’ autobiographies were subjective and introspective, Robert Sayre argues that the Transcendentalists influenced autobiography in areas of the spiritual and romantic genre (252). Transcendentalist autobiographies did not concern major, historical events like many autobiographies did. Instead, the Transcendentalists wrote about their inner lives. Since Fuller presented a more conversational and sentimental tone in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* according to Sandra Gustafson, the subjective and personal nature of “Autobiographical Romance” is not surprising. Fuller’s focus on her childhood and illness reveals how she viewed herself and others. In the introduction of *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield state, “As awareness has shifted from women’s experience as a given, to the complex construction of gendered subjectivities, the field of autobiography has become a central preoccupation and testing-ground for feminism” (2). Fuller’s “Autobiographical Romance” is one of those testing grounds.

Although the Transcendentalists may have believed that “truth” could at times be found in writing, Fuller encountered the “Real” in the abject of her sister’s corpse. This traumatic childhood memory followed her into adulthood and shaped her thoughts and ideas. Analyzing this memory creates another lens in which to view her later works like *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and *Summer on the Lakes*. Fuller may have regretted her early childhood reflection, but it did influence her adult life and writings. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Charles Capper writes that Fuller experienced “matricidal nightmares” as an adult when she was considering the job with the *New-York Tribune*. He

states that these nightmares, “strongly suggest a wish to rid herself of her mother’s image as she prepared to take up a masculine role” (66). In dreaming of her mother’s death, Fuller encountered the abject. The nightmares that influenced her ill health during the revision process of *Woman* call for a closer look at the origin of these nightmares in Fuller’s childhood using “Autobiographical Romance.” Fuller dreamed of her mother’s death but also physically experienced the death of her sister.

### **Fuller and the Figure of Miranda**

Before beginning my analysis of “Autobiographical Romance,” I find it necessary to discuss Fuller’s other autobiographical work of Miranda in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* due to the wealth of scholarship surrounding it which does not exist in the same way for “Autobiographical Romance.” In *Margaret Fuller: A Psychological Biography*, Katherine Anthony takes a psychoanalytic approach to look at the relationship between Fuller and her father present in *Woman*. Anthony points out the “Miranda fable,” a loosely autobiographical passage in *Woman*, and analyzes how Fuller compares herself to Miranda and her father to Prospero from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. While Chevigny in “Daughters Writing” chooses to focus on the absence of Fuller’s mother in the “Miranda Fable,” Anthony focuses on Fuller’s preoccupation with her father. Anthony writes that Timothy Fuller was in charge of every aspect of Fuller’s life “and so it came about that Margaret, having been brought up by hand by a father who had certain so-called feminine traits, became a woman who had certain so-called masculine traits” (6). This view of Timothy Fuller is particularly evident in the “Miranda fable.” In comparing the Miranda section to “Autobiographical Romance,” I want to point out the differences between the two works in order to see the multiple ways that Fuller viewed herself and her

relationship with her parents. I will then focus on “Autobiographical Romance” and examine how Fuller perceived the “Real” and how she achieved the “Real” through the abject.

The fact that Fuller chose the name Miranda in *Woman* is significant due to the name’s history. The name demonstrates Fuller’s positive view of the relationship between herself and her father. Elaine Showalter writes that women writers have “appropriated and revised the figure of Miranda in thinking about their relationship to patriarchal power, language, female sexuality, and creativity” (28). Miranda, Prospero’s daughter in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, is raised on an island by a strong, intellectual (and sometimes foolish) man. Fuller uses the character of Miranda in *Woman* to combat the dualisms between feminine and masculine. Showalter argues, “Like Miranda, Fuller’s education reinforced her own distance and difference from women or female tradition” (29). In the “Miranda fable,” Fuller seeks to bridge that distance and states that the Miranda’s father had a “firm belief in the equality of the sexes” (*Woman* 21). Fuller states that Miranda learned “self-dependence” and “self-reliance” (22). Self-reliance categorizes Miranda as a Transcendentalist woman. Phyllis McBride posits that the “Miranda fable” is an invention of a new, autobiographical woman. McBride counters other arguments and states, “It is tempting to assume, as Elaine Showalter does, that Fuller is simply ‘retelling’ Shakespeare’s Miranda story [...] But Fuller does not simply ‘retell’...she appropriates it, then extends it beyond Shakespeare’s script” (134). Fuller is claiming her identity through Miranda. By claiming this identity, she is participating in reinventing or rewriting her trauma.

Fuller’s description of Miranda’s close relationship with her father is in stark

contrast to the distant and bitter relationship she depicts in “Autobiographical Romance.” Chevigny addresses the dichotomy between the two autobiographical works and states, “Setting these two accounts of her father side by side, it is tempting to see the second [Miranda] as a symbolic act of reparation, a making of amends for the symbolic abuse of the father in her earlier imaginative reconstruction of him” (85). In some ways, I disagree that Miranda was a “reparation.” Although Miranda may present a more positive view of Fuller’s father, it was written for a different audience (first for the *Dial* and her Transcendentalist friends then for *Women* and a wider audience<sup>9</sup>). Although we do not know the intended audience for “Autobiographical Romance,” it is evident that Fuller wanted to communicate a different purpose and view in “Autobiographical Romance.” While in “Autobiographical Romance” Fuller mentions her mother briefly, in the “Miranda Fable” she does not acknowledge her mother’s existence at all (in keeping with Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*). Fuller begins her “Autobiographical Romance” by describing her mother and father, but she quickly delves into her experiences as a young child with the death of her baby sister. She is writing about herself to gain selfhood and to consider her childhood. Carolyn Steedman in “Enforced Narratives: Stories of Another Self” states that “it has become clear that in some autobiographies of the last two centuries the idea of the child was used to both recall and express the past that each individual embodied” (27). Fuller’s use of her childhood self is indicative of the writing in the nineteenth century. Steedman continues, “[W]hat was turned inside in the course of

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<sup>9</sup> See Larry Reynold’s “From Dial Essay to New York Book: The Making of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.”

individual human development was that which was already latent; the child (the child the autobiographer had been) *was* the story waiting to be told” (27). Fuller, by writing about her childhood, is therapeutically writing her story the way she feels it needs telling. Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet discusses narrative in autobiography and states, “As a product of the narrativisation [*sic*], the life course represents in the life-story a basic scheme which is made specific by the ficationalisation [*sic*] of the self, i.e. the construction of a character” (67). Fuller’s constructed character of her childhood self-conveys her life story and depicts the mourning of her sister.

### **Fuller, the “Real,” and the Abject**

Mourning in the nineteenth century shifted from a quiet acceptance to what Philippe Ariès describes as an exaggerated mourning. He states that feared not only the death of themselves but the deaths of those around them. This exaggerated mourning would have influenced Fuller’s response to her sister’s death. Fuller relates the event of a nursemaid showing her the body: “She took me by the hand and led me into a still and dark chamber,—then drew aside the curtain and showed my sister. I see yet that beauty of death!” (“Autobiographical Romance” 144). Fuller writes, “Thus my first experience with life was one of death” (144). In this way, Fuller encountered the “Real” (as Kristeva defines it) early in life. According to Lacan, the “Real” cannot be reached due to the limitation of language (i.e. the signifier is always separated from the signified) (*Écrits* 415). The limitation of language causes an irreparable divide. The Transcendentalists also believed that a person could not achieve the “Real” or, in their case, “truth.” Reynolds states, “As humanists, rather than social scientists, they recognized imaginative ‘re-presentation’ as the most promising method to reveal whatever ‘truth’ this actuality

contained and an active poetic sensibility as the best means to do so” (3). In their case, the “re-presentation” is through the use of language; therefore, Transcendentalist belief is also opposed to Lacan’s theory of the “Real” because they believed that language was a way to reveal “truth.” In many ways, Transcendental idealism is diametrically opposed to abject theory, which reduces the human experience to one of psychological reaction to the body and its fluids. Fuller’s own beliefs resist abject theory in part because Transcendental idealism points to the “divine energy imminent in nature and in man, giving them meaning, purpose, and direction” (Boller 66). However, Fuller’s fixation on her sister’s corpse presents an unintentional narrative that does not always dwell on the divine energy associated with human existence. Despite the contradiction of ideals between the body and soul, Fuller’s accounts in “Autobiographical Romance” indicate an uncharacteristic focus on the body and the nature of death.

I argue that Fuller as a Transcendentalist uncovers the “Real” or truth through the abject (particularly the abject corpse). According to Kristeva, the abject is the opposite of “I” or self. Kristeva writes, “And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out. To each ego its object, to each superego its abject” (2). The abject presents a “challenge” to normal behavior by bringing the “I” closer to the corpse or bodily fluid. While language creates a separation that leads other theorists to posit that the “Real” is unattainable, Kristeva theorizes that the “Real” can be achieved (or observed) in part through acknowledging the abject (9). Kristeva posits, “The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious

chance” (3). In part, the abject is the moment of revulsion when encountering a corpse. Lacan’s mirror stage separates self from other (“The Mirror Stage” 445), but the abject can blur those distinctions between subject and object as explained by Dino Felluga in “Modules on Kristeva: On the Abject.” Kristeva’s view of the abject is focused in the corpse as the prime example:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (4)

In Fuller’s exclamation of “I see yet that beauty of death!” she participates in the abject that “beckons.” As a three-year-old child, Fuller is forced to see the “other” (her sister) as separate from herself but she also witnesses what could be—her own death. Kristeva states that “refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (3). Fuller faces death and is aware of her own mortality while also choosing life as a child seeing her sister’s body and as an adult writing about the experience. In saying “I see yet that beauty of death” and being forced to view the abject, she is experiencing *jouissance*. The abject of her sister’s corpse means that the “Other no longer has a grip on the three apices of the triangle where subjective homogeneity resides; and so, it jettisons the object into an abominable real, inaccessible except through *jouissance*” (Kristeva 9). Through *jouissance*, Fuller can grasp and see the “Real.”

Fuller also sees her sister, however, in selfish terms. The sister “who would have been the companion of my life was severed from me, and I was left alone” (“Autobiographical Romance” 144). Fuller’s regret depicts a difference between her

idealism which would argue that “natural law was ethical in character” (Boller 74) and her true feelings of loss. Fuller states multiple times throughout her autobiography that she felt lonely due to the absence of her sister and later spending too much time alone studying. While Lacan might argue that this is due to the lack of the “Real,” Kristeva points it out as “want” by saying:

The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (5)

Fuller experienced the loss of her sister and, in the abject corpse and later loneliness, recognized the “wants” that she had for that relationship. Kristeva writes that through the vision of the abject “so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones” (Kristeva 9). Fuller then may have wanted to once again experience *jouissance* by remembering her sister’s dead body and writing about it. In regards to Fuller’s correspondence writings, Reynolds writes “It would seem that Fuller’s focus upon pain and suffering, as opposed to great ideas at the center of the era, takes her closer to truth and reality, or at least to emotional engagement with the world” (11). Zwarg also discusses trauma in Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes*. Although Zwarg does not discuss Fuller’s own trauma, Zwarg explains the relationship between Fuller’s focus on suffering of Native Americans and slaves in her writing. The pain and suffering focus is also true of her autobiography, which focused on her own traumatic past experiences rather than the experiences of others. In that focus on her childhood pain and suffering

she was trying to achieve the “Real” through the abject.

Fuller sought the abject her entire life though the memory of her baby sister whose corpse produces a cognitive dissonance. When Kristeva describes seeing the children’s shoes at Auschwitz, she states that those deaths interfere “with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things” (4). Usually, a child lives and contributes to a feeling of generativity. When they (he or she) die, this generativity is cut short. Although Fuller was a child herself at the time, her sister’s death still affects Fuller as an adult. She writes, “This has made a vast difference in my lot” (“Autobiographical Romance” 144). Fuller believes that much of her current turmoil or “lot” could have been resolved if only her sister had survived. Fuller yearns for the life they could have lived together and experiences the collapse of what should have, in the words of Kristeva, “saved” her from death.

### **Fuller and the Repetition of Trauma**

Fuller’s fascination with her sister’s death shows the repetitive nature of her trauma. In Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he describes the connection between trauma and repetition. Freud explains that “part of what is re-experienced under the compulsion to repeat must cause the ego displeasure, since it brings to light activities of repressed instinctual impulses” (435). He finds that although people wish to avoid trauma and pursue pleasure, that trauma enacts itself in strange ways. In remembering the death of her sister, Fuller is repeating the trauma *fort/da*, the child’s game Freud uses to illustrate the repetition of trauma. The child throws a reel with a little string attached to it and cries “fort!” or “gone!” Freud compares this to the child’s emotions when his mother leaves him. Then the child pulls the reel back to himself and cries “da!” or “there!” to

represent the mother's return (431-432). The child is reenacting a painful event through the disappearance of his toy as well as participating in the pleasure of its return. Despite the fact that the memory brings Fuller pain, it also brings her pleasure to remember. The fact that the repetition brings her pleasure does not negate the trauma because, according to Freud, "unpleasure for one system" can be "satisfaction for the other" (435). She experiences pain from the memory, yet in searching for the "Real" and acknowledging the abject in her writing, she feels *jouissance* or pleasure and "trauma provides a vehicle for questioning the relationship between experience, memory and event" (Zwarg 68). Not only does it provide a way to question but also a way to achieve answers. Cathy Caruth writes that trauma "seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). Fuller still grieves; nevertheless, she uses this grief (which in some ways offsets her Transcendental beliefs) and chooses to write about the experience, romanticize it, and search for the "Real."

The only instance where Fuller does not romanticize the death is in her description of the funeral: "I did not then, nor do I now, find any beauty in these ceremonies. What had they to do with the sweet playful child? Her life and death were alike beautiful, but all this sad parade was not" ("Autobiographical Romance" 144). The distinctions between self and other return and she loses sight of the "Real." The ceremony of the burial blurs the abject. Fuller willingly addresses the abject corpse of her sister but not in the ceremony that put her in the grave. She then relates a story from the funeral: "But I have no remembrance of what I have since been told I did, —insisting

with loud cries, that they should not put the body in the ground” (144). On one hand, she is reacting to the loss of her sister. On the other hand, she does not want the abject to depart from her sight. It is significant that she writes “the body” and not “my sister’s body” or “her body.” Fuller separates herself from the body when discussing the memories of others. In this last description, she is resisting and moving away from the abject of her sister’s corpse and thus moving away from the “Real.”

Following the burial scene, Fuller begins the critique of her early education by her father, Timothy Fuller. She was the oldest and he educated her as if she were an oldest son. Fuller writes, “He hoped to make me the heir of all he knew” (“Autobiographical Romance” 145). According to Fuller, these studies impacted her health and mind negatively:

The consequence was premature development of the brain, that made me a “youthful prodigy” by day, and by night a victim of spectral illusions, nightmare, and somnambulism, which at the time prevented the harmonious development of my bodily powers and checked my growth, while, later, they induced continual headache, weakness and nervous affections, of all kinds. (145)

Unlike in the “Miranda fable” where she describes education leading to “an outward serenity and inward peace” (*Woman* 21), she critiques her father and blames him for her poor health. In a footnote of “In Her Father’s Library: Margaret Fuller and the Making of the American Miranda” McBride writes, “In her ‘Autobiographical Romance’, Fuller explains that her father’s insistently patriarchal instruction, while ultimately advantageous, at times proved to be both psychologically and physically deleterious” (129). As well as causing her physical and emotional pain, I argue that the nightmares

(that Fuller blames on mental overwork) are another form of the abject. Due to these dreams, she was afraid of going to sleep. While the unconscious does not reveal everything, the “spectral illusions” in Fuller’s dreams can easily connect and represent something in her conscious life that she would rather repress or omit.<sup>10</sup>

Fuller’s slippage into third person narrative regarding her dreams indicates a symptom of trauma. For most of her work, she refers to herself as “I” but at the points where she experienced the most trauma (in her case, horrible nightmares) she refers to herself as “she” or “child.” Although she is writing about her trauma, she is also separating herself from it. She writes, “They did not know that, so soon as the light was taken away, she seemed to see colossal faces advancing slowly towards, the eyes dilating, and each feature swelling loathsome as they came” (145). The swelling features may indicate death as well. “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 13). The monsters from Fuller’s dreams reside in the in-between. The fear associated with the creatures’ strange faces and eyes disrupts her perceptions. While Fuller may not be “seeing” death through the “spectral illusions,” she is coming close to the “border” as Kristeva would say. She dreams of her own death of being “trampled by horses” or seeing “trees that dripped with blood” and the “blood became a pool [...] till it reached her lips” (146). Lacan considers the self-reflection of dreams and writes that “the *imago of one’s own body* presents in hallucinations or dreams [...] would seem to be the threshold of the visible world” (“The

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<sup>10</sup> See Freud’s description of the nature of “condensation” and “omission” in dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Mirror Stage" 443). I interpret this as *almost* achieving the "Real" in dreams. In regards to Fuller's dream combined with Kristeva's idea of "abject," Fuller may be experiencing the "Real" in the dreams of her own death.

Although Fuller attributes the tree dream to her reading Virgil before bed, I would also argue that the nature of her dreams has something to do with her mother. Earlier in "Autobiographical Romance" Fuller describes her mother in terms of a garden: "She was one of those fair and flower-like natures[...]of that spontaneous love for every living thing, for man, and beast, and tree" (143). After a long description of her fascination with books, particularly Roman mythology, she returns to her mother's garden, which she calls "the happiest haunt of my childish years" (149). She discusses the flowers and writes, "An ambition swelled in my heart to be as beautiful, as perfect as they. I have not kept my vow" (150). Could Fuller also be referring to her mother in this declaration? If only she could be as beautiful and perfect as her mother. In this scene, Fuller is distancing herself from the abject in the life that surrounds her in the garden. She tells the flowers that "ye know nothing of the blights, the distortions, which beset the human being" (150). Although Fuller seeks to remove herself from pain by visiting the garden, she is still engaging with her trauma. Fuller may be equating her mother with the flowers; however, Chevigny reads Fuller's moment of wanting to be "perfect" like the flowers as a moment of jealousy: "She clings to flowers as links to her mother which are also her sibling rivals, but asserts that she cannot match them, cannot be a garden growth" (84-85). While some critics focus on Fuller's relationship with her father, Chevigny considers the strained relationship between Fuller and her mother: "The autobiographical romance goes on to chart the effects of this early loneliness and rigor. In describing the two worlds of her

divided self (her father's books and her mother's flowers), she all but names them masculine and feminine" (85). Fuller's nightmares may be an indication of this divided self. However, in the garden, she felt peace. Chevigny writes that the "chief refuge" from her "father's study" was her mother's garden (84). Chevigny continues, "Although the mother is not described in this passage, her presence is felt, perhaps with more power and pathos, through the plants she nurtured so tenderly" (84). Fuller's mother's presence is also felt not only in the garden, but also in her horrible nightmares of trees dripping with blood. Fuller blames her father for being the "cause of all these horrors of the night (146). In this way, Fuller also blames her father for separating her from her mother. In the *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva recounts the phobia of a young girl, Sandy. Kristeva states, "Through the mouth that I fill with words instead of my mother whom I miss from now on more than ever, I elaborate that want, and the aggressivity that accompanies it, by saying" (41). Fuller's dreams act as the "aggressive want" to be with her mother. Kristeva also describes the mother as the "first pre-object (abject) of need" (118) especially in regards to giving birth to her child (155). While Fuller may always want to return to the original abject of her mother, she is forced away by her father.

The abject presents itself once again in "Autobiographical Romance" when Fuller writes about dreaming of her mother's death. In the third person, Fuller writes, "Often she dreamed of following to the grave the body of her mother, as she had done that of her sister, and woke to find the pillow drenched in tears" ("Autobiographical Romance" 146). Fuller dreamt of her mother's death, which is another separation from the mother. Fuller was separated from her mother early in life as a consequence of Fuller's education and she subsequently dreams of the greater separation in death. In her unconscious fear of her

mother's death, she is once again forced to confront the idea of the abject or corpse and "Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject" (Kristeva 6). Fuller confronts the "otherness" by writing about the corpses of her sister and mother. Fuller even addresses the "Real" that she feels: "the life of dreams [...] has often seemed to her more real, and being remembered with more interest, than that of waking hours" (146). The interest is *jouissance*. Her nightmares, full abject horror, causes the "loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other" (Felluga). Her dreams feel "more real" because she is encountering the in-between where she can meet the "Real."

### **Fuller's Rejection of Her Father and Early Reflection**

As previously stated, Fuller did not view her education in a positive light in "Autobiographical Romance." Beyond this view, Fuller rejects both her mother and father in "Autobiographical Romance" versus just rejection of her mother in *Miranda*. Believing that she had to grow up too soon, Fuller writes:

But I do wish that I had read no books at all till later, —that I had lived with toys, and played in the open air. Children should not cull the fruits of reflection and observation early, but expand in the sun, and let the thoughts come to them [...] With me, much of life was devoured in the bud. ("Autobiographical Romance" 155)

Fuller denounces the education she received by her father and regrets her early childhood maturation. Rachel Blumenthal writes, "By identifying her father as the cause of her mental and physical distress, Margaret Fuller traces the etiology of her nervous illness

(and brilliance) to an overbearing patriarchal—and mercantile—figure” (562). In this way, she is “rejecting” the father. Kristeva theorizes the rejection of the father by saying that “a child who has swallowed up his parents too soon [...] rejects and throws up everything that is given to him—all gifts, all objects. He has, he could have, a sense of the abject” (6). Fuller also rejects her mother and, according to Kristeva, what she “has swallowed up instead of maternal love is an emptiness, or rather a maternal hatred without a word for the words of the father; that is what he tries to cleanse himself of, tirelessly” (6). Although Kristeva was describing a son as this point, it is applicable to Fuller, who was trained as a son by her father.

Fuller’s declaration concerning her education both denounces the education she received by her father (hence reflection) and longs for a connection with her mother. Reflection is theorized by Lacan when he expands on Freud’s ideas about childhood and adds different stages, one being the mirror stage, which usually occurs between 6-18 months of age (Felluga). In this stage, the infant recognizes self and other as two distinct things and Lacan illustrates this in how an infant looks into a mirror (“The Mirror Stage” 442). Fuller regrets reflection. Reflection involves separation. Part of this may be due to the separation between herself and her mother at an early age. The first separation appeared when her mother gave birth to another child, then the separation due to her baby sister’s death, and finally the separation when Fuller’s father began to educate her. Chevigny discusses the reasons behind this as well: “Several factors worked to diminish her [Fuller’s mother] contact with her firstborn: her own chronically delicate health: the care of her second child and her grief after that death, and the bearing later of seven more children” (83). If Fuller’s life had not been “devoured in the bud” she believes that she

would have been better off. She wants to go back to that time before the separation of self and other and live life differently. She still has a desire for her mother but she is forced to change that desire to her father and knowledge. She is “driven for refuge[...]to the world of books” (“Autobiographical Romance” 146). Rather than being nurtured like a garden plant in the sun by her mother (the garden here being a feminine space), she is confined to her father’s study (the masculine<sup>11</sup> space).

### **Fuller, Feminism, and Freedom**

Fuller’s phrases “play in the open air” and “expand in the sun” (155) also have their own feminist connotations in the study of women authors. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state in their seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic* that women used imprisonment metaphors in the writing as personal depictions of their lives (87). In writing about escape, Fuller is engaging with writing as an outsider in a man’s world. Fuller uses similar imprisonment terminology again in regards to her father. She relates the story of reading Shakespeare’s plays on a Sunday and being punished for it (since Shakespeare was not proper for Sunday reading according to her father). Fuller writes, “My confinement tortured me. I could not go forth from this prison to ask after these friends [Shakespeare’s characters]” (“Autobiographical Romance” 152). Fuller’s exaggeration of being locked away from Shakespeare is possibly the musings of an angry child; however, because she is writing about this incident as an adult, she is also relating how she felt imprisoned in other ways. Fuller wrote “Autobiographical Romance” during a difficult time in her life. Chevigny writes, “Looking for ways to help support her

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<sup>11</sup> As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Fuller viewed the intellect as a masculine part (or trait) of the human soul.

mother and younger siblings (her father had died five years earlier) and concerned about her own emotional and intellectual fulfillment, she suffered from a critical sense of impasse" (84). In writing "Autobiographical Romance," Fuller is attempting "to understand the origins of that impasse" (Chevigny 84). However, Fuller's need to understand herself is another form of reflection, which she largely regrets as discussed earlier.

### **Conclusion**

Fuller gives her own reading of herself that resists male interpretation in "Autobiographical Romance." Gilbert and Gubar write of the woman author, "Her battle, however, is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of *her*. In order to define herself as an author she must define the terms of her socialization" (49). Fuller defines these terms by writing about her childhood. By defining herself in "Autobiographical Romance," Fuller seeks "selfhood" or "authority" over herself. In an article about Harriet Martineau's autobiography, Sidonie Smith states, "'Self' [...] could be 'represented' precisely because the pattern imposed by the autobiographer names and controls the meaning of life and the configuration of self' (4). Fuller develops her own idea of self and achieves selfhood in her writing; however, she experiences "timidity about self-dramatization" (Gilbert and Gubar 50). The timidity is evident since Fuller never finished "Autobiographical Romance" and does not describe her adult self except in regards to her later health. She writes that her childhood studies "wasted my constitution, and will bring me, —even though I have learned to understand and regulate my now morbid temperament,—to a premature grave" ("Autobiographical Romance" 145). However, Fuller makes a point to say that she did not suffer from

madness: “I did not go mad, as many would, at being continually roused from my dreams. I had too much strength to be crushed” (147). Fuller admits to her physical illness but not to any lingering psychological illness. Fuller, by discussing illness and relating it to her father and her education, is resisting the patriarchal lineage of her education “handed down not from one woman to another but from the stern ‘literary’ fathers of patriarchy to all their ‘inferiorized’ female descendants” (Gilbert and Gubar 51). Fuller seeks to understand herself as an author in the male world (or what Fuller might call the male sphere) by examining her childhood and subsequent ill health. Ultimately, “Autobiographical Romance” is a rich mining ground for theories of trauma, the “Real,” and the abject. Fuller’s work lends itself to all these theories due to her absorption with her baby sister’s death, her regrets that her education led to premature reflection, and the repetitive nature of her trauma through her writing. “Autobiographical Romance” presents the reader with a glimpse of Fuller’s provocative and unique thought.

## CONCLUSION

Scholars recognize and draw attention to Margaret Fuller's mental and physical illness; yet few scholars directly analyze her works through the lens of her illness. The abundance of examples situated in her works, however, show that mental and physical illness influenced her writing, specifically *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and "Autobiographical Romance." The diagnosis given to "nervous" women in the nineteenth century intersects with Fuller's representations in her journal and letters of her own illness. Fuller's use of mesmerism as a treatment presents a unique dichotomy between her Transcendentalist ideals and her need to treat her illness. Fuller's writing in her additions to "The Great Lawsuit" for *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* depicts a view of woman's lot that reveals more negative outlook on life than expressed in her previous published texts. Fuller's visit to Sing Sing prison, her romantic rejection by William Clarke, and her anxiety over taking the job in New York are significant events that shaped her revisions to *Woman*. Scholars have investigated the rhetoric of her writing by relating it to sermons, conversation, and feminism, but have not addressed the rhetoric of illness in *Woman*.

Illness is also present in Fuller's "Autobiographical Romance" when she describes traumatic childhood with the death of her sister and her many nightmares (which she blames on her studies). She even identifies the correlations between her childhood and her physical illness as an adult. Fuller pushes her trauma away from herself but then re-enacts it by choosing to write "Autobiographical Romance." While

Lacan theorized that the “Real” could never be reached, Fuller encountered the “Real” in remembering the corpse of her baby sister. Although I did not discuss it in this chapter, Fuller wrote another piece of semi-autobiographical writing in *Summer on the Lakes*. She writes of a young girl, Mariana, whom she met at boarding school; however, according to a letter from Fuller to Channing, Mariana is based on Fuller’s own perception of herself. Fuller is both Mariana and the young girl in awe of Mariana. The dual personality is intriguing, especially when Fuller writes of Mariana’s spirit being broken and the “black despair of which only youth is capable” (166). Fuller states that Mariana “returned to life, but it was as one who has passed through the valley of death” (167). Although Mariana did not physically die, her spirit withered and a “wild fire was tamed” (167). This piece presents multiple ways to examine Fuller’s trauma more in depth and analyze her distinction between the “Real” and the unreal. Further study is needed to compare all three autobiographical works: the Miranda fable in *Woman*, “Autobiographical Romance,” and Mariana in *Summer*.

Ultimately, the Transcendentalists’ ideology is counterintuitive to abject theory. The abject focuses on the body, much in the same way Fuller focused on the body, while Transcendentalism emphasizes transcendence or growth of the soul. Although abject theory appears at first glance as incompatible with Transcendentalism, many of the Transcendentalists were unable to separate the mind from the body. As Cynthia Davis positions in “Body and Soul,” Emerson suffered from tuberculous and saw family members die from the disease, yet he did not dwell on the experience or connect the body and the soul. However, if one were to use the abject to analyze other writings by Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, we might discover new ways of reading their writing.

Physical and mental illness plays a major part in the reality of being human. Can this reality be separated from American Transcendentalism? Emerson writes in “Heroism that ‘false prudence which dotes on health and wealth is the butt and merriment of heroism. Heroism, like Plotinus is almost ashamed of its body’” (*Project Gutenberg*). Therefore, part of heroism means to forget one’s body. Although he does not wish to “dote on health,” his very mention of the body and health presents a conflict between the idealism associated with Transcendentalism and the material existence of an imperfect or ill body. The Transcendentalists sought unity in all things. Yet, their own bodies resisted unity with nature and the spiritual world by bringing them back into the realm of bodily pain and imperfection.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1: Frequency of Words from “Lawsuit” (18,624 words) to *Woman* (46,029 words)**

	<i>Words</i>	<i>Lawsuit #</i>	<i>Woman #</i>
<i>Words Related to Emotions/Mind</i>	“sad”	2	7
	“saddens”	1	2
	“sadly”	0	1
	“sadness”	1	2
	“sorrowful”	2	2
	“sorrow”	0	5
	“tears”	2	12
	“happiness”	4	17
	“happy”	4	12
	“minds”	10	15
	“mind”	31	67
	“mental”	4	14
	“feelings”	3	12
	“lonely”	3	9
	“bitter”	1	6
	“bitterness”	1	3
<i>Words Related to Health</i>	“mesmerism”	1	1

	“magnetism”	2	2
	“magnetic”	2	3
	“electric”	1	4
	“electrical”	3	3
	“ill” *	0	2
	“tired”	1	1
	“pain”	1	4
	“painful”	2	3
	“agony”	0	1
	“affliction”	0	1
	“afflict”	1	1
	“afflicting”	0	1
	“death”	4	15
	“body”	1	16
<i>Words Related to Religion/Transcendentalism</i>	“transcended”	1	1
	“religious”	10	18
<i>Uncategorized Words</i>	“freedom”	12	24
	“destiny”	6	17
	“lot” *	2	8

\* (when not used in the context of ill will, ill intent, etc.)

\* in regards to “woman’s lot”