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*East Tennessee State University*

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“In death thy life is found”:  
An Examination of the Forgotten Poetry of Margaret Fuller

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of English  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in English

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by  
Staci E. Lewis  
May 2002

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Dr. Ronald K. Giles, Chair  
Dr. Judith B. Slagle  
Dr. Theresa Lloyd

Keywords: Margaret Fuller, Nineteenth-Century Poetry, Transcendentalist, Androgyny, Woman  
in the Nineteenth Century, American Poets, Early Feminism

## ABSTRACT

“In death thy life is found”:  
An Examination of the Forgotten Poetry of Margaret Fuller

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Staci E. Lewis

Despite the recent scholarship that has been performed on Margaret Fuller, very little has focused on the varied body of poetry she composed during her brief life. By dividing her poetic works into three categories – those written to an early “lover,” those focusing on the theme of androgyny, and those written during her “mature period” of 1844 – one is better able to follow Fuller on the emotional and intellectual journey that served as the foundation for all of her writings. In addition, the study of Fuller’s poetry provides a clearer understanding of how this erudite woman transcended gender boundaries in her writings, as well as in the choices she made in her daily life, further emphasizing her reputation as a revolutionary woman of nineteenth century.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of Sarah Margaret Fuller, a revolutionary woman and visionary whose candle of knowledge was extinguished far too soon.

“If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.” - Margaret Fuller

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I wish to thank my parents, Wayne and Gwen Lewis, whose overwhelming love has provided me with a canvas on which to express my independent thought and creativity. Thank you for instilling in me a strong sense of ambition in addition to a great love and appreciation of books. I love both of you very much.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GENDER BARRIERS

“What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her.”

Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century

Margaret Fuller, a prominent Transcendentalist and leading nineteenth-century educator, is best remembered for the many works of nonfiction she produced during her very brief life, works that include her noteworthy travel book, Summer on the Lakes; her treatise on the position of nineteenth-century women, Woman in the Nineteenth Century; hundreds of letters, dozens of articles, and the essays that she composed for publication in The Dial and the New York Tribune. In addition to these numerous texts, however, Fuller also composed more than one hundred poems, few of which have ever been examined by more than a handful of scholars who have given them little more than a fleeting glance.

It is my contention that Fuller’s poetry possesses a value that has been overlooked by the academic masses, a value that is perhaps best measured by examining a select few that share common elements. Throughout this text, I plan to evaluate closely three categories of Fuller’s poetry, specifically, those poems that were written to an early “lover,” those that focus on the theme of androgyny, and those meritorious miscellaneous works she composed during 1844, a year termed “the mature period” by renowned Fuller scholar Jeffrey Steele (“Freeing” 138). It would be difficult to explore the many thematic possibilities of every poem in each of these three categories, so instead I plan to narrow my focus, closely analyzing a select few from each.

The poems Fuller wrote to an early “lover” were actually intended for a Miss Anna Barker, a young woman Fuller referred to as “the Beautiful” and for whom Fuller often

expressed loving sentiments in written correspondence to friends. Whether or not Fuller and Barker ever engaged in a sexual relationship remains unclear despite the vast amount of scholarship that has been performed on Fuller's life during the last fifty years. However, it is unquestionable that Fuller harbored very strong, and most likely very romantic, feelings for her, even after Barker's marriage to Fuller's friend, Samuel Ward. I will specifically address three of the seven poems written to Barker, including "To A.H.B. On our meeting, on my return from N.Y. to Boston, August 1835," "To the Same. A Feverish Vision," and "To the Same. Glen-Anna. August 1835." These three works, in addition to numerous pieces of Fuller's written correspondence, provide evidence of their loving relationship and afford an intimate look at Fuller's otherwise very private personal existence and will thus support my contention that she felt much more than a girlish friendship toward Barker, an assumption that many scholars have deemed preferable.

The theme of androgyny was an appealing and ever-prevalent notion that seemed to saturate Fuller's longer texts in addition to much of her poetry. Three of these poems, "Double Triangle, Serpent and Rays," "To the Face seen in the Moon," and "For the Power to whom we bow," will be discussed in chapter three as a basis for an assessment of her fascination with the theme of androgyny. Further, I will present my theory that she refused to repress her interest in this subject during a time when the "radical dualism" of male and female was rarely mentioned or even considered by male scholars of that time. I also contend that future writers, such as Virginia Woolf, were greatly influenced by Fuller's poems and miscellaneous writings on this topic.

Finally, Fuller wrote many of her finest poems during the year 1844. Each poem I choose from Fuller's "mature period" will demonstrate how she proved herself to be a scholar



familiar with many aspects of literature, in particular themes associated with Greek, Roman and Egyptian mythology as well as Biblical references common in Christian culture, as she reinforces her theme of androgyny by incorporating these aspects into it.

The order selected to present these themes best demonstrates the emotional and intellectual journey that served as the foundation for all of Fuller's writings, her poetical works not excluded. This analysis of her poetry will begin with those she composed for Anna Barker in 1835, the same year that witnessed the death of Fuller's father, Timothy. This passing launched a period of deep emotional stress in Fuller's life as she experienced grief and relief simultaneously, two sentiments that added to the immense confusion she already possessed about love. This uncertainty led Fuller to embrace strongly her relationship with Barker, which caused her to question further the validity of the stereotypical roles that had always been assigned to women and men. Thus began Fuller's interest in the theme of androgyny, the focus of the following chapter. Fuller's extensive exploration of this topic added to her reputation as a revolutionary and intellectual writer, two characteristics that paved the road to her "mature period," the subject of this study's fourth chapter. The concluding chapter will provide a general history of Fuller's last years, with specific emphasis placed on her tragic death that occurred during her return to the United States after having lived abroad for a number of years. Further, this chapter will examine Fuller's frame of mind during her last years as she debated returning to a nation that she felt rejected her and her radical ideas. Fuller's breadth of independent thought demonstrates how she transcended gender barriers not only in her writings but also in her daily choices. The framework of analysis in this study is intended to provide the reader with a clearer understanding of Fuller's internal journey, as her ever-evolving mind became tinder for her poetical fire.

Although Fuller gained the reputation of an erudite writer of prose during her life, her works were soon neglected after her untimely death in 1850 at the age of forty. It was not until the 1960s that Fuller was resurrected from obscurity when a sudden explosion of interest in women writers flooded academia.<sup>1</sup> Although many of her works now enjoy vast acclaim, her poetry has never really been accepted as worthy of scholarly praise. It is my contention, however, that many of these poetical works illuminate a great deal about the revolutionary mind that Fuller possessed. Today's society is better able to accept her poems, as modern readers tend to appreciate feminist responses and viewpoints much more readily than Fuller's contemporaries. Thus independent readers and scholars alike are more sensitive to and appreciative of views that were deemed radical during her day, but that are now viewed as poetic expressions of our daily emotions and, indeed, of our daily existence.

It would be untrue to say that Fuller received no admiration at all during her life; she was in fact respected by many of her contemporaries and regarded as an asset to the Transcendentalist movement. However, it was not uncommon for her feminist ideas and learned capabilities to meet with staunch opposition from a great many nineteenth-century men and women who more often than not chose to show contempt or outward disregard for her independent thought and daring lifestyle. It is certainly reasonable to assert that Fuller receives much more respect today than she did during her own life. It is for this reason that I chose "In death thy life is found," a line from her poem "Double Triangle, Serpent and Rays," to be the primary title of this work. This is a logical choice, as I feel it encapsulates the whole of this study's premise; Fuller, through her poetry, projected independence of thought and strength of the human condition, thus enabling her to transcend gender barriers and leave her mark on history as a woman ahead of her own time. Dead for more than one hundred and fifty years,

Fuller has only recently entered into the academic arena as an author worthy of our time and attention. It is my desire to examine some of her poetical works, and, in so doing, encourage other scholars to gain a different perspective on, and deeper appreciation for, the life she lived.

The secondary title of this work, “An Examination of the Forgotten Poetry of Margaret Fuller,” was chosen because past literary scholars and anthologists often dismissed Fuller’s verse with so much force that few realized that she even wrote poetry. On rare occasion today, one may happen upon, in an anthology of American poetry, two, three, or perhaps even four of her poems entrenched among the overabundant works by male poets who most often laid claim to their insurmountable territory long before death; generally, however, a small excerpt from Woman in the Nineteenth Century can be found in a college-level American literature textbook, it alone expected to encompass the full extent of Fuller’s bravado.

Through my analysis of Fuller’s poetry, I hope to illuminate some of the literary value that has been ignored since her death more than one hundred and fifty years ago. Categorizing her works of poetry, as stated above, clarifies how Margaret Fuller transcended the boundaries of gender in ways that were, indeed, revolutionary for a woman living in the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER 2

### SHE WHO SOUGHT FRIENDSHIP:

#### FULLER'S POETRY TO ANNA BARKER, "THE BEAUTIFUL"

"...beings born under the same star, and bound with us in a common destiny. These are not mere acquaintances but are sharers of our very existence [. . .]. These not only know themselves more, but *are* more for having met, and regions of their being burst into leaf and bloom and sing."

Margaret Fuller, Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli

It is often helpful to examine poetry initially from a biographical point of view. The poems discussed in this chapter, "To A.H.B. On our meeting, on my return from N.Y. to Boston, August 1835," "To the Same. A Feverish Vision," and "To the Same. Glen-Anna. August 1835," encompass many fascinating aspects that shed light on some of the mysteries that surround Fuller's life, not the least of which are references to her tortured mental condition brought on by a difficult childhood relationship with her father and, perhaps more importantly, the homoerotic feelings she possessed for a friend she lovingly referred to as "the Beautiful."

Biographical criticism is a very important, although occasionally neglected, theory from which to study a literary text. In the past, both biography and "intention" have been attacked by formalists who felt that a piece of literature should be examined "not on the author's intention," but on its "own merits" (Stevens and Stewart 56). However, a critic must be willfully blind to disregard the life of the author completely when studying a text that came from the heart and mind of a human being who experienced real life situations that are undoubtedly reflected in his or her text. According to biographical critic Leon Edel, "The text cannot be an 'appendage' to the biography of the [author], for it is an integral part of it; and it is a reflection not only of the [author's] reading but of his way of experiencing life" (63). This is especially true when

studying the poetry of Margaret Fuller, as she poured so much of her own rich life into her literary endeavors. The biographical critic is inclined to believe that the “personal emotions” of the author have not entirely disappeared and that “at least a portion of them may be recovered and may perhaps be found to have some relevance” (65).

Before we can accurately examine the poetry Fuller wrote to Anna Barker, we must first briefly consider other factors that contributed to the condition of her life at that time. As stated in the previous chapter, Fuller possessed conflicting ideas about love that were only compounded after the death of her father, Timothy, in 1835.<sup>1</sup> The loss of her father left her emotionally bisected, forcing her to experience the grief related to the loss of a parent, as well as an overwhelming sense of relief that was the direct result of a difficult childhood spent deep in study. Her youthful academic pursuits were forced upon her by a dominating father who insisted that his eldest child receive a “gentlemen’s classical education” despite the fact that she was female. Influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Women, Fuller’s father provided her with an “education that rivaled that of John Stuart Mill” (Smith 32). By the time Fuller was nine years old, she had studied Virgil, Cicero, Horace, and Tacitus and was able to read and write French, Italian, and Greek. She later wrote that she felt her “nature had been forced” by these educational rigors. She experienced headaches, nightmares, and life-long psychological maladies due to the years she spent “overstraining her mind,” years that deprived her of both recreation and sleep (Bell 18).

Fuller’s overzealous studies eventually proved to be too much for her. At the age of twenty-five, she found herself suffering from “brain fever,” an illness that was attributed to a combination of mentally strenuous work, Fuller’s “sense of confinement,” and familial guilt.<sup>2</sup> Fuller would later write that while she was ill, she and her father shared one of the few tender

moments of their relationship, an event characterized by a loving verbal expression of pride that Timothy Fuller related to his daughter as she lay in her bed, death apparently imminent. Fuller did, however, eventually recover, but her father passed away soon after her recuperation. The guilt she expressed after the passing of her father was later related by her mother who stated, “Margaret brought the younger children together around the lifeless form of her father, and, kneeling, pledged herself to God that if she had ever been ungrateful [. . .] to her father, she would atone for it by fidelity to her brothers” (von Mehren 71). With this knowledge of Fuller’s youthful history, the critic can examine her poetical work more critically, because her early experiences of love intermingled with grief and guilt established much of the foundation of her relationships with women, including Anna Barker.

The three poems to be considered here are from a series of seven that Fuller wrote to Barker, a young woman who was very different from Fuller in many ways. As implied earlier, Fuller was highly intellectual, strong-willed, and quite liberal for her time. Most scholars represent Barker as demure and very beautiful; she does not seem to have been even slightly interested in politics or writing, the two cornerstones of Fuller’s existence. Throughout many of Fuller’s texts (poems and essays alike), the belief that opposites attract appeared quite often. To her it was “a law of nature that two halves sought a whole” (von Mehren 164). The mixture of emotions Fuller experienced after the death of her father seems to have strengthened the relationship she already shared with Barker. It would seem natural for a philosophical thinker like Fuller to seek out the closest person who represented her opposite self; her desire to form a bond with her other half was perhaps an attempt to produce a unity within her life that she had not experienced before.

Fuller's poem, "To the Same. A Feverish Vision," was written during her struggle with "brain fever" that was detailed in the above paragraphs. Although this poem was written before the death of her father, it is still a good place from which to begin an examination of her poetry, as it includes not only loving references to Barker, but also provides a glimpse into the tortured frame of mind Fuller endured during her mid-twenties, the period in which Fuller's convoluted feelings about love bloomed into fruition. The text of this poem follows:

After a day of wearying, wasting pain,  
At last my aching eyes I think to close;  
Hoping to win some moments of repose,  
Though I must wake to suffering again.  
But what delirious horrors haunt my brain!  
In a deep ghastly pit, bound down I lie, --  
About me flows a stream of crimson dye,  
Amid its burning waves I strive in vain;  
Upward I stretch my arms, -- aloud I cry  
In frantic anguish, -- "raise me, or I die!"  
When with soft eyes, beaming the tenderest love,  
I see thy dear face, Anna! far above, --  
By magnet drawn up to thee I seem,  
And for some moments was dispelled the fever's frightful dream!<sup>3</sup>

Written in September 1835, the above sonnet has been called "the most important of Fuller's early poems" (Steele, "Freeing" 140). Despite its brevity, the language is descriptively rich, thus enabling the reader to gain a better understanding of the author herself, as well as her

mental state at the time when these lines were composed. The dream imagery that Fuller incorporates into this poem leaves itself open to an interpretation that illuminates a great deal about her state of mind; according to her journals, Fuller experienced, while she was ill with “brain fever,” numerous nightmares that were similar to those she suffered through during the youthful days she spent studying with her father. The references to her nightmares in this sonnet predict a passage later written by Fuller in her “Autobiographical Romance”:

They did not know that, when at last she went to sleep, it was to dream of horses trampling over her . . . or, as she had just read in her Virgil, of being among trees that dripped with blood . . . while the blood became a pool and plashed over her feet, and rose higher and higher, till soon . . . it would reach her lips . . . she told what she had dreamed, her father sharply bid her “leave off thinking of such nonsense, or she would be crazy.” (qtd. in Steele, “Freeing” 141)

It seems clear that the “delirious horrors that haunt[ed] her brain” were those engraved into her imagination as a child brought on by her father’s overzealous teaching practices. The “stream of crimson dye” Fuller refers to in this poem is certainly the blood that she had imagined flowing over her after reading a passage from Virgil before she was even nine years old. These horrifying images speak to the reader and help to clarify Fuller’s mental condition.

Although she was a brilliant woman by any standards, highly respected and widely renowned, Fuller secretly endured a number of ghosts that presented themselves in the form of flashbacks that would not only haunt her subconscious and creep into her writings, but also encumber her accomplishments throughout life. For example, the rigorous study with her father made her a very unpopular child after she began school at the age of ten. She was perceived as a boaster who monopolized the classroom and took pleasure in embarrassing other students when



they gave the wrong answers to questions. When she became an adult, many of her male contemporaries found her to be a brazen female who was haughty and aloof. Perhaps it was partially these opinions possessed by her male friends that persuaded her to shun them generally in favor of very close relationships with women.<sup>4</sup> As women are more often considered to be sources of emotional support than their male counterparts, it seems obvious that Fuller, a woman who experienced inner turmoil throughout most of her life, would choose to associate herself with loving and compassionate females such as Barker, a suggestion that is reiterated in the presence of the female guardian who appears to Fuller at the end of this poem in the physical appearance of her “beautiful” friend, a savior to Fuller during her most emotionally unsettling times.

Barker played the role of Fuller’s guardian for many years during her young adulthood. To Fuller, she represented all that was good, innocent, and “beautiful” in life. It is little wonder that Fuller saw her as a potential savior able to rescue her from “the fever’s frightful dream,” since she was probably one of the few visions of loveliness in Fuller’s world. There is no doubt that Barker loved Fuller, although most certainly not to the extent that Fuller returned the sentiment. Several years after composing this sonnet, Fuller wrote a passage in her journal about the feelings she possessed for Barker in her younger years:

The beautiful seeks the strong, and the strong the beautiful [. . .]. I loved Anna for a time I think with as much passion as I was then strong enough to feel – Her face was always gleaming before me, her voice was echoing in my ear [. . .]. She loved me, too, though not so much, because her nature was “less high, less grave, less large, less deep” but she loved me more tenderly, less passionately. (Steele, Essential 23)

These lines from Fuller's journal are reflected in the sonnet. Indeed, "[Anna's] face was always gleaming before [Fuller]," just as Fuller wrote in the poem: "When with soft eyes, beaming the tenderest love, / I see thy dear face, Anna! far above." The love Barker directed toward Fuller must have been very tender indeed for Fuller to remember it so vividly seven years after the poem was written. There is no doubt that of the two, Barker was the "beautiful" and Fuller the "strong." As stated earlier, Fuller believed that opposites attract, and the tenderness Barker possessed must have more than made up for that which Fuller lacked.

Another sonnet Fuller wrote to Barker, "To the Same. Glen-Anna. August 1835," also possesses many of the loving sentiments Fuller expressed in "To the Same. A Feverish Vision." This second sonnet, written the month before Fuller became ill with "brain fever," focuses on "the power of friendship by attributing the capacity to appreciate nature to the 'heart's power' communicated by [a] friend" (Steele, "Freeing" 139). The text of the poem follows:

Less bright the scene, than when my saddened eye  
Last saw these graceful trees and gentle slopes,  
Leaving them, with but half-encouraged hopes  
That e'er again, in the sweet company  
Of the bright being I had held so dear,  
Beneath the summer sky I here should stand.  
Once more the solemn voice salutes my ear  
Of the slow sea break, on the narrow strand, –  
While a pale vaporous softness, well agrees  
With tender thoughts, and moonlight memories  
Of hours that treacherous breath could not profane, –

*She* still will love; if ne'er we meet again  
And *thou* hast made me blest, by thy heart's power  
To read untaught the past, and share the present hour!<sup>5</sup>

Just as in "To the Same. A Feverish Vision," there is a sense of angst in this sonnet. In the previous poem, Fuller wrote of her desperation to end a horrifying nightmare, an end that came about only after the "beautiful" vision of Anna Barker appeared before her in the form of a guardian angel. Conversely, this poem's dilemma revolves around the *absence* of Barker's physical presence, although her ability to protect is still apparent. Examining this poem as a parallel to Fuller's life, one can see that she is looking to Barker for support and security in the text, just as she did in her life. Additionally, this poem conveys an overwhelming tone of sadness and anxiety, two emotions Fuller seems to have carried with her daily. As this work states, Fuller's "hopes" were "half-encouraged" by Barker's "sweet company," a poetic portrait of the true existence the women shared.

As described in the sonnet, the unique friendship Fuller and Barker possessed seems to "transcend separation" (Steele, "Freeing" 139). Despite Barker's absence, the love Fuller feels for her friend emerges in the text through the imagery of "graceful trees and gentle slopes," images that are commonly characteristic of sentimental love poems. Fuller's description of holding Barker, "the bright being," illuminates the extent of Fuller's emotional attachment to her friend, a connection so strong that "lovers" seems to be a more appropriate description of their relationship than simply "friends." The poem evokes an image of two young lovers standing on a sandy shoreline, sharing their "heart's power" for the "present hour," realizing that they will later remember with "tender thoughts" and "moonlight memories" the beauty and mutual love of that evening. To carry this notion a step further, seven years after this sonnet was written, Fuller

wrote the following in her journal: “that night when she [Anna] leaned on me and her eyes were such a deep violet blue, so like night, as they never were before, and we both felt such a strange mystic thrill and knew what we had never known before” (Steele, Essential 23). This entry is oddly reminiscent of the sonnet discussed here (e.g. “of the bright being I had held so dear, / beneath the summer sky”); it would be logical to surmise that it refers to the night detailed in the poem. Whatever else they mean, these words imply the homoerotic feelings Fuller possessed for Barker, feelings that are present, though delicately rendered, in the poem discussed here.

Despite the fact that it was considered inappropriate for persons of opposite sex to display affection publicly toward each other during the nineteenth century in the United States, it was quite acceptable for persons of the same sex, especially females, to do so. Such behavior was viewed as “girlishly pure, a sign of sensibility and emotional responsiveness [. . .] innocent, permissible, and unthreatening” (von Mehren 51). But, a nineteenth-century best seller entitled A Young Lady’s Friend by Eliza Farrar, Fuller’s friend and mentor, who introduced her to Barker, states:

All kissing and caressing of your female friends should be kept for your hours of privacy, and never indulged in before gentlemen. There are some reasons for this, which will readily suggest themselves, and others, which can only be known to those well acquainted with the world. (qtd. in von Mehren 269)

This historical insight into nineteenth-century cultural norms suggests that relationships between women, such as Fuller and Barker, were likely viewed as natural and healthy relationships that probably attracted very little attention and were entirely acceptable. The fact that Fuller wrote numerous poems to women, including the seven to Barker, was considered normal behavior,

despite her use of phrases such as “divinist (sic) love” when referring to Barker (von Mehren 51). According to Mary E. Wood,

To write about a romantic love for a woman was necessarily to place oneself in the position of male artist or philosopher. Just as a romantic friendship between middle-class white women was permissible as long as it did not threaten marriage, such a friendship was only acceptable as long as it did not enter public discourse, in other words, as long as it did not threaten the heterosexuality implicit in the dominant genres of nineteenth-century America. (7)

To say that Fuller *required* a relationship with another person is not a completely accurate statement; she was known for her typically transcendental belief in self-reliance, one of the basic principles of life on which she based much of her writings, including Woman in the Nineteenth Century. Despite the emphasis she placed on independence, however, she was still human and desired another person with whom she could share her time. Although she has been branded with the reputation of a brazen, independent woman, she did not possess anti-love sentiments; she only wished for women to discover who they were before they gave themselves to another person. This, however, does not erase the confusion she suffered about love herself. Romantic or familial, she still desired to love and to be loved by anyone who shared an emotional connection with her. Gender made no difference to Fuller, who once wrote, “It is so true that a woman may be in love with a woman, and a man with a man [. . .]. It is regulated by the same law as that of love between persons of different sexes, only it is purely intellectual and spiritual” (Steele, Essential 22-3). According to Fuller biographer Joan von Mehren, for a period of ten years, Barker “served as Margaret’s most cherished romantic love.” She goes on to say,

Margaret's poems and terms of endearment, especially in her later characterization of her love for Anna as "the same love we shall feel when we are angels," suggest that Anna's attraction, while based on the power of opposites (the beautiful Anna, the brilliant Margaret), was possibly sustained by Margaret's need, as Bell Chevigny has suggested, "to resolve her sexual identity by transcending sex itself." (51)

Fuller once wrote in her journal that love between persons of the same sex is "unprofaned by any mixture of lower instincts." This observation can be interpreted in multiple ways, either that sexual relations between persons of the same sex is a completely spiritual experience, untainted by acts normally considered to be morally improper, *or* that sex is never an issue between persons of the same gender if their relationship is of a truly deep and spiritual nature.

By understanding Fuller's intellectual approach to same-sex relationships, one may surmise that Anna Barker was in all probability Fuller's first love. It is unclear, however, whether or not Fuller and Barker ever experienced a sexually intimate relationship with one another, although several biographers believe that the possibility exists. According to von Mehren, it was certainly likely that Fuller had been "erotically in love with Barker," but if their friendship extended beyond "an occasional thrilling touch," we have no proof (164).

The final poem on which this chapter will focus, "To A.H.B. On our meeting, on my return from N.Y. to Boston, August 1835," differs from the two poems previously discussed. Unlike the other two, this poem focuses more heavily on the strength of friendship, as opposed to young love and its ability to protect during emotionally difficult times. The text of the poem follows:

Brief was the meeting, – tear-stained, full of fears

For future days, and sad thoughts of the past, –  
Thou, seeing thy horizon overcast,  
Timid, didst shrink from the dark-coming years;  
And I, (though less ill in mine appears,)  
Was haunted by a secret dread of soul,  
The Fate had something written in her scroll  
Which soon must ope again the fount of tears;  
Oh could we on the waves have lingered then,  
Or in that bark, together borne away,  
Have sought some isle far from the haunts of men,  
Ills left behind which cloud the social day,  
What grief I had escaped; yet left untried  
That holy faith by which, now fortified,  
I feel a peace to happiness allied; –  
And thou, although for thee my loving heart  
Would gladly some Elysium set apart,  
From treachery's pestilence, and passion's strife,  
Where thou might'st lead a pure untroubled life,  
Sustained and fostered by hearts like thy own,  
The conflicts which thy friend must brave, unknown, –  
Yet I feel deeply, that it may be best  
For thee as me, that fire the gold should test,  
And that in God's good time we shall know perfect rest!

As stated above, this poem examines a different aspect of the relationship shared by Fuller and Barker. This work relies almost entirely on the subject of pure female friendship that is untainted by masculine interference. According to Jeffrey Steele,

Fuller contrasts the Elysian qualities of her friendship with Barker to a world that prompts ‘fears,’ a ‘horizon overcast,’ and a ‘secret dread of soul.’ Specifically, this poem expresses the fear that ‘the haunts of men’ threaten the intimacy of Barker and Fuller. In its conclusion, this poem evokes, but ultimately relinquishes, the image of an emotional sanctuary where female friends might live apart and in peace. (“Freeing” 140)

By examining the poem in this manner, one can sense the importance Fuller placed on female camaraderie, that it was not an aspect of life important to men alone. Fuller understood the need for women to gather together and share in the exchange of ideas, a realization that later prompted her to organize the Boston Conversations, a series of meetings “designed to encourage women in self-expression and independent thinking” (von Mehren 114).

The desire Fuller expresses in this poem to be “together borne away,” to seek “some isle far from the haunts of men,” is reminiscent of the sorority led by the poet Sappho on the island of Lesbos more than twenty-five hundred years ago. Fuller, who was known to have read extensively throughout her life, beginning with the in-depth study sessions of her youth, certainly read Sappho’s existing poetry. Under Sappho’s leadership, women gathered informally to engage in many of the pleasures of the humanities focusing on the creation and deliverance of poetry, a notion that was likely very appealing to Fuller. As a lesbian, Sappho explored themes associated with the life she led among many other culturally stimulating and beautiful women; she expressed her emotions in terms that ranged from innocent friendship to fervent love and



homoerotic longing. It is certainly reasonable to surmise that Fuller was intrigued by Sappho's way of life and poetic works, and was possibly influenced by many of her ideas and themes that worked their way into Fuller's own poetry as detailed in the three poems discussed here. On one occasion Fuller praised two of her poems in her journal, but went on to add, "as a woman she is repulsive" (Capper 281). Her reasoning for this statement is never made clear, but given Fuller's intellectual approach to same-sex relationships, it is unlikely that she was commenting on Sappho's lesbian lifestyle unless she is referring to the lack of commitment she bestowed upon any one person.

By examining the poetry composed for Anna Barker, one can observe Fuller's highly intellectual and forward-looking approach to the notion of same-sex relationships, an aspect of life that was very rarely discussed or written of by women during the early nineteenth century. Fuller's characteristically independent thinking enabled her to embrace openly the feelings she possessed for her friend and enjoy the rich emotions that commonly accompany love, especially romantic love, without care or concern for the opinions of others. It is obvious in all three of the poems discussed here that Fuller greatly believed in the importance of friendship and love, despite her often convoluted notions of the same, and greatly treasured them as foundations for emotional solidity. Fuller's ability to transcend gender boundaries through her expressions of love, without reservation, and friendship was made apparent when she wrote these poems at the age of twenty-five.

## CHAPTER 3

### “THE GREAT RADICAL DUALISM”:

#### ANDROGYNOUS ACUITY IN FULLER’S POETRY

“Let us have one creative energy, one incessant revelation. Let it take what form it will, and let us not bind it by the past to man or woman, black or white.”

Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century

Androgyny is a theme that saturates much of Margaret Fuller’s poetry. This was a subject of great interest to Fuller, as she deeply believed that woman and man “are the two halves of one thought [. . .] [and] the development of one cannot be effected (*sic*) without that of the other” (von Mehren 192). Although this was a very progressive and controversial notion during the mid-nineteenth century, Fuller completely believed that the “masculine traits” she possessed were an essential part of her physical makeup, and without them she would not be a complete person (Capper 288). Her advanced criticism of the rigid sexual roles of nineteenth-century women aided in branding Fuller as a forward-thinking feminist who spent her life attempting to reverse the cultural norms and place females on a more equal foundation with their male counterparts. This chapter will demonstrate Fuller’s use of androgynous themes in three of her poems, “Double Triangle, Serpent and Rays,” “To the Face seen in the Moon,” and “For the Power to whom we bow,” as well as reveal how Fuller’s revolutionary philosophy on male-female relations shaped the thinking of later authors, most notably Virginia Woolf.

“Double Triangle, Serpent and Rays” is one of the few poems by Fuller that is often anthologized. In this work, Fuller describes a “talisman” that symbolizes the spiritual wholeness of a person, a consciousness she never felt that she herself possessed. According to Fuller, this wholeness can only be achieved when masculine and feminine character traits are adequately

linked together in a perfect and harmonious balance. Hoping to resolve some of the inconsistencies in her own life, she composed the following:

Patient serpent, circle round,  
Till in death thy life is found;  
Double form of godly prime  
Holding the whole thought of time,  
When the perfect two embrace,  
Male & female, black & white,  
Soul is justified in space,  
Dark made fruitful by light;  
And, centred in the diamond Sun,  
Time & Eternity are one.

This poem is represented in the form of a drawing that depicts interlocking triangles fitted together to resemble a Star of David surrounded by a snake swallowing its tail. This illustration likely represents the continuity of time, as well as “psychic totality or equilibrium” (Steele, “Symbols” 150). Such an image accompanies this poem and was used as the frontispiece for the 1845 edition of Woman in the Nineteenth Century.

According to Jeffrey Steele, this poem represents the “transfiguration of gender difference through the powerful symbol of androgynous union,” thereby forming a psychological equilibrium within one’s own self (“Freeing” 164). This poem indeed symbolizes the forming of a whole being through the joining together of opposite character traits, particularly those of masculine and feminine. In addition to this explanation, however, it is likely that Fuller might also have been making a statement about the “double standards” that existed between men and

women during the nineteenth century. Social and sexual hypocrisy were very important issues to Fuller, as they usually resulted in an injustice for women. It would be logical to assume that the lines “Double form of godly prime / Holding the whole thought of time” are referring to the double standards that were forced upon women then, and that continue to exist in the minds of many people today, “holding” throughout “time.” Fuller believed that the internal makeup of each person is similar, despite outward appearances, yet women seemed to be the recipient of the larger portion of the world’s social injustices. Thus this concept of double standards is arguably the secondary theme of this poem.

“To the Face seen in the Moon” is another poem that incorporates the need for androgyny in order to obtain psychological equilibrium, whereby Fuller attempts to dispute established “gender stereotypes” (Steele, “Editing” 273). Just as “Double Triangle, Serpent and Rays” symbolizes Fuller’s quest for wholeness of being between her male and female traits, this poem balances masculine and feminine characteristics of the psyche by portraying both in the face of a “Mother” the poet envisions in the moon:

Oft, from the shadows of my earthly sphere  
I looked to thee, orb of pale pearly light,  
To loose the weariness of doubt and fear  
In thy soft Mother’s smile so pensive bright,  
Thou seemedst far and safe and chastely living  
Graceful and thoughtfull, loving, beauty giving,  
But, if I stedfast gaze upon thy face  
A human secret, like my own, I trace,  
For through the woman’s smile looks the male eye

So mildly, stedfastly but mournfully  
He holds the bush to point us to his cave,  
Teaching anew the truth so bright, so grave  
Escape not from the middle of the earth  
Through mortal pangs to win immortal birth,  
Both man and woman, from the natural womb,  
Must slowly win the secrets of the tomb,  
And then, together rising fragrant, clear,  
The worthy Angel of a better sphere,  
Diana's beauty shows how Hecate wrought,  
Apollo's luster rays the zodiac thought... (1-20)

In this poem, the poet comes to realize through her meditation that the maternal energy she is receiving comes not only from the "Mother," but also from another coordinate image, that of a masculine face the feminine facade has partially covered: "But, if I stedfast (*sic*) gaze upon thy face / A human secret, like my own, I trace, / For through the woman's smile looks the male eye." Fuller wrote in Woman in the Nineteenth Century, "the growth of man is two-fold, masculine and feminine" (99). In other words, Fuller believed that the male and the female are the dual expression of one thought. Through this revelation, the poet discovers that she must permit the male side of her personality to express itself if she is ever to achieve wholeness of spirit and being.

Beginning with line sixteen, this poem takes on a very personal meaning for Fuller. According to Steele,

[. . .] the Poet must allow the “Man from the Moon” side of her personality to express his “secret heart.” It is revealing that this process is portrayed as winning “the secrets of the tomb.” Having released herself from the burden of mourning her father [. . .] [and] all those that have been “lost” to her – Fuller depicts her heart as a tomb, a crypt, that can be reopened to reveal both masculine and feminine power. At [the] moment of release, both “Moon and Sun” rise from their grave. But in order to achieve that consummation, the Poet must wed the “Man in the Moon,” her “Apollo.” In other words, she must acknowledge and express both her masculinity and her femininity. Only when the man hidden inside her is released can the “union” of the self be realized. (“Freeing” 170-71)

In other words, the Poet’s reference to her “masculine and feminine power” is presented in the forms of “Diana,” the virginal Roman goddess of the moon, and “Apollo,” brother to the Greek counterpart of Diana, Artemis, as well as god of intellect and the arts, associated with light (Evans 25-72). At the moment the tomb is opened, Diana and Apollo rise together. In order to achieve the perfect union, the Poet must wed Apollo (Steele, “Symbols” 150). According to Fuller, the “‘union’ of the self,” as referred to in this poem, would culminate in “a radiant sovereign self” harmonizing what she referred to as the “Woman in me” and the “Man in me” (Steele, “Symbols” 150).

According to Fuller scholar Mary E. Wood, “affections” belong to the woman and “intellect” or the “piercing eye of understanding” belongs to the man. She continues, “To the woman belong the social graces that make her an adequate object of desire and to man the gaze of desire itself. Yet at the same time that these lines separate and define male and female qualities, they evoke a female persona whose ‘steadfast gaze’ matches the look of ‘the male

eye” (7). This is perhaps true; however, Fuller’s use of androgynous themes in her works makes a statement about the androgynous nature of all men and women. It is unlikely that she was equating women only to “objects of desire.” Similarly, it is doubtful that she considered men to be the only gender capable of projecting “the gazes of desire.” It is more probable that Fuller considered both men and women to be desirable, just as it seems likely that she considered both to be capable of projecting desiring gazes.

“For the Power to whom we bow” is the poetic conclusion to the text of Woman in the Nineteenth Century, a work written almost entirely in prose. According to Steele, “This ‘Power,’ the Poet promises, ‘Has given’ its pledge that ‘They of pure and stedfast mind’ shall hear the music first ‘ventured’ in Fuller’s book.” This poem continues the “promise of an androgynous union of masculine and feminine qualities” in an effort to obtain the transcendental mainstay of self-reliance (“Freeing” 171). In this work, Fuller describes a utopian sort of dwelling where both feminine and masculine strengths prevail:

For the Power to whom we bow  
Has given its pledge that, if not now,  
They of pure and stedfast mind,  
By faith exalted, truth refined,  
*Shall* hear all music loud and clear,  
Whose first notes they ventured here.  
Then fear not thou to wind the horn,  
Though elf and gnome thy courage scorn;  
Ask for the Castle’s King and Queen;  
Though rabble rout may rush between,

Beat thee senseless to the ground,  
In the dark beset thee round;  
Persist to ask and it will come,  
Seek not for rest in humbler home;  
So shalt thou see what few have seen,  
The palace home of King and Queen.<sup>3</sup>

As the poetic climax to Woman in the Nineteenth Century, this poem is a warning to her readers that “the way to such revelation[s]” as she outlines in her treatise “will be arduous; for ‘rabble rout may rush between, / Beat thee senseless to the ground’” (Steele 171). Fuller scholar Julie Ellison remarks, “the battle call of the high-minded feminist reformer defies the irrational hostility of the ‘rabble rout’ [. . .] the woman warrior strives to move toward the ‘palace home of the King and Queen’ [. . .]. The mob represents both internal and external resistance. . . the need for a strongly defended ‘palace home’ suggests that feminist ambition desires refuge as much as glory (262). Jeffrey Steele expands this idea by stating,

The image of threatening “rabble” suggests as well the horde of fears, anxieties, and uncertainties that she must weather before reaching the tranquility of self-reliance. But in contrast to Emerson’s assertion that self-reliance involves the realization of power, light, and instinct through the expansion of the self, Fuller defines the process as entrance into a dwelling where masculine and feminine powers both rule – “the palace home of the King and Queen.” This is an enlargement of one’s habitation, a harmonious balancing of disparate qualities that leads to a more regal sense of self. But, significantly, it is not – as Emerson imagined – an aggressive process of “dominion.” Self-fulfillment, Fuller



suggests, does not come through conquest but rather as a result of accepting and assimilating qualities that others repress. (“Freeing” 171-72)

This is a plausible summation; by bringing together one’s internal differences, the ultimate result can only be a sense of spiritual wholeness, which according to Fuller, is achievable only through the harmonious balance of masculine and feminine characteristics. However, both Ellison and Steele make convincing arguments according to Larry J. Reynolds who states, “It seems likely that the poem alludes as much to an anticipated loss of identity in mass society as it does to the price of outspoken feminism” (28).

One of Fuller’s most memorable quotes on the theme of androgyny can be found in the text of Woman in the Nineteenth Century: “Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman” (Fuller 68-69). Despite the fact that few read Fuller for many years after her death, a select group of highly intellectual men and women continued to peruse her works from time to time, thus keeping her ideas, if not her name, alive. One of the more notable readers of Fuller’s work was the twentieth century British author Virginia Woolf, who mentions Fuller in her Diary: “I think one day I shall write a book of ‘Eccentrics.’ Mr Grote shall be one. Lady Hester Stanhope. Margaret Fuller. Duchess of Newcastle. Aunt Julia” (23). Although she never attributes the androgynous themes found in many of her works, including Orlando and A Room of One’s Own, to Fuller, it would be difficult to dispute the contention that Fuller’s avant-garde thinking on this subject, epitomized in the quotation above, directly influenced Woolf. One observation in particular from Woolf’s work is especially intriguing as it bears a striking resemblance to Fuller’s statement: “Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind

that is purely feminine [. . .]. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (Woolf, A Room 98-104). Although not conclusive, it can be argued that Woolf’s writings were influenced by Fuller, a possibility that has not been previously considered in the extensive research so far consulted.

Fuller’s references to androgyny were many and varied. They saturate the works of her poetry and prose alike, greatly contributing to the reputation she acquired as a revolutionary feminist who thought outside of her assigned gender boundaries. By examining the three poems discussed in this chapter, as well as the excerpts from Woman in the Nineteenth Century, I believe it is obvious that Fuller’s forward-thinking capabilities greatly influenced the works of future writers, not the least of whom was Virginia Woolf, a revolutionary author in her own right, but who was likely influenced by the writings of a nineteenth-century American woman who refused to be typical.

## CHAPTER 4

### COMING INTO HER OWN:

#### THE POETRY OF FULLER'S "MATURE PERIOD"

"Old woman shall not be the synonym for imbecility, nor old maid a term of contempt, nor woman be spoken of as a reed shaken in the wind. It is time, indeed, that men and women both should cease to grow old in any other way than as the tree does, full of grace and honor. The hair of the artist turns white, but his eye shines clearer than ever. Age brings maturity, not decay."

Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century

During 1844, Margaret Fuller composed thirty-eight poems in addition to completing Summer on the Lakes and Woman in the Nineteenth Century. Never again would Fuller achieve the level of creative productivity she experienced during this single year, a year that has since been termed the "mature period" (Steele, "Freeing" 153). The poems produced by Fuller during this time were typical of traditional transcendental verse. According to Joel Myerson, "The Transcendentalists argued for a type of poetry that valued inspiration over technical perfection (or genius over talent), meaning over form, a sharp contrast to the highly constructed verse of the preceding century" (491). Indeed, many of the poems Fuller produced during 1844 lacked a great deal of "technical perfection," but were undeniably the result of events, some distressing, that inspired her creativity. According to Jeffrey Steele, "The intensity of symbolism, the archetypal energy, of Fuller's 1844 poems suggests the power of the forces she was encountering. A sense of anguish, and even despair, lurks just beneath the surface of many of them, as if their lines were charms or talismans preserving a precarious psychological equilibrium" ("Freeing" 166). Fortunately, however, Fuller was able to rise above her "personal pain as she transmute[d] her own sorrow into powerful images of spiritual rebirth" (Steele,

“Editing” 272). In fact, much of her work from this period can be read “as a progressive act of exorcism – a psychological healing that once and for all closed the door on many of Fuller’s deepest obsessions,” a feat that was attained “through a sequence of psychological and mythic encounters,” which enabled her to achieve a “consciousness of her private demons and angels” (Steele, “Freeing” 153).

Like many of her other works from this time, poetry and prose alike, Fuller also continued to experiment with the notion of the duality of male and female characteristics, another element she incorporated into her poetical works of this time. Unlike the previous chapter, however, the dual nature of man and woman to be examined here emerges through the theme of alchemy, a popular theory with many nineteenth-century American authors, including Hawthorne, Poe, and Emerson. In addition, Fuller also exhibited an interest in the notion of “regeneration” as a means through which to achieve “gender equality” and its relationship with alchemy, a science that “sought to transmute one element into another.” To explain this theory better, John Gatta states,

[Fuller’s] aspiration to regenerate herself – and, by extension, her nineteenth-century sisters stillborn into that fixed domain of cultural identity defined as “true womanhood” – often expressed itself symbolically through mythology. Fuller’s eclectic mythologizing drew mainly from ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Hebrew, and Christian paradigms. She enriched it further through her extensive reading in German romanticism. But the archetypal Goddess, bearing her sundry names from this vast span of cultures, remains a pervasive presence throughout Fuller’s prose and poetic writings. (qtd. in Clack 114)

Fuller's writings frequently refer to archetypal female images that she used for the purpose of illustrating to her readers her unyielding beliefs in self-reliance and gender equality.

According to Randall Clack,

Whereas the figure of the archetypal goddess recurs throughout Fuller's work, an exploration of the alchemical tropes Fuller employs in her writings affords a unique and rewarding perspective from which to view Fuller's themes of regeneration and gender equality. In both her prose and poetry [. . .] we can discern Fuller's maturing vision of alchemical regeneration. (114)

In three poems to be examined in this chapter, "Leila in the Arabian zone," "Winged Sphinx," and "Raphael's deposition from the cross," we become aware of Fuller's use of themes, such as alchemy and regeneration, in connection with examples from mythology and Christian culture to expose further Fuller's revolutionary views on women and their equality with male counterparts.

It has been stated that Fuller's "first reference to alchemy appears in a letter" written in 1840 to Caroline Sturgis, a very close friend and confidant. The letter was composed after a period of depression brought on by the marriage of Anna Barker, from which she "seems to have emerged [. . .] with new creative energy, for in the [. . .] letter she writes, 'I live, I am – *The Carbuncle is found.*'" According to Clack,

Fuller's declaration that she lives and 'The carbuncle is found' recalls the metaphor of alchemical death and rebirth and suggests the difficult (and often perilous) search for and the attainment of the stone of transmutation or regeneration [. . .]. Indeed, for Fuller, the stone of power she claims to possess appears analogous with imagination and inspiration. (115)

The carbuncle becomes a common image in the poetry of Fuller's "mature period," and will be examined as a recurring theme in this chapter. According to Steele,

Throughout Fuller's [. . .] 1844 poetry, the carbuncle (a glowing ruby or garnet) reappears as a profound emblem that stood at the center of a complex network of psychological symbols [. . .]. Fuller associated the carbuncle with the philosopher's stone of medieval alchemy and depicted the quest for the carbuncle as a struggle for spiritual fulfillment and psychological wholeness [. . .]. In twentieth-century gemlore, one notes, red stones are sometimes associated with menstrual blood and the flow of female energy. Fuller's use of the carbuncle [. . .] seem[s] to carry with [it] a similar range of gendered connotations. ("Symbols" 144-46)

Fuller's poem, "Leila in the Arabian zone," is a work that includes many references to mythology as "the figure of Leila," one of Fuller's most important archetypal female images, "is deepened and enriched by a complex weave of mythical reference. Io, Isis, Diana, Mercury, the Sphynx are all evoked – a mythical panoply that links directly with the myths underpinning Fuller's 'idea of Woman' in Woman in the Nineteenth Century" (Steele, "Freeing" 162). The text of the poem follows:

Leila in the Arabian zone

Dusky, languishing and lone

Yet full of light are her deep eyes

And her gales are lovers sighs.

Io in Egyptian clime

Grows as Isis calm sublime  
Blue black is her robe of night  
But blazoned o'er with points of light  
The horns that Io's brow deform  
With Isis take a crescent form  
And as a holy moon inform.  
The magic Sistrum arms her hand  
And at her deep eye's command  
Brutes are raised to thinking men  
Soul growing to her soul filled ken.

Dian of the lonely life  
Hecate fed on gloom and strife  
Phebe on her throne of air  
Only Leila's children are.

Fuller had written an essay entitled "Leila" three years before she composed this poem. In this "mystical sketch [. . .] Fuller resorts [. . .] to a feminized vocabulary that locates a goddess – as opposed to a masculine god – within. She links this figure to the intense glowing red light of the carbuncle, as if the goddess Leila were a personification of the divine psychological powers symbolized by the gem" (Steele, "Symbols" 145-46). According to Clack, in Fuller's mind, the goddess Leila harbors a

strong affinity with the philosopher's stone. Like the stone of transmutation, Leila is elemental, linked with water, air, fire, and earth [. . .]. It is especially

interesting to note that while Fuller links Leila with the four elements the alchemists believed to compose the philosopher's stone, Leila's link with the earth's metals recalls the alchemical theory of the 'seed of gold.' The metals associated with Leila further emphasize this mysterious figure's connection to the philosopher's stone [. . .]. (115)

In the poem that appeared in 1844, Fuller takes on "the role of the goddess Leila, a figure 'languishing and lone,'" and "expands her being to encompass the attributes of Io, Isis, Dian, Hecate, and Phebe. Of all these, the figure of Isis is most important," as she carries a "'magic Sistrum' (a rattle) [that] possesses a transformative power on the opposite sex: 'Brutes are raised to thinking men / Soul growing to her soul filled ken.'" The Goddess, Fuller suggests [. . .] embodies an ideal of spiritual fulfillment that transcends the gender divisions marking the unequal relationships of American culture" (Steele, "Freeing" 163-64). According to Clack,

This connection of Leila with the goddesses anticipates an important observation that Fuller makes in Woman: "'The mothers' – 'The mother of all things,' are expressions of thought which lead the mind towards this side of universal growth." [. . .] Fuller intimates a "return to the mothers," an idea that Goethe emphasizes in Faust II and that recalls the alchemical concept of *prima material*, the first matter of all things from which the alchemists often attempted to extract the seed of gold. This return to "the mothers" signals a recognition of the female power(s) that Fuller refers to in Woman as Minerva and the Muse. (119)

Fuller's famous reference from Woman in the Nineteenth Century to Minerva and the Muse alludes to the "two aspects of woman's nature." Fuller states that it is "more native" for a woman "to be the living model of the artist [. . .] to inspire and receive the poem, than to create it



[. . .]. Such may be the especially feminine element, spoken of as Femality. But it is no more the order of nature that it should be incarnated pure in any form, than the masculine energy should exist unmingled with it in any form” (Fuller 68). In other words, through the images of the Muse and Minerva, Fuller demonstrates the “radical dualism” of a woman’s personality. Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, represents the masculine nature of woman, and the Muse, the fabled inspiration of art, represents the feminine. According to Clack,

Fuller’s words evoke the alchemical marriage (the reconciliation of opposites). [. . .] [She] recognized two different aspects of this male-female union. The first was the literal union between the sexes, but the second [. . .] was the union of male and female elements within herself [. . .] woman needs to free herself from patriarchal dominance; to achieve this, woman must withdraw within herself and reconcile her own male and female attributes [. . .]. Once woman achieves spiritual enlightenment, or, in alchemical terms, once she discovers the equivalent of the philosopher’s stone within herself, she will possess the power to transmute her surroundings [. . .]. After woman’s inner work is complete, says Fuller, she will, like the alchemists, “know how to turn all dross to gold, and will be rich and [most important] free.” (124-27)

Fuller’s poem “Winged Sphynx” advances the notion of the alchemical marriage. In this work Fuller “illustrates the alchemical wedding of heaven and earth” (Clack 120). The text of the poem follows:

Through brute nature upward rising,  
Seed up-striving to the light,

Revelations still surprising,  
My inwardness is grown insight.  
Still I slight not those first stages,  
Dark but God-directed Ages;  
In my nature leonine  
Labored & learned a Soul divine;  
Put forth an aspect Chaste, Serene,  
Of nature virgin mother queen;  
Assumes at last the destined wings,  
Earth & heaven together brings;  
While its own form the riddle tells  
That baffled all the wizard spells  
Drawn from intellectual wells,  
Cold waters where truth never dwells:  
– It was fable told you so; –  
Seek her in common daylight's glow.

Jeffrey Steele refers to “Winged Sphynx” as a poem that “maintains the image of spiritual quest,” as opposed to the alchemical marriage interpretation favored by other scholars, including Clack, who states,

Fuller's subject in this poem, the sphinx, an obscure hieroglyph (even by alchemical standards) for the philosopher's stone, joins heaven and earth in an alchemical marriage of the material (the lion's body) and the spiritual realm (wings) as the sphinx “Assumes at last the destined wings, / Earth & heaven

together brings.” In the first section of the poem, Fuller, through the voice of the sphinx, summarizes the spiritual change that she has experienced. [. . .] Fuller next recounts the process of the sphinx’s (and Fuller’s own) spiritual transformation. [. . .] In the final lines of Fuller’s poem the sphinx offers a riddle of its own, reminiscent of the cryptic passages from the alchemists. (120-21)

Steele’s interpretation that this poem focuses instead on Fuller’s own “spiritual quest” refers to the “spiritual awakening” she experienced in 1844 and how it relates to the depression she suffered in 1840. This “earlier crisis is now interpreted as a necessary station on the poet’s journey. The fragments of her life are now seen to cohere into a pattern of spiritual progression” that can be detected in the lines of this poem (“Freeing” 164).

The reference to “virgin mother queen” in the tenth line of this work certainly alludes to the Holy Mother, arguably the most important archetypal female image Fuller incorporated into her writings. A virgin, as well as a wife and mother, the Madonna seemed to be the most likely image Fuller could use to instill her views on the importance of spiritual self-reliance that she had been awakened to in 1844. Fuller believed that the most effective way to use the role of the Madonna in her writings was first to dissect her functions into their three separate roles: virgin, wife and mother. Fuller then felt it was necessary to recombine these roles into “Virgin Mother” and “Virgin Wife.” Fuller spends the bulk of Woman in the Nineteenth Century advocating each woman’s ability to embrace her own self-reliance, thereby modeling her life after that of the Holy Mother who was devoted to her husband, yet not absorbed by him. According to Fuller, “virgin” was not a term that was properly used in a sexual sense, but in a spiritual sense, indicating that a true virgin was a woman who was “celibate in spirit rather than in body.” Because of this belief, Fuller felt that she possessed a very strong connection to the Holy Mother

who was “both an independent self and a companion to man, represent[ing] the perfect balance of the self-reliant and relational aspects of female identity.” Fuller encourages women to become spiritual virgins, “self-reliant, self-taught, self-fulfilled beings” (Adams 385-400). As Fuller states in Woman in the Nineteenth Century, “I have urged on woman independence of man. [. . .] I wish woman to live, *first* for God’s sake. Then she will not make an imperfect man her god, and thus sink to idolatry” (103). Fuller, however, does not propose that women become completely virginal. Instead, she believes that women should follow the example set by the Holy Mother who symbolizes the “perfect balance of the independent and relational aspects” of female individuality (Adams 390).

Another poem that references the archetypal image of the Holy Mother is “Raphael’s deposition from the cross,” a text considered by some critics to be Fuller’s “finest” poetical work. The title apparently refers to Raphael’s painting “Deposition” (1507), which Fuller may have seen in Rome, where she later traveled. This poem, which is related to the reader through the poet’s own voice, “expands the meditation upon Christian symbolism by evoking Mary’s pain at the moment of Christ’s death” (Steele, “Freeing” 168). An excerpt from the text follows:

Virgin Mother, Mary Mild!  
It was thine to see the child,  
Gift of the Messiah dove,  
Pure blossom of ideal love,  
Break, upon the “guilty cross”  
The seeming promise of his life;  
Of faith, of hope, of love a loss  
Deepened all thy bosom’s strife,

Brow, down-bent, and heart-strings torn,  
Fainting by frail arms upborne.

But 'tis mine, oh Mary mild,  
To tremble lest the heavenly child,  
Crucified within my heart  
Ere of earth he take his part [. . .]. (1-13)

In this part of the text, Fuller “focuses Mary’s grief as that of a mother lamenting a dead child. The poem echoes the grief occasioned by the death of Emerson’s first child Waldo, a loss that had been reawakened by the birth in 1844 of his second son. But more importantly, it confronts Fuller’s own pain and grief for ‘the heavenly child, / Crucified within my heart’” (Steele, “Freeing” 168). Another interpretation of these opening lines suggests that Fuller’s grief was instead “motivated by the failure of a romantic relationship” Fuller shared with William Clarke, “the younger brother of Sarah and James Freeman Clarke” (Steele, “Editing” 272). Whatever Fuller’s inspiration, “a process of grief-work prepares the way for vision. Only by accepting and working through her sense of loss can the Poet rediscover her deepest spiritual and creative energies” (Steele, “Freeing” 168).

Let me to the tomb repair  
Find the angel watching there  
Ask his aid to walk again  
Undeiled with brother men [. . .]. (17-19)

According to Steele, “the goal she longs for is a moment of death and rebirth, purification and apotheosis – her old self dying into a renewed being” (“Freeing” 168-69).

Fan again the Parsee fire,  
Let it light my funeral pyre  
Purify the veins of Earth,  
Temper for a Phenix birth [. . .]. (27-30)

According to Steele, “At the conclusion of the first section [. . .] a process of transformation is evident in the poet’s prayer for purifying fire that might light a ‘funeral pyre’ within the heart. She longs to ‘Purify the veins of Earth’ and prepare herself for what she calls ‘a Phenix birth’” (“Editing” 272).

They do not feel this holiest hour,  
Their hearts soar not to reach the power  
Which this deepest of distress  
Alone could give to save and bless.

Soul of that fair now ruined form,  
Thou who hadst force to bide the storm  
Must again descent to tell  
Of thy life the hidden spell;  
“Maiden, wrap thy mantle round thee”  
Night is coming, clear cold night;  
Fate, that in the cradle bound thee,  
In the coffin hides thy blight;  
Angels weeping, dirges singing,  
Rosemary with hearts-ease bringing,

Softly spread the fair green sod,  
Thou escape and bathe in God.

Margaret! Shed no idle tears;  
In the far perspective bright  
A muse-like form as thine appears  
As thine new-born in primal light.

Leila, take thy wand again;  
Upon thy arm no longer rest;  
Listen to thy thrilling brain;  
Listen to the throbbing breast;  
There nightingales have made their nest  
Shall soothe with song the night's unrest.

Slowly drop the beaded years;  
Slowly drop the pearly tears;  
At last the Rosary appears  
A Ruby heart its clasp appears  
With cross of gold and diamond  
Like to that upon the wand.

“Maiden wrap thy mantle round thee”

Night is coming, starlit night,  
Fate that in the cradle bound thee,  
In the coffin hides thy blight;  
All transfused the orb now glowing,  
Full-voiced and free the music growing  
Planted in a senseless sod  
The life is risen to flower a God. (45-84)

The second section of this poem again focuses on the “mourning Virgin,” and “the Poet begins to realize that ‘power’ is only reached through the ‘deepest of distress.’” It is undeniable that a “Christian message [. . .] is evident, but combined with the Christian theme is a psychological truth as well – that the resurrection of the self depends on the acceptance, and not the avoidance, of pain. Only by focusing upon the ‘blight’ hidden in the ‘coffin’ can one ‘escape and bathe in God’” (Steele, “Freeing” 169). This section of the poem has been termed “an audacious adaptation of the Easter story,” in which the speaker imagines her “own death and resurrection.” According to Steele,

[The speaker] imagines herself being wrapped in the mantle of night and then buried. In the tomb, she is granted a vision of a “muse-like form” wrapped in “primal light” – a being she identifies as “Leila.” [. . .] As she waits in the grave, her “tears” change slowly into a flowing “Ruby heart” (the familiar symbol of the “carbuncle”) – a metamorphosis that signals the transfiguration of pain into creative insight. The concluding lines summarize, in highly condensed fashion, the narrative of personal transformation that lay at the center of Fuller’s creative and spiritual vision. (“Editing” 272)



Through the complex and emotion-inspired poetry of her “mature period,” Fuller was able to repair many of her internal wounds, a process that would prepare her for the numerous changes that she would face during the forthcoming years. The thematic elements found within many of the poems she composed during 1844 – alchemy, androgyny, regeneration, female archetypes, Christian paradigms – demonstrate the level of scholarship Fuller had achieved at the age of thirty-four. Regardless of how she presented her ideas, however, her underlying theme remained the same; self-reliance is the primary component of a woman’s conception of her true self.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION: RESURRECTION FROM OBSCURITY

“How often rings in my ear the consolatory words. . . ‘Though the million suffer shipwreck, yet noble hearts survive!’” – *paraphrased from Körner*

Margaret Fuller, Letter, Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli

With the passing of 1844, Margaret Fuller’s “mature period” ended. In December of that year, Horace Greeley requested that she move to New York and take a position as a “book reviewer and social analyst” at his newspaper, the New York Tribune (Steele lvii). Greeley, who described his relationship with Fuller as one of “friendly antagonism,” was impressed with her literary capabilities, especially those she exhibited in her travel book Summer on the Lakes, and easily concluded that she would be an asset to his publication. Although seemingly propitious in the beginning, this career opportunity would eventually lead Fuller to her untimely and tragic death just five years later.

Greeley’s interest in Fuller intensified during the mid-1840s; he felt that “her intellectual abilities were [. . .] well recognized” and her talents as a writer were “already eminent in the higher walks of literature” (Mitchell 3). After Greeley published Woman in the Nineteenth Century, he remarked, “Margaret’s book is going to *sell*. I tell you it has the real stuff in it [. . .] it will make its mark. It is not elegantly written, but every line talks.” According to Joan von Mehren,

[Greeley] admired the gusto with which Fuller wrote about the plight of prostitutes and her ability to “arouse and quicken intellect.” She was, he wrote later, “a philanthropist, preeminently a critic, a relentless destroyer of shams and outworn traditions.” Convinced that with some discipline on his part, he could

make a newspaperwoman out of her, he placed her columns on the first page. [. . .] Her assignment was to review the important new books, to keep the public informed on new trends in European literature, and to cover cultural events in New York. (203)

Fuller's reputation escalated at the Tribune. According to Catherine Mitchell, a scholar who specializes in Fuller's journalistic career, her success was directly related to the "outstanding literary criticism" she composed that was founded on "a carefully thought-out critical philosophy," as well as her use of "European, particularly Continental, works to argue the possibility of creating a national literature for Americans." The works she used as a foundation for this idea included books that she reviewed by authors now considered among the "first real geniuses" in the American literary canon, such as Melville, Poe, Longfellow, and Hawthorne, whom she balanced against critical essays she wrote on noteworthy European writers, including Dumas, Carlyle, Dickens, Disraeli, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Robert Browning, Balzac, and Goethe (5-6).

While living in New York, Fuller "modified her romantic transcendentalist idealism" and used her column in the Tribune as a forum from which to espouse her concern for the city's poorer inhabitants, as well as a feasible means by which the city could achieve social reform (Mitchell 5). After two years, Fuller received a promotion that included the opportunity to live in Europe as a foreign correspondent. She eventually settled in Italy, where in 1847 she met Giovanni Ossoli, an Italian count who was ten years her junior and the man with whom she would spend the last years of her life.

Fuller and Ossoli met on Holy Thursday after a religious ceremony at St. Peter's in Rome. A friendship developed before Fuller realized that the young man was a marchese and

“the youngest son of an aristocratic family which had distinguished itself in the papal service since the seventeenth century.” At the time of their meeting, Ossoli was “without a firm purpose in life or a sense of vocation, but he was courteous, gentle, and responsible,” thus enabling Fuller to “enjoy the relaxation of his easy, uncomplicated companionship” (von Mehren 256-57). The two remained close, and during the winter of 1847, Fuller discovered that she was pregnant. She gave birth to a son, Angelo Eugenio Filippo Ossoli, on September 5, 1848; his father was twenty-seven and his mother was thirty-eight.

Whether or not Fuller and Ossoli ever married is unclear, but it was important to them that their child be granted the hereditary rights of the Ossoli name. At one point she confided in a friend, Emelyn Story, that she was married in April of 1848, but no official documentation attesting to that fact has ever been revealed. Story later wrote that Fuller had given her a collection of documents that she was to keep. According to Joan von Mehren,

Story did not examine the papers closely. The only paper Margaret read over with her was the parchment document bearing the Ossoli family seal, “saying that Angelo Eugene Ossoli was the legal [illegible] heir of whatever title and fortune should come to his father.” Story was under the impression that the document had been prepared by the priest who had married Margaret and Giovanni. With the documents was also a book to be delivered to the Fuller family in case of Margaret’s death, which, Margaret told Story, contained the whole [account] of the Ossoli relationship. Story admitted later that she never actually saw a marriage certificate, nor could she explain the oddity of the existence of a document – said to be prepared by the priest who presided at the marriage ceremony – attesting to Angelino’s hereditary rights. (304)

While Fuller was pregnant, a revolution began in Italy that included uprisings in Austria and France. Fuller found herself in the middle of a war that threatened the livelihood of the Italian people she had come to respect so much. Attempting to conceal her pregnancy from her readers abroad, she continued to write about the ongoing political conflict for the Tribune until she was no longer able. After giving birth, she was required to complete a forty-day period of convalescence, all the while complaining of her eagerness “to go once again into the world” (von Mehren 287). Fuller eventually moved into a small apartment in Rome so that she would be near the ever-increasing drama, leaving her son for a short time in the care of a friend. Less than a month after Fuller returned to Rome and the world of journalism, the “pope’s newly appointed prime minister,” Count Pellegrino Rossi, was assassinated, an event that was soon followed by the death of a bishop who “was serving as a papal secretary.” Pope Pius IX surrendered to the anti-papal factions and departed from Rome, paving the way for imminent “military intervention” by the rebels (288-92).

Fuller remained in Rome while city governments all over Italy fell victim to the opposition. She wanted desperately to leave as reports of impending military action increased daily, intensifying her fear that she would be cut off from news of her son. Finally, on March 26, 1849, Fuller was granted a permit to travel to Rieti where she was reunited with Angelo. During her absence from Rome, “the Roman Assembly – in response to the military threat to the Republic – voted to place the government under the leadership of a triumvirate,” a strategy that enabled the government to move forward and Fuller to move back to Rome. Soon after her arrival, she was requested to direct the Fate Bene Fratelli, a hospital for injured rebels located on the Tiber Island; her only directions were to receive and organize the female volunteers who

were arriving to care for the wounded, an obligation she took seriously and fulfilled over the course of the next several months (von Mehren 299-302).

Throughout the turmoil erupting in Europe, Fuller continued her correspondence for the Tribune, keeping Americans informed of the events as she witnessed them. Her contributions, however, eventually became few and far between, as she claimed to be working on a comprehensive history of the revolution in Italy and was afraid of duplicating her work in the letters. Her friends in the United States were still unaware that she had given birth, although she would occasionally allude to the fact in her column, hoping to lessen the shock when news of Ossoli and their son was made public.

Fuller composed her last dispatch for the Tribune on July 8, 1849, after Bishop John Hughes of New York expressed his outrage at Fuller's description of the pope's "flight from Rome," and her condemnation of the papal government in Italy (Deiss 188; von Mehren 310-11). She traveled to Reiti where she and her son were reunited with Ossoli. In September, the three of them moved to Florence, where Fuller began to refer to herself as "M. Ossoli." Whether or not the two ever officially married, their reputation was that of "a devoted couple," whose "circle of respectable friends in Florence accepted them at their word as man and wife" (von Mehren 315-17).

In February of 1850, the Ossolis determined that they would journey to the United States, live there for a few years, and then consider returning to Italy. News of Ossoli and Angelo had reached America by way of visiting friends and discussions of Fuller's marriage and integrity dominated conversation in Boston where one family friend remarked, "Margaret Fuller is a figure strongly characteristic of the ambiguity in woman's position and consciousness in this age of transition" (von Mehren 324).

The Ossolis planned to embark on the Elizabeth sometime in mid-May. The night before their departure, they received a visit from Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the latter having been carried up six flights of steps by her husband to the Ossoli's apartment. Fuller presented the Brownings' son with a Bible inscribed "In memory of Angelo Eugene Ossoli," a hauntingly prophetic expression considering that the entire Ossoli family would be dead in little more than two months (von Mehren 332). Margaret Fuller died twelve hours after the Elizabeth wrecked during a storm the night before the ship was to dock. According to eye-witness accounts,

Though under close-reefed sails, their vessel was making way far more swiftly than any one on board had dreamed of; and for hours, with the combined force of currents and the tempest, had been driving headlong towards the sand-bars of Long Island. About four o'clock, on Friday morning, July 19th, she struck, – first draggingly, then hard and harder, – on Fire Island beach. [. . .] At the first jar, the passengers, knowing but too well its fatal import, sprang from their berths. [. . .] One scream, one only, was heard from Margaret's state-room. (Emerson, Channing, and Clarke 342-43)

Just four hundred yards from shore, rescue workers tried to get Fuller off the ship. She adamantly refused, saying she would not leave her son and husband. Hours later, "the fore-castle was filled with water, and the helpless little band were driven to the deck, where they clustered around the foremast." One of the four seamen who still stood by the passengers was a steward who harbored a great affection for little Angelo; the steward took the child in his arms in an attempt to save him, but the raging storm washed both of their bodies onto the beach a mere twenty minutes later. Once the "sea struck the fore-castle [. . .] the foremast fell, carrying with it

the deck, and all upon it [. . .] Margaret sank at once. When last seen, she had been seated at the foot of the foremast, still clad in her white nightdress, with her hair fallen loose upon her shoulders” (Emerson, Channing, and Clarke 348-49).

A few days after the wreck of the Elizabeth, Emerson charged Henry David Thoreau with collecting “all the intelligence &, if possible, any fragments of manuscript or other property” belonging to the Ossolis. Thoreau interviewed many local inhabitants, only verifying the fact that four bodies were still missing, among them the Ossolis. According to Joan von Mehren,

He listed and described meticulously the salvaged Ossoli property: a trunk, a carpetbag, a broken desk, none of them intact. All the papers found in the trunk would barely cover a small table, and there was no sign of a manuscript [. . .] he interviewed a man who had found a lady’s shift, which “he thought had the letters S.M.F. on it,” and a coat of the Marchese Ossoli. Thoreau ripped a button off the coat and put it in his pocket.

On Saturday he walked five miles down the beach to view a body that had washed up that morning – “simply some bones washed up on the beach.” [. . .] The form was unrecognizable, either as a man or as a woman; he hired the light keeper to bury it and put a marker on it. (337)

According to a passage from a journal written by a friend of Fuller’s,

No trace has yet been found of Margaret’s manuscript on Italy, though the denials of the wreckers as to having seen it, are not in the least to be depended on. [. . .] Possibly it was washed away before reaching the shore, as several of the trunks, it is said, were open and empty, when thrown upon the beach. But it is sad to think, that very possibly the brutal hands of pirates may have tossed to the



winds, or scattered on the sands, pages so rich with experience and life. The only papers of value saved, were the love-letters of Margaret and Ossoli. [. . .] Was this, then, thy welcome home? A howling hurricane, the pitiless sea, wreck on a sand-bar, an idle life-boat, beach-pirates, and not one friend. (Emerson, Channing, and Clarke 350-51)

Fuller's family did not organize a public funeral; everyone who knew her mourned her death in his or her own way. Emerson composed a eulogy for her in his journal: "To the last her country proves inhospitable to her; brave, eloquent, subtle, accomplished, devoted, constant soul! If nature availed in America to give birth to many such as she, freedom & honour & letters & art too were safe in this new world." Fuller's friend Caroline Sturgis Tappan wrote in a letter, "The waves do not seem so difficult to brave as the prejudices she would have encountered if [Margaret] had arrived here safely."

Fuller was memorialized in a number of ways. Within a week of her death, Horace Greeley suggested that Ralph Waldo Emerson "prepare a biography of Fuller," a text on which Emerson collaborated with William Henry Channing and James Freeman Clark and eventually published as a memoir. According to the New York Home Journal,

"the first thousand [. . .] was sold in twenty-four hours." James Freeman Clark noted that two more editions "were hurried through the press [. . .] when, *presto*, the sale stopped [. . .] Uncle Tom's Cabin was published. The retail book market never can take two enthusiasms at one time." Even so, until Phineas T. Barnum's Life, by Himself was published in 1856, The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, was the best-selling biography of the decade.

Next, Fuller was honored three months after her death at the “first national Woman’s Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts [. . .] [where] the delegates observed a moment of silence” in her memory. Finally, a monument honoring Fuller and Ossoli was erected beside the sarcophagus inscribed with the name of her father on a plot of land that eventually became “the first garden cemetery in the United States,” a location that soon developed into a “major tourist attraction” where “guidebooks pictured the Ossoli monument prominently and described it as one of the cemetery’s most popular ‘contemplation spots’” (von Mehren 338-43).

Despite the sadness her death generated, many of Fuller’s Works were soon disregarded, although for a brief time, there was renewed interest in her during the 1880s when “Julia Ward Howe and Thomas Wentworth Higginson published biographies of her in 1883 and 1884, respectively” (von Mehren 345). Her memory, however, eventually faded, along with many other women and men of the Transcendentalist movement. As stated earlier, a few intellectuals continued to read Woman in the Nineteenth Century, but for the most part, her writings remained dead until the second half of the twentieth century when a sudden burst of interest in women’s literary scholarship spread through academia.

The epigram for this chapter is a variation of a quote by the German poet Theodor Körner who greatly inspired Fuller, who included it in a letter that was incorporated into The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli. It is greatly intriguing that the original text, “Though many have suffered shipwreck, / still beat noble hearts,” would have been such a powerful influence on Fuller who must have read more than a thousand such moving lines over the course of her life. She certainly could not have known that she herself would someday suffer a shipwreck, but because of a revival of interest in her writings, her “noble heart” will continue to beat for years to come, inspiring women of this generation to compose their own literary works based on Fuller’s

life experiences. Anne G. Faigen has recently written a work of historical fiction for young readers titled Finding Her Way that makes numerous references to Fuller, as well as to other prominent figures in the Transcendental movement. Many female writers, such as Grace Schulman and Eva Heisler, have also published poetical works, including “Margaret Fuller: Fire Island, New York” and “Margaret Fuller, Pregnant – December 1847,” that detail individual events in her life. One poem in particular, “Crystalline Mine: Marchioness Ossoli, Margaret Fuller” by Geraldine C. Little, is especially poignant as it details all of the major events in Fuller’s life in verse form beginning with her birth and progressing through her difficult study sessions with her father, the death of her father, life in Italy, her son’s birth, her tragic death, and concludes with a description of her surreal existence after death. The last two segments of this poem follows:

#### **VI. The Snuffed Flame**

Another May: fields fruited, full  
of the miracle: sun  
You move with your miracle  
son and husband towards  
America, waves  
doubling, tripling until June  
with its flowing tides  
sees you just off  
shore, waves moving like avalanches  
foaming, spinning  
wrecking

forever

your vessel's timbers

on the beaches of Fire Island

## VII. Questions

Margaret, walking the sea's fathoms,

are your footsteps light on sea grasses?

Is the baby, the son

in your arms, laughing at toys,

the twisting tentacles?

Does he move beside you,

the man, the husband sharing

your restless questioning

of that spectacular world?

Daisies rise wild beyond the dunes,

a gull settles into its shadow moaning

*Margaret, forty was too young*

*for death*

*for the burning out*

*in that cold fire*

This work, as opposed to other biographical poems about Fuller, is unique in its focus on the spectrum of events that defined her life, in addition to a closing segment that asks some of the questions surrounding her death. The brilliance of the poem rests in this final section as the reader is compelled to imagine Fuller's ghost inhabiting for eternity the Fire Island waters.

There is no denying that Fuller transcended gender boundaries in all aspects of her life, and her controversial works are no exception. The words penned by Fuller were based on forty years of exceptional living, an existence which set an example for other women. Whether she was translating the works of Goethe, writing of her homoerotic feelings during her mid-twenties, editing the New York Tribune, or compiling the history of a war as she experienced it first-hand, her life revolved around her ability to communicate through written expression. This talent led directly to her understanding of a world where women were defined by strict gender barriers to which she refused to conform. Her poetry leads its reader on an intellectual, emotional, and historical journey through the mind of its author, vividly describing the various paths she traveled, if only the reader will be open to the unique biography of her life. Hers was not a theoretical self-reliance; she lived the true transcendental existence. She was not defiant in her life or her writing; she was simply confident in her abilities. To paraphrase her fellow Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, Fuller went confidently in the direction of her dreams in order to live the life she imagined (216).

## NOTES

### Chapter 1, *Introduction: The Transcendence of Gender Barriers*

<sup>1</sup> Some scholarship periodically appeared on Fuller between 1850 and the 1960s, but most often her name received little more than a brief reference in a catalog listing of Transcendental writers or a harsh criticism of her overtly feminist and often complicated style, such as the following passage taken from a survey of American literary criticism written in 1931:

Margaret Fuller is mentioned in all histories of American Literature, yet as a writer she is as dead as Nahum Tate. Widely accepted in her own day, the first woman in this country, I believe, to attempt and succeed in making a living by her pen, there is not a single page of her writing that is read today, except by the literary antiquarian. . . Higginson, it is true, calls her the best literary critic of America. She is not that, she is not even a good literary critic, and for one reason. She could not write. Her style is impossible – dull, inflated, muddy, possessing all the vices and none of the virtues of critical prose. (DeMille 128-29).

### Chapter 2, *She Who Sought Friendship: Fuller's Poetry to Anna Barker, "The Beautiful"*

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Fuller died of Asiatic cholera (Chipperfield 118).

<sup>2</sup> Fuller was originally diagnosed with “brain fever,” but later she referred to her illness as “typhoid fever” (von Mehren).

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all the quotations from Fuller's poetry are taken from Steele's The Essential Margaret Fuller.

<sup>4</sup> After Anna Barker married Samuel Ward, a friend of Fuller's, she began a similarly close relationship with another woman, Caroline Sturgis (von Mehren 164).

<sup>5</sup> Taken from “Freeing the Prisoned Queen”: The Development of Margaret Fuller’s Poetry”

by Jeffrey Steele.

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VITA

STACI E. LEWIS

Education: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
English, B.A., 2000  
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
English, M.A., 2002

Professional  
Experience: Staff Accountant, Lewis & Associates, P.C.,  
Johnson City, TN, 1996-2000  
Administrative Assistant, National Storytelling Network,  
Jonesborough, TN, 2000-2001  
Research Assistant, East Tennessee State University,  
English Department, 2000-2001  
Teaching Assistant, East Tennessee State University,  
English Department, 2001-2002

Papers  
Presented: "Margaret Fuller and the Female Archetype," New Voices 2001 Graduate  
Conference, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, September 2001  
  
"Climbing the Social Ladder of Destruction: A New Historicist Study of  
John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," Annual Conference of the  
Tennessee Philological Association, Middle Tennessee State  
University, Murfreesboro, TN, February 2002

Membership &  
Committees: Member, Sigma Tau Delta, 1998-present  
Member, Phi Kappa Phi, 1999-present  
Member, East Tennessee State University Graduate and Professional  
Student Association, 2000-present  
Member, The Margaret Fuller Society, 2000-present  
Local Arrangements Host Committee for the February 2001 Annual  
Conference of the Tennessee Philological Association  
President, Association of Graduate English Students, 2001-2002

Awards: Academic Performance Scholarship, 1997-2000  
Mary B. Herrin Scholarship, 2001-2002