This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.
Rewriting the Life of an “Ultra-Radical”: Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852)

Alice de Galzain

PhD in English Literature
The University of Edinburgh
2023
Declaration of Originality

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or processional qualification except as specified.

Part of this work has been published in “Transcendentalist Women in Conversation: Margaret Fuller, Sophia Ripley, and ‘Woman.’” *Transatlantica : Revue française d'études américaines*, no. 2, 2022, [https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.19508]

Alice de Galzain
Abstract

This thesis focuses on Ralph Waldo Emerson's portrait of Margaret Fuller in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852). More specifically, it centres on the chapters “IV. Visits to Concord” and “V. Conversations in Boston,” both written by Emerson. The main hypothesis of this project is that Emerson’s portrayal of Fuller in *Memoirs* constitutes a step back in his career as a reformist; reading *Memoirs* as Emerson’s first public statement on women’s rights, I explore the limitations of his understanding of womanhood while comparing it with Fuller’s views on the subject. In order to compensate for the corrupt and mediated nature of the biography, I read Emerson’s sections in *Memoirs* alongside other writings by him and by Fuller—in doing so, I provide analyses of unpublished material, but I also focus on writings that have often been overlooked in scholarly studies. I also look at works by William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke (Emerson’s two co-authors), and Sophia Ripley.

My research aims have been to answer the following questions: (1) how did Emerson’s and Fuller’s different understandings of womanhood impact their views of society and the American nation? And (2) how can *Memoirs* inform our understanding of Emerson’s stance in relation to the women’s rights movement, of which he was a very timid and ambiguous supporter? The first chapter centres on Fuller and Emerson’s conversations on womanhood: reflecting on their different understandings of such a term, I show how gender was a problem that both animated many of their exchanges and troubled their friendship. I compare Emerson’s commentary on his friendship with Fuller in *Memoirs* with her take on friendship in her review of *Die Günstterode* (published in the *Dial* in 1842). I then turn
to Sophia Ripley’s *Dial* article “Woman” (1841) to show how other Transcendentalists were also part of that conversation on women’s rights.

In Chapters Two and Three, I further reflect on Emerson’s rewriting of Fuller’s life in *Memoirs*. Focusing on Emerson’s problematic commentary on Fuller’s career, I examine his silencing of her most radical works as well as his criticism of her writing. I highlight the aspects of her career that he purposefully left out of the biography and examine his dislike of her writing focusing, in particular, on the accusation that Fuller “often loses herself in sentimentalism.” In the third and final chapter of this thesis, I reflect on the notion of “embodiment” in order to demonstrate how female physicality represented an obstacle for Emerson. I argue that this is visible in *Memoirs*, in which his distaste for Fuller’s inclinations towards mesmerism and her faith in bodily intuition is apparent. I demonstrate that the same doubts which transpire from Emerson’s portrait of Fuller in *Memoirs* also inhabit his subsequent lectures on women’s rights.
Lay Summary

In this thesis, I am to examine *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852), the posthumous biography of Margaret Fuller that Ralph Waldo Emerson co-wrote with James Freeman Clarke and William Henry Channing. Focusing specifically on Emerson’s chapters “IV. Visits to Concord” and “V. Conversations in Boston,” I ask the following research questions: how did Emerson’s and Fuller’s different understandings of womanhood impact their views of society and the American nation? And how can *Memoirs* inform our understanding of Emerson’s stance concerning the women’s rights movement, of which he was a very timid and ambiguous supporter?

*Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* is a biased and corrupt text. It is “corrupt” because the male friends who narrated Fuller’s life and work tampered unapologetically with the sources they used in the biography. It is “biased” because the authors ignored the most important (and radical) aspects of Fuller’s career to suit their own agendas. Being such a mediated work, *Memoirs* requires to be read alongside other texts: my examination of the biography is built along a series of close readings of Fuller’s and Emerson’s work (including unpublished material) but also of lesser-known texts by other Transcendentalists, which inform my analysis of the one-sided depiction of Fuller produced by her male biographers.

The thesis opens with an examination of Fuller and Emerson’s conversations on womanhood: in the first chapter, I analyse their different views on gender while also demonstrating how those divergences played a decisive role in their friendship and in the way in which Emerson recounted Fuller’s life in *Memoirs*. Secondly, I focus more closely on Emerson’s editorial choices: as I look at the parts of Fuller’s individuality that he left out of the biography, I question his ability to see her both as
Lastly, I argue that Emerson’s criticism and depreciation of Fuller’s work in *Memoirs* stem from a certain distrust of the body, depicted as an obstacle to the intellect, which contrasts with Fuller’s vision of the body as means for transcendence. I believe that the nature of Emerson’s distaste for Fuller’s inclinations towards mesmerism and her faith in bodily intuition in *Memoirs* can help us shed light on his ambivalent support of women’s rights.
Acknowledgments

Looking back at the past four years, I cannot but feel overwhelmed with gratitude.

Thank you, Professor Andrew Taylor, for being the best supervisor I could hope for. I am particularly grateful for your patience and for your understanding during the past four years (six, if I include my master’s thesis, which you also supervised).

Thank you, Professor Keith Hughes, for the feedback and guidance you provided during each annual review. I always felt supported and inspired by your comments!

Thank you, mum, for making it possible for me to do what I love and for making me feel supported and loved every single day throughout this exhausting but magical PhD journey. I owe you everything, and I cannot wait for us to celebrate our literary successes together this year!

And thank you to all of you who helped me get to this point. Grazie Fabio, grazie Bruna, grazie Paola, grazie Edda. And to those I cannot thank in person, thank you from the bottom of my heart: merci nona, grazie nonno, et merci Philippe.
Contents

Abbreviations ........................................................................................................................................ 1

Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 2

Chapter One – Emerson and Fuller in Conversation: On Friendship, Womanhood, and Poetry ........................................................................................................................................ 25

Introduction – The Problem of Fuller’s Reputation .............................................................................. 25

1.1 Emerson on Fuller: Memoirs, Idealism, and Women’s Rights ......................................................... 40

1.2 “Woman [and] Artist”: Margaret Fuller on Bettine Brentano-von Arnim and Friendship ......................................................................................................................... 60

1.3 Transcendentalists in Conversation: Margaret Fuller, Sophia Ripley, and “Woman” ................................................................. 83

Chapter Two – Rewriting the Life of an “Ultra Radical” ................................................................. 106

Introduction – The Problem of Privacy .................................................................................................. 106

2.1 “An Essential Line of American History”: Memoirs and Its Authors ............................................. 110

2.2 “I Feel Too Full of Thought, Like Light”: Margaret Fuller’s Unpublished Journal Fragments ......................................................................................................................... 129

2.3 “Woman, or Artist?”: Emerson and the Fuller Dilemma in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli ................................................................................................................................. 162

Chapter Three – The Body Element in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli ........................................ 178

Introduction – Of Textual Mutilations and Biographical Embalmment .............................................. 178

3.1 From Emerson’s Notebook to Memoirs’ Body Text: Of Editing Practices and Gender Discrepancies ......................................................................................................................... 184

3.2 Fuller and Emerson on “Dæmonology”: Bodily Functions and Biographical Misrepresentations ............................................................................................................................. 203

3.3 After Memoirs: The Sinusoid Trajectory of Emerson’s Involvement in the Women’s Rights Movement ............................................................................................................................... 228

Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 255

Bibliography ......................................................................................................................................... 263
Abbreviations

FL

MHarF
Fuller, Margaret. “Transcript.” 1840-44, Margaret Fuller Papers, Fruitlands Museum. The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center, Sharon, MA.

WNC

CW

EEL

EJ

EL

LL

MMFO
Introduction

In 1845 Margaret Fuller confidently prophesized that “no doubt, a new manifestation is at hand, a new hour in the day of man” (*WNC* 10). Inspired by the wave of utopian and reform movements sweeping the United States and Europe, Fuller believed that political change was imminent in America. Right from the initial pages of her famous feminist tract *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, she insisted on the need for reform in the young democracy—“The tree,” Fuller metaphorically explained, “cannot come to flower till its root be free from the cankering worm, and its whole growth open to air and light” (*WNC* 10). Fuller denounced the fact that the American nation was built on structural inequality and emphasised that “[w]hile any one is base, none can be entirely free and noble” (*WNC* 10). As the use of the adjective “noble” suggests, it seemed inconceivable that a country whose formation had resulted from a revolt against European monarchies would deny some the right to “citizenship” just as arbitrarily as kings granted their privileges. At a time when “manifest destiny” was to become the symbol of the settlers’ advance into the West, Fuller longed for a different type of “manifestation” and announced that “something new shall presently be shown of the life of man” (*WNC* 10). As the title of her work uncompromisingly indicates, Fuller focused on woman as she juxtaposed to the growing abolitionist sentiment her own feminist plea—“As men become aware that few men have had a fair chance, they are inclined to say that no women have had a fair chance” (*WNC* 12). Fuller’s demand that “inward and outward freedom for woman as much as for man shall be acknowledged as a right, not yielded as a concession” (*WNC* 20) preceded the first women’s rights convention by three years.
In order to assert herself as a woman intellectual in antebellum America, Fuller braved social conventions that kept women confined to the domestic sphere. Challenging the limitations imposed on her sex, she became a renowned writer, teacher, conversationalist, and journalist. While her first article appeared in the *Boston Daily Advertiser & Patriot* as early as 1834, Fuller spent the last years of her life reporting from Italy for the *New-York Tribune*, thus making history as America’s first female war correspondent. A major figure of American Transcendentalism, she is known for her literary criticism, her mastery of European literature, as well as for her socio-political reflections which were majorly informed by her first-hand experience of the 1848 Italian Revolution, and for her published works on woman. Unlike the male members of the Transcendental Club and also unlike her brothers, Fuller did not study at Harvard (although she was the first woman to be granted the right to use Harvard Library). Instead, she relied on the education she received from her father Timothy, on her training at schools for girls,¹ and on her brilliant work as an autodidact (learning German by herself and translating Johann Peter Eckermann’s *Gespräche mit Goethe* [1839] is only one illustration of her virtuoso self-education).

Fuller’s *Woman* was the first book written in America to argue for women’s rights (Gilbert 211). As her friend and fellow Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson noted in the posthumous biography *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852), Fuller was ahead of her time—"this athletic soul craved a larger atmosphere than it found; as if she were ill-timed and mis-mated, and felt in herself a tide of life,

---

¹ She attended Cambridge Port Private Grammar School, a school designed to prepare boys for Harvard that also admitted girls, Dr Park’s Boston Lyceum for Young Ladies, and Miss Susan Prescott’s Young Ladies’ Seminary in Groton, Massachusetts.
which compared with the slow circulation of others as a torrent with a rill” (1:232).

Through her work and life choices, Fuller refused to conform to a limiting definition of “womanhood” and, by example, inspired many women to do the same. In 1895, her former student Caroline Healey Dall recalled how “[m]any of the young women who grew up with her have since become distinguished. Those who have not, have not failed to introduce into sacred homes the high ideal that she imparted” (“Transcendentalism” 35). At the same time, Fuller’s views on “womanhood” were harshly criticised in the years after her death, as people blamed her for not conforming to the ideal of femininity of her times. In 1852, the German Reformed Messenger, a weekly magazine published in Pennsylvania, reported how “her reading was ill-chosen” and “her education . . . anything but a proper one,” concluding that Fuller was “what may be termed an ultra-radical in religion, morals and politics” (“Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli”). Two years later, The Southern Literary Messenger depicted Fuller as “one eminently womanly by natural impulse, but a man by training and philosophy” (“Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli”). A central problem in the reception of women intellectuals at the time was in fact the public’s general inability to see them “as having both feminine sexuality and ‘masculine’ intellect,” Rula Quawas notes (134). Fuller was also long discredited by literary critics as a minor figure of Transcendentalism, while the works of male thinkers like Emerson and Henry David Thoreau elided any form of real interest in the ones produced by women. In 1964, the author of an article entitled “Emerson and Christopher Pearse Cranch” declared that the “impact of a man of Emerson’s stature upon his contemporaries should always interest us” (18). Thanks to the critical rediscovery of Fuller’s work that began in the 1970s, the “impact of a [woman] of [Fuller’s] stature upon [her] contemporaries” is now considered as equally important.
In a series of articles published since 1982, David M. Robinson established that “Fuller’s ideas both challenged and extended Emerson’s” as “Transcendentalism moved from an intensified religious awareness toward a foundation for social and political reform” (“Alternative” 573). Certainly, as Robinson acknowledged in 2021, “Transcendentalism has never been easy to describe or define” (“Alternative” 573). Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a contemporary of Fuller and Emerson, recounted how the movement originated as a doctrine of religious empowerment that “amounted essentially to this: that about the year 1836 a number of young people in America made the discovery that, in whatever quarter of the globe they happened to be, it was possible for them to take a look at the stars for themselves” (Margaret 133). As Phyllis Cole writes in A Companion to American Literature, “[a]ffirmation of intuitive thought, questioning of inherited authorities, and recognition of a divinely charged natural universe must be claimed as central to any description of Transcendentalism” (67). What’s more, the movement was largely centred on orality to the point that, according to Lawrence Buell, it “can almost be said to have begun and ended as a discussion group” (Literary 77). Deemed one of the best conversationalists in America, Fuller’s famous Conversations in Boston (November 1839–May 1844) perfectly epitomise that all-important dimension. The sessions, which were dedicated to a female audience with only one series open to men, were meant to compensate for women’s lack of education, reflecting the Transcendentalists’ commitment to changing people’s lives by changing their minds.

Having taken part in these Conversations, Dall paid tribute to her former mentor in a lecture entitled “Transcendentalism in New England,” in which she

---

2 Dall’s lecture was in part a response to a homonymous text by Octavius Brooks Frothingham (1876). In his “History” of the movement, Frothingham described “Miss Fuller” as someone who was “thoroughly feminine in her intuitions” (177) and
proposed a definition of the movement that seemed particularly aimed at celebrating women thinkers—“The arc, which we call transcendental, was subtended by a chord, held at first by Anne Hutchinson, and lost in the Atlantic waves with Margaret Fuller” (Myerson, Reader 675). Almost fifty years after Fuller’s death, Dall described how “the history of the Transcendental movement stretched along two hundred years, beginning with a woman’s life and work in 1637, and ending with a woman’s work and death in 1850” (Myerson, Reader 675). Although that end date was not taken up by critics, Robinson admits that “specifying an ending date for Transcendentalism [is] difficult—the movement seems to have diffused in several directions in the middle 1840s” (“Alternative” 573). And yet what transpires from Dall’s remarks is how eager she was to reiterate the importance of Fuller’s work amidst the many attempts that were made to discredit her. After a period of relative critical oblivion and subsequent reinstatement, we now similarly applaud how works like “The Great Lawsuit: Man Versus Men. Woman Versus Women” (1843) and its prolongation Woman played a major role in the history of women’s rights in the U.S. Quoting Fuller’s letter to William Henry Channing, in which she wrote that she “felt a delightful glow as if I had put a good deal of my true life in it, as if, suppose I went away now, the measure of my foot-print would be left on the earth” (FL 3:241), Robinson reasserts with the advantage of hindsight that “[h]er book, as we now know, has made a lasting impression” (“Alternative” 586). As we continue to explore the impact of Fuller’s work on the history of feminism (first and second wave), and as we focus more and more on Emerson’s rare instances of position-taking on the question of women’s rights, it is important that we turn our attention to Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli—the ascertainment that the “only criticism that can fairly be made on the Transcendentalist’s idea of woman, is that it has more . . . respect for the ideal woman than for the actual woman” (181).
posthumous biography of Fuller edited and co-written by Emerson right after her
death—in order to further investigate the way(s) in which Fuller’s and Emerson’s
different understandings of womanhood impacted their views of society and of the
American nation. This thesis provides an original outlook on Fuller’s and Emerson’s
Transcendentalism(s) by placing *Memoirs* at its centre. Focusing on Emerson’s
chapters “Visits to Concord” and “Conversations in Boston,” I shall address the
following questions: did Fuller and Emerson agree on a common definition of
“womanhood”? How did Emerson portray Fuller in *Memoirs*, and what does that tell
us about his views on women’s rights? How did their considerations on gender
reflect on their Transcendentalist philosophy and on their political thinking?

It was Horace Greeley, editor of the *New-York Tribune*, who encouraged
Fuller to expand “The Great Lawsuit” into a book while also inviting her to move to
New York to become the *Tribune*’s literary editor. It was also Greeley who, in much
more tragic circumstances, urged Emerson to write a biography of Fuller after she
died in July 1850. In August that year, he asked Emerson to work on “a proper
edition of Margaret’s works, with extracts from her unprinted writings which were the
freest and most characteristic of any” (*EL* 4:225). Fuller died on July 19th, in a
shipwreck just fifty yards off Fire Island, New York, along with her two-year old son
Angelino and her husband Giovanni Angelo Ossoli. A somewhat criminal lack of
rescue efforts characterised the accident: as recalled by a witness, “the men on
shore had not courage enough to launch the lifeboat—they might have launched
without risk of life,” instead they “sat for an hour or two on the side of the boat, doing
nothing” (Davis). Thoreau, sent out by Emerson to search the scene the day after the
shipwreck, deploringly announced that neither Fuller’s body, nor her book—the
history of the Italian Revolutions of 1848–49 that she called her “masterpiece”—were
anywhere to be found. Had Fuller’s “masterpiece” been recovered, perhaps her reputation would have followed a very different trajectory in the century following her death. An authoritative text like a history of the Italian Revolutions might in fact have sealed Fuller’s status as a major Transcendentalist and hushed those who attacked her for her views on women’s rights. Instead, after Fuller’s premature death (she was only forty years old), the radicalism of some of her written work, particularly her 1843 essay and Woman, as well as her unconventional marriage with the Marquis Ossoli, continued to pose a serious threat to her posthumous reputation. In fact, even among Fuller’s most intimate friends, her marriage had caused some concern. Less than a month after Fuller’s death, Emerson wrote in a letter to Thomas Carlyle that he believed Fuller would have struggled to fit in now that she was joined by her Italian husband for “[h]er marriage would have taken her away from us all” (EL 8:224).

In Emerson’s Memory Loss, Christopher Hanlon remarks that it is partly in order “to legitimize” her that Emerson started working on a biography of Fuller, “whose unorthodox marriage . . . and resulting child Angelo produced an atmosphere of scandal the Memoirs was intended to quell” (49). After Fuller’s tragic death, Emerson immediately started working on a tribute for he believed that such “opulent genius deserves a fluent eulogy” (EL 4:253). With the help of Fuller’s close friends William Henry Channing and James Freeman Clarke, he attempted to secure her posterity and recover her life and work in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, which was published in 1852 by Phillips, Sampson and Company. As suggested by Emerson’s comment “Margaret’s book has had the most unlooked for & welcome success” (EL 8:224), Memoirs did very well at the time of its publication. Thomas R. Mitchell indicates that “the first 1,000 copies sold within 24 hours. Before the year
ended, the two-volume edition had been reprinted 4 times, by 1884 11 times” (212). And yet in recent years, despite remaining a reference for biographical accounts of Fuller, *Memoirs* elicited a lot of criticism from scholars who regarded it as reductive and therefore unreliable. While Higginson, in his own 1884 biography of Fuller, acknowledged the complexity of her character, noting that she was indeed “many women in one” (4), Emerson, Channing, and Clarke struggled to come to terms with Fuller’s controversial radicalism and chose to depict only some aspects of her life. For Cole, “Fuller scholars have been justifiably critical of these friends’ editorial mangling of her manuscripts not only changing words but cutting actual pages of her journals so as to delete and rearrange as they wished” (*Companion* 80). Indeed, the editors’ efforts to contain Fuller’s reputation resulted in what Sonia Di Loreto has described as “a ruthless cut and paste of fragments of letters sent or received by Fuller, pieces of her writings, and quotations from other works” (11). Commenting on the biographical reductionism at work in *Memoirs*, Bell Gale Chevigny noted that “where Fuller’s individuality seemed to threaten deep-seated cultural, social, and political norms of femininity, the editors tempered or obscured” (“Censorship” 451).

Journal entries and private correspondence by the authors of *Memoirs* show that writing the biography was not a straightforward process: in a letter to William H. Furness, Emerson recounted how he had “just escaped from a task that has absorbed near six months, a labor of love, but of very questionable judgment, - Margaret Fuller’s memoirs” (*Fruitlands*). In addition to the complex gathering of Fuller’s papers, disseminated all over New England and Europe, working on *Memoirs* involved reading some of her very intimate accounts: the “experience could be uncomfortable,” as Susan Manning remarked in *Poetics of Character* (173). James Freeman Clarke indeed confessed that “[t]he difficulty which we all feel in
describing our past intercourse and friendship with Margaret Fuller, is, that the intercourse was so intimate, and the friendship so personal, that it is like making a confession to the public of our most interior selves" (MMFO 1:61). On top of issues of privacy, there was the even bigger problem of Fuller’s posthumous reputation of which, as Manning noted, “the memoir . . . took pre-emptive control” (105). When confronted with the question of how and what to tell the public about her, the authors of Memoirs struggled to deal with Fuller’s private and public life. First, there was the uncertainty surrounding her union with Ossoli, which was particularly troubling because the news of a child born out of wedlock could destroy her reputation. Her writings on women’s rights could equally turn her into an easy target in mid-nineteenth century America.

Unfortunately, the decades following Fuller’s death showed just how fragile the reputation of a woman intellectual like Fuller could be. In his article on “Julian Hawthorne and the ‘Scandal’ of Margaret Fuller,” Mitchell pinpoints that “[a]fter 1884 Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli . . . would not be reprinted until 1973” (213). Similarly, “Fuller’s Woman in the Nineteenth Century, in its twelfth printing in 1884, would be reprinted only once more (1893) before its revival in 1969” (213). As Mitchell recounts, 1884 was a great year for Fuller’s admirers—two new biographies were published, Higginson’s Margaret Fuller Ossoli and Julia Ward Howe’s Margaret Fuller (Marchesa Ossoli). Indicating that “Fuller’s reputation seemed secure three decades after her death” (212), Mitchell quotes further evidence—Fuller’s “brother Arthur’s edited collections of her work, At Home and Abroad (1856) and Life Without and Life Within (1859), had been reissued 10 and 4 times, respectively; of her Summer on the Lakes in 1843, [Evert Augustus] Duyckinck in his private diary had written that it was the most genuinely American book that he had ever read,” and in
“1868, Horace Greeley had devoted an entire chapter to Fuller in his autobiography, *Recollections of a Busy Life*” (212). And yet, when Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne’s son Julian published his father’s journals, he purposefully and successfully degraded Fuller’s image by including an entry in which Hawthorne had recorded the derogatory remarks that American sculptor Joseph Mozier had made about Fuller. Mitchell explains that “Fuller’s sudden devaluation in the very year that promised to raise her literary and historical currency was, in fact, part of Julian’s strategy to strengthen his father’s position as a celebrated American author” (213). As his notes reveal, Julian Hawthorne was terrified of what the women’s rights movement might do to “married women, who had in their husbands their ideal of marital virtue, and whose domestic affairs sufficiently occupied them, were not likely to be cordial supporters of such doctrines as the book enunciated” (qtd. in Mitchell 226).

The “devaluation” of Fuller’s work, which eventually resulted in a century-long underappreciation of her genius, finally came to an end in the 1970s when Fuller’s name started to emerge from neglect. Chevigny, author of the foundational work *The Woman and the Myth: Margaret Fuller’s Life and Writings* (1976), describes how second-wave feminism played a defining role in her wanting to bring Fuller’s work back to life. Commenting on the state of the archives in the 1990s, Christina Zwarg, another major voice in the critical resurrection of Fuller, recounted how she “indulged in resentful comparisons between the haphazard condition of Fuller’s works and the fastidious order of Emerson’s papers (both published and private) at Harvard” (“Review” 132). In a review of Charles Capper’s *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life* (1993), Zwarg notes how “[e]ven tracking down Fuller's published writing takes considerable effort” and “Capper is much more modest than he needs
to be about the formidable task he set before himself when he embarked on this project” (“Review” 132). In 2022, things are looking different: not only is Fuller’s written work now widely available, but for the first time a Collected Writings of Margaret Fuller is going to be published. Since the critical reevaluation of Fuller’s work began, a large part of her writings has been reprinted in a series of important collections, starting with Robert Hudspeth’s 1983 The Letters of Margaret Fuller (six volumes, published by Cornell University Press). Quoted earlier, Chevigny’s The Woman and the Myth juxtaposes excerpts from Fuller’s works with texts written by her contemporaries; edited by Larry J. Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith, “These Sad but Glorious Days": Dispatches from Europe, 1846-1850 (1991) features Fuller’s pieces from Europe for the Tribune; in 1998, Reynolds also edited a Norton edition of Woman in the Nineteenth Century; published in 2000, and edited by Judith Mattson Bean and Joel Myerson, Critic: Writings from the New-York Tribune, 1844-1846 focuses on Fuller’s New-York journalism; in the same year, Transcendentalism: A Reader by Myerson also appeared, featuring key texts by Fuller including some of her Dial articles and, more recently, Myerson also edited Fuller in her Own Time (2008), a collection of first-hand reminiscences written by her contemporaries.

Although Zwarg’s comments about the state of the archives are now dated, they do invite us to reflect critically on the posterity of nineteenth-century authors like Fuller and Emerson. Both central figures of the Transcendental movement, Fuller and Emerson were not only intimate friends, but they were also part of the same national conversation that characterised antebellum America, whereby writers and thinkers attempted to redefine the very terms of national belonging. However, while Emerson’s fame continued more or less uninterrupted after his death, Fuller was relegated for quite some time to the margins of the Transcendentalist circle.
Although she was eventually brought back by critics and scholars, the fluctuating curve of her popularity tracks with the similarly wavering reception of nineteenth-century female intellectuals. Indeed, until the second half of the twentieth century, critical overviews of American literature identified Emerson and Thoreau as key figures of American Transcendentalism. Scholars and biographers also tended to mention Ellery Channing, his nephew William Henry Channing, Theodore Parker, and George Ripley as influential figures within that movement; but far less did such studies recognise key roles played by women Transcendentalists—intellectuals who were omitted from anthologies and syllabi, left aside of the academic canon where their writings were largely forgotten. Though Fuller proved an exception to this trend, most scholarship focused for a long time upon her life rather than her work, a trend that is “not exactly news in the history of women’s struggle to gain acceptance for their achievements,” as noted by Belasco Smith (“Animating”). This tendency toward biographical rather than critical treatments of women such as Fuller gave way in the 1960s and 70s, as academics like Chevigny, Zwarg, and Capper worked for the critical reinstatement of Margaret Fuller. With Fuller’s writings more easily available, more and more critical works were published on Fuller, including several new biographies—Capper’s two volumes An American Romantic Life: The Private Years (1993) and The Public Years (2007), John Matteson’s The Lives of Margaret Fuller (2012), and Megan Marshall’s Margaret Fuller: An American Life (2013), winner of the 2014 Pulitzer Prize. The rediscovery of Fuller’s work contributed to the enlargement of the Transcendentalist canon by adding a more political dimension to our understanding of the movement. In recent years, scholars also developed analyses of other women who played an active role in the Transcendentalist circle: Cole has written extensively on Mary Moody Emerson in Mary Moody Emerson and
The Origins of Transcendentalism: A Family History, Tiffany K. Wayne’s monograph Woman Thinking: Feminism and Transcendentalism in Nineteenth-Century America (2005) shed light on works by Paulina Wright Davis, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, and Ednah Dow Cheney amongst others, while the more recent collection of essays edited by Jana L. Argersinger and Phyllis Cole Towards a Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism (2014) similarly aimed to bring some of these women’s works back to critical attention after a long period of oblivion.

Although Fuller is only now, belatedly, coming into her own as a major figure in U.S. literary history, her friendship with Emerson never stopped eliciting the curiosity of commentators. And yet whenever their contemporaries tried to define their relationship, they would often reach the conclusion that it was as complex and hard to pin down as were the minds of the two thinkers. Emerson himself once wrote to Fuller, “It seems as if we had been born & bred in different nations. You say you understand me wholly. You cannot communicate yourself to me. I hear the words sometimes but remain a stranger to your state of mind” (EL 2:353). Howe’s comments in her 1883 biography of Fuller similarly emphasise the friends’ temperamental differences, “Mr. Emerson served only to display her powers, his uncompromising idealism seeming narrow and hard when contrasted with her glowing realism” (114). Although we might suppose that Howe, while writing Fuller’s biography, became a little biased in her judgement of Emerson, her comments are also echoed in Higginson’s biographical work. Indeed, Higginson did “not think that Mr. Emerson, with his cool and tranquil temperament, always did quite justice to the ardent nature that flung itself against him” (300). Commenting on Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, he criticised the way in which Emerson, Clarke, and Channing had chosen to depict Fuller, noting that “the prevalent tone of the
‘Memoirs’ leaves her a little too much in the clouds” (5). Higginson used Memoirs as a foil to define what he would not do in his biography—“With every disposition to defer to the authors of the ‘Memoirs,’ all of whom have been in one way or another my friends and teachers, I am compelled in some cases to go with what seems the preponderance of written evidence against their view” (4). Modern critics have similarly acknowledged Memoirs’ heavy mediation. Examining the Fuller-Emerson relationship in Poetics of Character, Manning described “the neutering biography produced by Margaret Fuller’s friends Emerson, Channing and Clarke” as “their attempt to kill off her continuing intellectual potency by memorialising her: embalming her inconvenient energies in a controlled version of the life-story they made poetic justice of an untimely death” (225). Hudspeth, working on his collection of Fuller’s letters in the 1980s, deplored the “physical abuse” undergone by the material used for the composition of Memoirs—“letters have whole paragraphs blotted by gobs of purple ink; other letters are cut into halves or quarters; editorial changes are written over Fuller’s writing” (1:63). The following analysis of Memoirs will provide an original outlook about the way in which the biography has been read by attending to Emerson’s relationship with Fuller at the level of his editorial changes. By viewing Emerson’s rewriting of Fuller’s life as a symptom of his views on womanhood, I shall consider the biography, but also Fuller and Emerson’s friendship, as well as their Transcendentalism(s), through the prism of gender.

The Fuller-Emerson relationship has been at the centre of attention of numerous important critical studies, many of which relied on Memoirs as an important biographical resource, while also commenting on Emerson’s strange portrayal of his friend. In her 2013 monograph Poetics of Character, Manning asserted that the “personal friendship between Emerson and Fuller was briefer and
more intense than Emerson’s relationship with Carlyle” (169). Manning read the correspondence between the two friends as a story of momentary miscommunications that kept them further apart than the ocean that would later stand between them—“[s]ome form of translation, Emerson implied, was required between their idioms for the friendship to be realised” (170). Character differences and the weight of nineteenth-century constrictive gender norms certainly added layers of complication to Fuller and Emerson’s relationship. While Fuller’s commitment to women’s rights grew stronger and stronger throughout the years, Emerson’s ideas on woman evolved in a different way. Armida Gilbert, in a chapter entitled “Emerson in the Context of the Woman’s Rights Movement,” describes how when he gave his first address on “Woman” in 1855, Emerson “had come far since the 1830s, when he had attempted to understand gender differences by means of such superficial and unlikely distinctions as ‘the man loves hard wood, the woman loves pitch pine’” (234). Memoirs was published three years before Emerson spoke at the Woman’s Rights Convention on 20 September 1855: this thesis shall interrogate his (questionable) editorial choices in Memoirs by viewing them in relation to the evolution of his thought on the woman question.

In the first critical work ever devoted to the famous friendship, Feminist Conversations: Fuller, Emerson, and the Play of Reading (1995), Zwarg examined the influence that Fuller had on her immediate surroundings. As she wrote in an earlier piece published in 1988, “critics [had] staunchly resisted Emerson’s feminist orientation despite his intimate relationship with the stunning feminist Margaret Fuller. No one seriously examined Fuller’s influence over Emerson because the assumption even among feminist critics was that Emerson held sway over Fuller” (“Scene” 133). In her 1995 monograph, Zwarg showed how Emerson “cherished
[Fuller’s] feminist perspective but also how he eventually came to rely on a feminist reader for his work” (32). Zwarg’s foundational work details the ways in which Fuller’s feminism shaped Emerson’s understanding of life; “Fuller’s unconventional experience as a woman,” Zwarg notes, “enabled her to remind Emerson through her complex alignment with masculine activity that one’s sex, though seemingly fatal in nature, need not to be restrictive in life” (33). Other critics have questioned that positive influence: just as Leslie Elizabeth Eckel explains in “Gender,” Emerson’s “theories of women’s strength may not have matched his practical efforts to promote feminist causes” (193). Eckel also summarises the critical debate by reminding readers that “[s]cholars are split on this point: Armida Gilbert argues Emerson was ‘extremely radical’ in his activism on behalf of women’s rights, but Cole maintains he was far more conservative than Fuller, her fellow ‘Exaltadas,’ and other men in his circle” (“Gender” 193). Gilbert is indeed convinced that “[w]hile [Emerson’s] arguments, influenced by Fuller, were couched like hers in the essentialist nineteenth-century language of sacred womanhood, gentility, and intuitive superiority, his political demands on behalf of woman were as bold as hers” (234). In “Emerson’s Hero: Mentoring Margaret Fuller” (Emerson’s Protégés, 2014), David Dowling similarly depicts Emerson as someone whose works “heralded the powers intrinsic to women and urged them to bloom into heroic proportions,” as in his lecture “Heroism” (40). Commenting on Emerson’s influence on Fuller, Dowling also reasserts Emerson’s position as Fuller’s mentor noting how the “principle of self-reliance and the critique of institutional corruption, materialism, and social injustice at the core of Emersonian transcendentalism equipped her with an outlook ideally suited to her position as literary editor” (34).
Julie Ellison’s *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding* (1990) reads like an attempt to recalibrate that debate, as she asserts that “Fuller would have been Fuller without Emerson” (220). Ellison states that “the reverse is also true, despite the fact that Emerson’s unsettling friendship with Fuller was far more unique in his experience than hers” (*Delicate* 220). Indeed, she suggests that “[d]espite the extraordinary interest of her relationship with Emerson – remarkable in the nuances of attraction, repulsion, self-revelation, and competitive understanding recorded by both parties – he is not as crucial to her development as most accounts of either Emerson or Fuller would have us believe” (*Delicate* 220). According to Ellison, “Fuller's Transcendentalist phase is viewed as something she outgrew, [and] it is also treated as something she grew into, in the late 1830s, as a result of the influence of Emerson” (220): for the purpose of my analysis of *Memoirs* however, Fuller and Emerson’s friendship remains crucial and so are their exchanges and the way in which they influenced each other. Arguably the first to do so, Zwarg devoted a full article to *Memoirs* in 1988: in “Emerson as ‘Mythologist,’” she argued that Emerson “defuse[d] the radical nature of Fuller's life” (217) in order to protect her from the judgement of her own era. Zwarg claims that calling Fuller “unattractive” was part of a larger strategy that Emerson employed to “temporarily [suspend] that problem for his intended reader—and . . . to make the more important and seemingly gender-free idea that Fuller had more ‘personal influence’ than ‘any person’ he ever knew” (“Mythologist” 219-220).

Phyllis Cole, another major voice in Fuller scholarship, is less “optimistic” about *Memoirs* and Emerson’s take on gender. In 1997, Cole stated that “America’s foremost prophet of originality constantly recorded, echoed, and colonized the words of others around him” (“Conversing” 128). Pointing out that the “Emersonian ‘Man
Thinking’ really is male, even if he counts women among his sources” (129), Cole nevertheless acknowledged that Emerson offered a “rhetoric of possibility” as he “invite[d] women into the prospects of the Phi Beta Kappa address” (“Conversing” 158). In a later piece on “Woman Questions: Emerson, Fuller, and New England Reform” (1999), she reasserted that there were “genuine differences between Emerson and Fuller” (419) for “[d]espite a common interest in women’s power of knowledge, their conclusions about women differed as widely as their conclusions about evil” (419). Cole has produced a number of influential analyses of Fuller’s work, focusing less on Emerson and more on Fuller’s ground-breaking use of the law trope to advance her feminist claim (“Fuller’s Lawsuit and Feminist History” in Margaret Fuller and Her Circles). Cole’s research importantly and uniquely “compound[s] the case for a feminized Emerson [cf Zwarg], bracketing the Fuller dialogue with an almost half-century (1812-1850) conversation by letter and by journal with Mary Moody Emerson” (“Woman Questions” 411)—a dialogue which, as Cole remarks, Emerson only took up so far. She notes in fact that, though the “two women hardly met each other, . . . Waldo’s characterizations of them sounded common themes for years thereafter” (“Woman Questions” 411) and, although he was full of admiration for the two exceptional thinkers, “in the private record of his journal he meanwhile recorded darker thoughts about women” (413). Showing great reverence to previous scholarship, Hanlon’s 2017 monograph entitled Emerson’s Memory Loss put Memoirs at the heart of his argument, viewing it as a cathartic moment of self-introspection during which Emerson was able to develop his views on abolitionism while thinking of “Emerson’s affective history as key to his politics” (52). For Hanlon, “the shift in Emerson’s affective politics . . . has much to do with his reconsideration of Fuller’s charge that he had failed her as a friend” (82): Hanlon
utilizes *Memoirs* in a wholly new way by claiming innovatively that the “process of conjuring Fuller after her death—attempting to bring her near again through the enjoined project of recollection that is the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*—becomes Emerson’s own way of negotiating distance and propinquity in Fuller’s rather than ‘Friendship’’s way” (65). In the 1841 essay, rather than equating friendship to a “communion of souls,” Emerson stated that he “embrace[d] solitude” (*CW* 2:114), an approach which Fuller had criticised and defined “cold.” Hanlon argues that *Memoirs* offered Emerson the opportunity to view his relationship with Fuller through her eyes, rather than his. Commenting on the titles of the sections that form Emerson’s chapters in *Memoirs*, Hanlon explains that “it is as if Fuller’s shifting whereabouts now mirror the attempts of her friends to map the career of what it is they have lost in her” (65).

While in the last thirty years critics have sought to demonstrate that Fuller’s radical feminist ideas did influence Emerson, either shaping his views on womanhood as Zwarg argues in *Feminist Conversations* or forging his abolitionism as demonstrated by Hanlon, I believe that *Memoirs* actually represents a step back from that kind of progressive conversation. In the 1850s, Emerson often used *Memoirs* as a reason—or maybe an excuse—not to appear publicly at women’s rights conventions. In 1850, “Emerson was prevented from attending the convention, his absence was due to his deep involvement in editing the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, which, as Howe paraphrased Emerson, ‘he hoped, would be considered as service in the line of the objects of the meeting’” (qtd. in Gilbert 212). The following year, in letter to Lucy Stone which appeared in the *New-York Daily Tribune* on 17 October, Emerson apologised for being unable to attend that year’s

---

3 Howe, *Reminiscences*, p. 158.
Worcester Woman’s Rights Convention and explained that he was “tied fast at home by a task which will not end until after a fortnight,” i.e. the memoirs (7). I believe that an in-depth analysis of Emerson’s portrayal of Fuller in Memoirs is required to see through the veracity of these comments and to better understand his thoughts on gender. Precisely because Memoirs is a highly mediated text, this thesis considers it alongside works by Fuller and other authors so that half of my analysis provides context for what was often distorted in first-person accounts. As well as exploring texts by women thinkers like Lydia Maria Child, Sophia Ripley, and Harriet Martineau, I will also examine Fuller’s writing in relation to the work of male Transcendentalists like Emerson, Thoreau, William Henry Channing, and James Freeman Clarke.

This thesis is built along a series of close readings, in which my exploration of Memoirs is compounded by analyses of other texts and authors: while its overall structure is reflective of the multi-faceted approach that the exploration of Memoirs requires, chapters are built as cohesive units and they are organized as follows. In Chapter One, entitled “Emerson and Fuller in Conversation: On Friendship, Womanhood, and Poetry,” I look at Emerson’s and Fuller’s different definition(s) of womanhood. Their relationship has been at the centre of many important scholarly studies on which I rely, but their friendship was also articulated on a series of discussions on gender (woman, marriage, man’s duties) on which I wish to focus. Looking into what made their understandings of womanhood different from each other, I examine how that impacted their friendship while also discussing how other Transcendentalists reacted to that conversation. First, I analyse how the dichotomy between “ideal” and “real” womanhood pervades Emerson’s and Fuller’s discussions on gender, but also how it defines the way in which he describes Fuller in Memoirs.
While Emerson’s 1841 essay “Friendship” often dominates critical discussions of his relationship with Fuller (Hanlon also relies on it to comment on Emerson’s account of that relationship in Memoirs), I look at the notion of friendship through Fuller’s eyes. Indeed, in the second section of the chapter, I focus on her analysis of the Brentano-Günderode relationship in “Bettine Brentano and her Friend Günderode” (published in the Dial in 1842) and reflect on how Fuller’s idealisation of the friendship between the two artists provides an interesting foil to Emerson’s portrayal of Fuller as a woman intellectual in Memoirs. Thirdly, I concentrate on Sophia Ripley’s essay “Woman,” which was published in the Dial in 1841, and examine how Ripley’s redefinition of the concept of “real” womanhood, inspired by Fuller, relates to the image of womanhood which transpires from Emerson’s descriptions of Fuller in Memoirs.

In “Rewriting the Life of an ‘Ultra-Radical,’” the second chapter of the thesis, I focus on Emerson’s editorial practices and choices in Memoirs. I interrogate his contradictory approach to the task of compiling the biography itself, which he described as “an essential line of American history” while also complaining about having to spend time writing it. I compare it with Clarke’s and Channing’s reflections on the act of writing Memoirs, looking at how they dealt with the notion of Fuller’s reputation and analysing how Channing manipulated the issue of Fuller’s marriage so that it would suit the biography’s agenda. Secondly, I examine Fuller’s unpublished 1844 journal fragments, held by the Trustees of Reservations, which I argue offer an insight into parts of Fuller’s individuality that were left out by the authors of Memoirs (and by Emerson more particularly, who was in charge of narrating that period of Fuller’s life). In the third section of the chapter, I concentrate on the “woman or artist” dilemma, which Emerson directly confronts in an
eponymous section of Memoirs, and on which I rely to discuss the various manoeuvres used to conform Fuller to a conventional and domestic image of womanhood. In Chapter Three, entitled “The Body Element in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli,” I examine the causes and the consequences of Emerson’s editorial practices, questioning the political implications of Emerson’s choices in Memoirs. Viewing Memoirs as Emerson’s first public response to women’s rights, I look at the biography in relation to his rather ambivalent career as a women’s rights supporter. Emerson’s rewriting of Fuller’s life in Memoirs shows the limitations of his understanding of womanhood and explains, I believe, why his engagement with the women’s rights movement was so tentative. Likening Emerson’s memorialisation of Fuller to the practice of embalmment, I explore the ways in which the body, a notion that held a very different meaning for Fuller and for Emerson, becomes the vehicle of a certain conservatism on Emerson’s behalf which stands in stark contrast with Fuller’s transcendent understanding of the (female) body. I argue that that is particularly apparent in Emerson’s treatment of Fuller’s interest in mesmerism in Memoirs, which I analyse in the second section of the chapter. Mesmerism, also known as animal magnetism, was a protoscience in which Fuller developed a keen interest while seeking a cure for the chronic pain she sustained all her life. In Memoirs, Emerson criticises Fuller’s fascination with mesmerism, as well as with other esoteric practices, discarding her faith in bodily intuition as an obstacle to the intellect and describing it as an eminently feminine attribute. Such an embodied vision of womanhood also pervades Emerson’s notebook “Margaret Fuller Ossoli,” a journal that he kept during the composition of Memoirs and which I examine in this chapter, reflecting on the textual mutilations undergone by the body of Fuller’s text which Emerson transcribed in the notebook as well as on the sexist characterisations
that Emerson wrote in it. Thirdly, in the last section of the chapter, I look at the history of Emerson’s support of the women’s rights movement, as I link his tentative support for the cause with the limited image of womanhood that emerges from his portrayal of Fuller in *Memoirs*. 
Introduction – The Problem of Fuller’s Reputation

Narrating the life of an “ultra-radical” (German Reformed Messenger) mustn’t have been an easy task. When Emerson, Channing, and Clarke undertook the project of writing a “Life of Margaret” (EL 4:222) in 1850, they were indeed confronted with the problem of Fuller’s reputation. Before we begin our analysis of Memoirs, it might be best to try and understand what that reputation looked like in 1852, when the biography was published. It might also be useful to pick a definition of “reputation” that sits chronologically closer to our Transcendentalist protagonists than the one we might have in mind today. In Vindication of the Rights of Woman published in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft defined “reputation” as a concept that totally depended on gender, and which was firmly linked to sexuality (in a woman’s case). Wollstonecraft bitterly remarked that “with respect to reputation, the attention is confined to a single virtue – chastity” (311). The lucidity of Wollstonecraft’s criticism is astounding for her time, as is her appeal to recognise the ubiquitousness of sexuality in society’s judgment of womanhood—“If the honour of a woman, as it is absurdly called, is safe, she may neglect every social duty; nay, ruin her family by gaming and extravagance; yet still present a shameless front – for truly she is an honourable woman!” (311-312). Quoting Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Wollstonecraft also pinpointed that man’s reputation was of a completely different nature, for it was precisely by challenging society’s opinion that a man could
be seen as truly “manly”—“A man . . . secure in his own good conduct, depends only on himself, and may brave the public opinion; but a woman, in behaving well, performs but half her duty” (302). Strategically juxtaposing to her own critique the authoritative voice of a male philosopher, Wollstonecraft denounced the fact that “[o]pinion is the grave of virtue among the men; but its throne among women” (303).

The act of recounting the life of a woman thinker like Fuller, who “often amazed people by a cold and unexpected dissent from the commonplaces of popular acceptation” (*MMFO* 1:96), was inevitably going to be entangled with notions of “opinion” and “virtue,” for it was in these terms that women were viewed and judged. It is therefore not surprising that sexuality—and more specifically, the question of Fuller’s marriage—played a decisive role in the way in which the three authors approached the task of writing *Memoirs*.

(Fig. 1) “Married perhaps in Oct, Nov, or Dec.” Margaret Fuller Ossoli, 1851. Ralph Waldo Emerson Journals and Notebooks, MS Am 1280H, (111), Volume: 96. Houghton Library.

The blurred circumstances of Fuller’s private life posed a major challenge to her biographers. As shown by a note in Emerson’s journal (which he kept while working on *Memoirs* [see figure 1]), the question of her marriage was on their minds from the onset of the project. While in Italy, Fuller had shared very little information about her private life with her friends and family in America. As Fuller explained in a letter to her sister Ellen, she was afraid she would be the target of judgement and criticism when back in her native country—“I expect that to many of my friends Mr
Emerson for one, [Ossoli] will be nothing, and they will not understand that I should have life in common with him" (FL 5:291). Consequently, in 1849, only a few of her friends knew about her relationship with Ossoli or about the fact that she had given birth to their child, Angelo Eugene Philip (“Nino”) in September 1848. The nature of Fuller’s union with Giovanni Angelo Ossoli remains a mystery today: although Ossoli is everywhere referred to as her “husband,” we are only partly confident that Giovanni and Margaret were in fact married. Two of Fuller’s most recent biographies, Megan Marshall’s *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* (2014) and John Matteson’s *The Lives of Margaret Fuller* (2012), both establish that, although probable, Fuller’s marriage cannot be determined with certainty nor pinned down to a specific moment in time. The wedding certificate was never found, and there is no real mention of a specific wedding date (nor is there any trace of it in Italian official registers). Just as Wollstonecraft anticipated when she wrote about “virtue” and “opinion,” the most problematic aspect of Fuller and Ossoli’s union in the 1850s was the question of whether they had married before the conception of their child. Today, we can only speculate, and critics have for now opted for a “no”; that is that Nino was conceived out of wedlock and that the couple married in April 1848 when Fuller was already pregnant. Recently discovered, the certificate of Nino’s baptism, which expressly refers to “the married Mr. Giovanni Angelo of Marquis Ossoli from Rome and Mrs. Margaret Fuller heterodox from America” (Matteson, *Lives* 357-358) is the most compelling existing piece of evidence that the marriage really happened. That said, as Chevigny writes, it all depends “on believing that Margaret and Giovanni and those around her never told an expedient lie. . . . my findings were more ambiguous, and I remain persuaded that the only truth we can establish is that this remarkable
woman would have had enormously complex feelings about the issue” (“Forty Years” 266).

For decades, Fuller’s private life outshone her work, which is “not exactly news in the history of women’s struggle to gain acceptance for their achievements” as noted by Susan Belasco Smith (“Transcending” 23). And although that is no longer the case today, it is nevertheless important that we reflect on how powerfully those life events impacted the way in which Fuller was perceived by mid-nineteenth century society. In Emerson’s Memory Loss, Hanlon identifies the marriage as one of the main causes of concern for the authors of Memoirs. The very title of Memoirs (i.e. the addition of “Ossoli” to Fuller’s maiden name) is a good initial indication of the stance Fuller’s biographers chose to adopt when confronted with the uncertainty of her marital status. It is however important to remark that although they chose to publicly assume she was married, they did not totally rename Fuller; in the letters she wrote from Italy, she had indeed asked her correspondents to address her as the “Marchesa Ossoli.” Writing to Costanza Arconati Visconti in October 1849, she justified her request and explained that although “it seems to me silly for a radical like me, to be carrying a title[,] . . . while Ossoli is in his native land, it seems disjoining myself from him not to bear it” (FL 5:270). Fuller equated nobility with the Old World and thought that when “O[ssoli] dropt the title, it would be a suitable moment in becoming an inhabitant of republican America” (FL 5:270). Just as Fuller’s reflection was political, the authors’ decision to include her married name should be viewed as a political move: the choice to portray Fuller according to society’s expectations and the decision to present her to posterity as a married woman were conscious ways of conforming (her) to gender norms. What’s more, their silencing of Fuller’s radicalism went way beyond settling the question of her
illegitimate progeniture. Just as the title of the posthumous biography reflects their editorial stance, the fact that Fuller’s magnus opus *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is given only one subsection throughout the entire biography is enough to suggest their elliptic, conformist approach. Fuller’s ground-breaking *Dial* article “The Great Lawsuit: Man Versus Men. Woman Versus Women” is never mentioned. It is as though the authors of *Memoirs* had tried to erase her radicalism from the geography of *Memoirs*; and although each of the biography’s chapter titles describes in one way or another her movements through New England and Europe, they never really integrated in their map the various stages of her feminist journey. As Carol Strauss-Sotiropoulos remarks, the “(male) Transcendentalist friends who compiled Fuller’s *Memoirs* . . . elided her revolutionary engagement and ideology to create a narrative of womanly yearning for love and domesticity” (“Speaking Truth” 47). In fact, the authors of *Memoirs* struggled to combine their admiration for Fuller with the threat she posed to nineteenth-century masculinity. Although they were exceptional trailblazers in philosophical, religious, and social matters, one should try and avoid falling into what John Matteson has described as the “lazy but seductive habit of supposing that the heroes of American Transcendentalism were simply a crowd of twenty-first century liberals” (33). As readers, we wish Emerson had added something to *Memoirs*, that he would have mentioned Fuller’s strength and her powerful rejection of gender constrictions. However, when asked if he could add any additional material, Emerson replied to Channing “I hate to hear of swelling the book, and I think not [Giuseppe] Mazzini himself, not [Christopher Pearse] Cranch, not Browning hardly, would induce me to add a line of Appendix. Amputate, amputate. And why a preface? If eight pages are there, let them be gloriously blank: No, no preface. . . . I do not mean to write a needless syllable” (*EL* 4:294). Emerson’s
refusal to write a preface or appendix is not surprising for an editor trying to manage the length of his work, but the exasperated tone of his remarks (“Amputate, amputate”), the mention of eight “blank” pages, and of “needless syllable[s]” suggest a degree of frustration that contrasts with his habitually “cool” temperament.

It is hard to know whether the conformism with which Emerson and his co-authors wrote Fuller’s biography was the product of a strategy to protect her or whether they themselves were unable to accept Fuller’s radicalism to the point that they couldn’t even write about it. In her foundational work Feminist Conversations, Zwarg pinpoints how in Emerson’s “first journal, his surprise and horror over [Fuller’s] death is compounded by his surprise and horror over the way some people were using the occasion to give vent to the anxieties they harboured against her exceptional life” (240). Here is the passage as it appears in his AZ Journal—

The timorous said, What shall we do? how shall she be received. now that she brings a husband & a child home? But she had only to open her mouth, & a triumphant success awaited her. She would fast enough have disposed of the circumstances & the bystanders. For she had the impulse, & they wanted it. Here were already mothers waiting tediously for her coming, for the education of their daughters. Mrs Ripley thinks that the marriage with Ossoli was like that of De Stael in her widowhood with the young De Rocca, who was enamoured of her. and Mrs Barlow has un unshaken trust that what Margaret did, she could well defend. (EJ 11:256)

As Zwarg points out, the endless insults targeting Fuller in the years following her death show the magnitude of gender-based anxieties that were brought to life by the popularity of her life and work. However, I would juxtapose Emerson’s comment in
his journal to a curiously equivalent statement he made in a letter to Thomas Carlyle, written on 5 August 1850—

You will have heard our sad news of Margaret Fuller Marchesa Ossoli. . . . I doubt you never saw in her what was inestimable here. But she died in happy hour for herself. Her health was much exhausted. Her marriage would have taken her away from us all, & there was a subsistence yet to be secured, & diminished powers, & old age. (*EL* 4:224)

Was Emerson one of those “timorous” individuals he spoke about in his journal? This letter to Carlyle certainly denotes a tension, an inner conflict, about Emerson’s mind in the months following Fuller’s death that is hard to resolve. Was it to adapt to his audience that Emerson behaved like the “timorous” he mentioned, calling Fuller’s death fortuitous? Or did he himself believe these things? After all, Emerson knew how Carlyle felt about Fuller; he had noted that same year that “Carlyle . . . does not wish to see any body whom he cannot eat & reproduce in his pamphlet or pillory. [Alcott] was meat that he could not eat, & [Margaret Fuller], likewise, so he rejected them at once” (*EJ* 11:264). The words Emerson used in his letter (his concerns about Fuller’s “exhausted health,” her finances “yet to be secured” and her “old age”) similarly recall another passage in his journal:

Mrs Barlow has the superiority to say [of Margaret] that the death seems to her a fit & good conclusion to the life. Her life was romantic and exceptional: So let her death be; it sets the seal on her marriage avoids all questions of Society, all of employment, poverty, & old age, and besides was undoubtedly predetermined when the world was created. (*EJ* 11:259)

The numerous parallels between the way in which Emerson spoke of Fuller’s death in his letters and in his journal are interesting and yet hard to decode: what did he
really think, and how much of what he wrote was adapted to his audience? The way in which Emerson reused Mrs. Barlow’s argument that Fuller’s death was after all a “good conclusion to the life” (EJ 11:259) possibly signifies that he was adapting to his readers, thus corroborating Zwarg’s contention about his hidden frustration and his desire to protect his late friend. However, his call to “amputate, amputate” takes us in the opposite direction, suggesting that the decision to exclude parts of Fuller’s life was more than a simple editorial necessity. Rather than making space for them, parts of her life were willingly left out.

Interestingly, the way in which Emerson wrote about Fuller’s death, both publicly and privately, differs in several respects from the comments he made after the loss of another one of his closest friends—Henry David Thoreau. In 1863, a year after Thoreau’s death, his Excursions were published, and the posthumous collection of essays on nature was preceded by a “Biographical Sketch” written by Emerson. In his historical introduction to the text, Joel Myerson’s approach to the “Sketch” is very similar to my own reading of Memoirs: “The ‘terrible Thoreau’ Emerson presented,” Myerson wrote, “was a humorless stoic, and his essay more often than not reveals, what it stresses and by what it omits from Thoreau's life and personality, more about its author than its subject” (17). In his thirty-page long tribute, Emerson describes young Thoreau as a “strong, healthy youth, fresh from college” who, in his approach to literature and to academia, was quite an “iconoclast” (Myerson, “Thoreau” 35). Although Thoreau “graduated from Harvard College in 1837,” Emerson mentions that he did so “without any literary distinction” (35) and explains how, rejecting traditional social institutions (“he never married, he lived alone, he never went to church; he never voted”), Thoreau chose instead to be “the bachelor of thought and Nature” (Myerson, “Thoreau” 37). While establishing, on the one hand, Thoreau’s belonging
to the New England intellectual elite, Emerson’s sketch also simultaneously praised
the autonomy and confidence with which he rejected a certain number of social
conventions. About Thoreau’s death, Emerson wrote,

The country knows not yet, or in the least part, how great a son it has lost. It
seems an injury that he should leave in the midst of this broken task, which
none else can finish, -- a kind of indignity to so noble a soul, that it should
depart out of Nature before yet he has been really shown to his peers for what
he is. . . . His soul was made for the noblest society; he had in a short life
exhausted the capabilities of this world; wherever there is knowledge, wherever
there is virtue, wherever there is beauty, he will find a home. (Myerson,
“Thoreau” 54-55)

The tone of this eulogy is not in complete contrast with Emerson’s mourning remarks
after Fuller died—in his journal, he wrote “To the last her country poses 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” (EJ 11:256). And yet Emerson never mentioned
Fuller’s “broken task”—i.e. the great things she could have achieved for the women
of her country if her life had not been cut so short. More generally, Emerson’s
forgiving, benevolent tone throughout the “Sketch” is strikingly different to his
account of Fuller’s life in Memoirs. Fuller is never really praised for her “dissent from
the commonplaces of popular acceptation” (MMFO 1:96): although Emerson shows
a great awareness as to the dangers of defying social expectations, he does not
praise her courage for challenging those norms, “She had a dangerous reputation for
satire, in addition to her great scholarship. The men thought she carried too many
guns, and the women did not like one who despised them” (MMFO 1:202). On the
contrary, Thoreau's nonconformity with regards to the traditional paths that young, white, male Americans were expected to take is depicted as an act of strength and intelligence—“No college ever offered him a diploma, or a professor's chair; no academy made him its corresponding secretary, its discoverer, or even its member. Whether these learned bodies feared the satire of his presence” (Myerson, “Thoreau” 47). The word choice and tone of Emerson’s commentary on his two friends reflect the gender limitations of the society in which Fuller and Thoreau evolved. About Thoreau, he celebrated the fact that “[h]ad his genius been only contemplative, he had been fitted to his life, but with his energy and practical ability he seemed born for great enterprise and for command” (Myerson, “Thoreau” 53). In Memoirs, he deplored that Fuller “had, indeed, a rude strength, which, if it could have been supported by an equal health, would have given her the efficiency of the strongest men” (1:231). While Thoreau went to college, despite then taking a different route than the one traditionally expected from him (“he favored stoic simplicity rather than pursuing earthly pleasures”), Fuller was never given such option purely because of her sex. Thanks to her father’s strict education, Fuller was able to rise above some of the limiting confines of the passivity and submissiveness expected by most from women. Being cut out from college education also informed her philosophy, in that she put education at the heart of her feminist call for women’s rights.

Reputation, that is the “overall quality or character as seen or judged by people in general” (Webster), is not univocal and can encompass elements that are at times totally contradictory: in the year Fuller died, she was a very famous and yet also a widely criticised literary figure. Member of the Transcendental Club, journalist, translator, her popularity explains why her biography was such a
success when it was published in 1852. While some were eager to know more about her life, Woman in the Nineteenth Century and “The Great Lawsuit” had attracted a range of negative criticism. The ones opposed to women’s rights thought it was scandalous, others like Orestes Brownson “believe[d] Miss Fuller wholly in the wrong” (257) on the basis of religion, and others—amongst whom were some of Fuller’s acquaintances—criticised her for behaving too much like a bourgeoise (see, for instance, Harriet Martineau’s comments). Defined as “ultra-radical” in some newspapers, the visionary and courageous nature of Fuller’s writings on women is often the reason why she is studied today. And yet her radicalism was definitely one of the most problematic aspects of her life in the eyes of her contemporaries—a topic that the biographers of Memoirs all found troublesome to tackle.

If Fuller’s radicalism was a challenge to her biographers, it is still something of a problem today. In 2022, Fuller is sometimes depicted as a twenty-first-century woman whom, despite her avant-gardism, she simply wasn’t. Reiterating “Chevigny’s 1976 demand that ‘we reverse the usual practice of seeing Margaret Fuller as a fascinating exception to the condition of American women of her time’” (159), Mary Loeffelholz notes that the “anxiety of exceptionalism still lingers around the figure of Margaret Fuller in feminist literary scholarship, coupled with a deep anxiety over critical anachronism and identification” (160). She explains that the “problem with Margaret Fuller in the writing of feminist literary history is both that we fear she is too unlike other (middle-class, white, New England) literary women of her period and that she is too like ‘us,’ if us means late-twentieth-century feminist literary intellectuals, mostly similar to Fuller in respect to race and class, who probably can’t help sharing Fuller’s will to believe that intellectual labor coincides with personal self-realization” (160). If Loeffelholz wrote this in 2000, the fact that Matteson made a
similar call in 2013 (in Margaret Fuller and Her Circles) suggests that a tendency to assimilation is still a reality. In “Fuller and the Problem of Feminine Virtue,” Matteson qualifies Fuller’s liberality by showing that although she was a radical with regards to women’s rights, there were still what we would now term conservative elements in her. Another warning must be added about race: as pointed out by Phyllis Cole in a lecture on “Margaret Fuller and the American Women’s Movement” in September 2020, “on the ideological level, Fuller was surely anti-slavery (she condemned the Mexican war and the institution of slavery), but she wasn’t as much an advocate for African-American slaves as she was for women.” Avallone also points out that while Romanticism contributed much to Woman in the Nineteenth Century, it also involved Fuller in some of its problematics. Romantic idealizing left her prey to racialism, as in her equating “Women of her country […] – Exaltadas” exclusively with “Women of English […] nobleness” (1845, 152), in maintaining that the French are liars, and in including an appendix that celebrates as religious virtue a Christian woman’s murderous refusal to marry a Moslem. If Fuller was able to tap the emancipatory power of Romantic discourse of nationalism, her yoking of an idealized America with her (proto)feminist project also involves her book in the national imperial project of westward expansion, despite her protest against annexation. (348)

Avallone also adds that these “limitations notwithstanding, Woman in the Nineteenth Century has brought and continues to bring Romanticism to inspire diverse emancipatory projects, most notably the ongoing movement for women’s equality” (348). As societies think of ways to discuss the work of their authors, Christina Katopodis (Fuller Society Board member) explains,
These authors were not perfect. They had bodies that smelled, opinions that changed, some ideas worth keeping and others worth critically reevaluating and problematizing. If we’re willing to treat them as complex and changing, they can help us to reflect on our common struggles, fight for equality, and resistance to injustice today.

In “Margaret Fuller and Antislavery: A Cause Identical,” Albert Von Frank’s stresses the changing nature of Fuller’s political thinking: her move to Italy, her radicalization due to finding herself in the midst of the combat, changed her views of abolitionism too. “Conditions as she found them in Rome,” von Frank explains, “put her in touch not with the period of Brutus and Caesar, but with history as social struggle, as an effort by a disfranchised class to effect justice by improving the conditions of its own existence (“Identical” 145). Unfortunately, a lot of that thought got lost when Fuller died. But her Tribune articles testify to her changing political involvement not only with regards to the Italian Revolution but also with regards to American democracy.

There is little doubt, after taking all these dimensions into account, about the complexities that were involved in writing a life of Fuller in the 1850s. Her reputation, already fragile because she was a woman, was at stake and Emerson knew that as he began to work on the biography. Whether his censure stemmed from a desire to protect her or from a refusal to accept her passions and beliefs, Emerson’s account of Fuller does not do justice to the kind of intellectual we know she was. And yet, although generally considered “bowdlerized and unreliable” (Smith 23), Memoirs deserves to be examined more closely than it has until now, for the information it provides about Emerson as a thinker, about his relationship with Fuller and about his relationship with women’s rights, is important.
The first chapter of my thesis is entitled “Emerson and Fuller in Conversation: On Friendship, Womanhood, and Poetry.” An analysis of Fuller’s friendship with Emerson will not only provide the opportunity to reflect on the philosophical meaning they respectively attached to friendship, or the intellectual divergences that animated the two Transcendentalists’ discussions, but it will also allow us to consider how the notion of gender—its meaning, its realities, and its limits—affected their friendship and most importantly impacted how Emerson viewed and wrote about Fuller in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli. In the first chapter, I rely on the notion of “conversation” as the narrative thread of my analysis, as I interrogate Fuller’s and Emerson’s respective visions of womanhood by looking at Emerson’s depiction of Fuller in Memoirs and by comparing it with Fuller’s take on the subject.

The first section of this chapter, “Emerson on Fuller: Memoirs, Idealism, and Women’s Rights,” examines how the two thinkers thought and wrote about womanhood. The fact that gender should be a recurring topic of conversation between the two is evident—in fact, both alluded in their journals to those discussions—but did they agree on anything while discussing it? The following section, “‘Woman [and] Artist’: Margaret Fuller on Bettine Brentano-von Arnim and Friendship,” also provides an original outlook on Transcendentalist friendships by focusing on Fuller's lesser-known “Bettine Brentano and her Friend Günderode” Dial article (1842). Framing her translation of Karoline von Günderode and Brentano-von Arnim’s correspondence with a commentary on human relationships, Fuller idealises the famous friendship which she insists on characterizing as ideal precisely because it is all female. How can we compare Fuller’s understanding of friendship with Emerson’s famous (and more or less contemporaneous) homonymous essay? The third section of the chapter is entitled “Transcendentalists in Conversation: Margaret
Fuller, Sophia Ripley, and “Woman,” and it expands this examination of Transcendentalist views on womanhood by focusing on another underexplored Dial article, Sophia Ripley’s “Woman” (1841). After considering ideal womanhood in the first and second sections, I turn to Ripley’s call for “real” womanhood.
1.1 Emerson on Fuller: *Memoirs*, Idealism, and Women’s Rights

In a letter to William Furness written in January 1852, Emerson’s reply to the latter’s invitation to speak at an event was “I hate to come, but I will come, if you say I must” (Fruitlands). Emerson explained his strange retort stating that it was “[s]imply because of the foolish weakness one has, when that word liberty is named. Since it is everywhere resisted and blasphemed, there seems a sort of imperativeness to stand for it, however badly” (Fruitlands). At end of the same letter, he noted “I shall have to copy & reedify the poor statement I got up for my townsmen some time last spring [most likely referring to his “Fugitive Slave Law Address”] – and which, like all my sallies into politics, I hate to think of” (Fruitlands). Almost ten years after arguing in favor of private rather than public improvement in “New England Reformers,” Emerson was clearly still unable to fully reconcile himself with the idea of engaging with the world of politics. One year after California was admitted to the Union as a free state in 1850, and a new fugitive slave law was passed as part of that compromise, Emerson declared that “the last year has forced us all into politics, and made it a paramount duty to seek what it is often a duty to shun” (*Political* 135). I argue that another event that took place in 1850, namely Fuller’s death, forced Emerson into action. In fact, I believe that working on *Memoirs* put him into the (somewhat unwanted) position of having to formulate a public response on the question of women’s rights.

Emerson’s ambivalence towards public activism manifested itself both in his interventions on slavery and on the woman question. After his 1844 “Address on the Emancipation of the British West Indies,” in which he recognised for the first time the pragmatic good of organized action, Emerson wrote to Carlyle that “though I
sometimes accept a popular call, & preach on Temperance or the Abolition of slavery, as lately on the First of August, I am sure to feel before I have done with it, what an intrusion it is into another sphere & so much loss of virtue in my own” (qtd. in Gougeon, *Virtue’s Hero* 92). This reluctance also caused disappointment among his audience. Oliver Wendell Holmes noted in his biography that Emerson’s 1844 address “was appropriate but also lacking”: he described how “This discourse would not have satisfied the Abolitionists. It was too general in its propositions, full of humane and generous sentiments, but not looking to their extreme and immediate method of action” (181). Similarly, Caroline Healey Dall wrote directly to Emerson after his 1855 lecture on “Woman” noting that “some of the papers thought it doubtful whether you were for us or against us” (qtd. in Eckel, “Gender” 193). In *The Poetics of Transition*, Jonathan Levin explains that if “Emerson [was] so dismissive of organization, even organization in the name of what is ostensibly good” it is because his “pragmatic idealism aim[ed] to cultivate the sacred without limiting it to any of its particular representations” (18-19). However, Emerson did eventually come round and addressed social issues. Indeed, Levin calls him “a champion of social reform” (20), indicating that his “first major address on slavery came . . . as early as 1837, in a Concord address on ‘Slavery’” (20). “This talk,” Levin adds, “is largely unknown because it was never published and the manuscript has not survived, but the notes for the talk do appear in Emerson's journal” (20).

Whether we locate the beginning of Emerson’s abolitionism in 1837 or in 1844, it is a matter of fact that it took him much longer to publicly express his support for women’s rights than to speak up against slavery. In fact, whereas he reacted to the Fugitive Slave Law in a letter published in the *Liberator* on 18 April 1851, which was followed the next month by the address mentioned above, Emerson rejected an
invitation that same year to attend a convention for women’s rights in Worcester, Massachusetts. In fact, he excused himself by noting that he was working on a biography of Margaret Fuller: in the letter, which was printed in the *New-York Daily Tribune*, Emerson indicated that he “shall not have any opportunity to come to [the convention], for [he was] tied fast at home by a task” and added that he was “by no means sure that [he] should find any message worth bringing” (7). He concluded that he hoped his absence would be forgiven in light of the fact that this “task” was “the inditing the ‘Life of Margaret Fuller.’” The letter was “introduced by the statement that in the preceding year Emerson [had] signed the call for the convention” (*EL* 4:261). It was not until 1855 that Emerson gave his first public address on “Woman”; I view *Memoirs* as his actual first public response on the matter, a response which I think reflects the differences, and acts as the site of confrontation between, Emerson’s idealistic vision of womanhood and Fuller’s feminism.

In *Feminist Conversations*, Zwarg aims to uncover the mutual influence the two thinkers had on each other with regards to their understanding of womanhood, as she asserts that Emerson’s “conversations with Fuller are the clue to understanding the various attributes of that engagement” (4). Focusing on *Memoirs*, Zwarg argues that “Fuller’s oddly represented life” was “the product of Emerson’s hostility toward – and embarrassment over – the frigid account he feels compelled to provide” (240). For Zwarg, the way in which Emerson memorialised Fuller by minimizing her radical ideas and behaviours was all part of a strategy by which he “consistently attempts. . . to put discord between Fuller and himself” because his “audience was curious, indeed, too curious, about the nature of their ‘intercourse, as such’” (*Feminist* 247). Although I agree that Emerson’s strategy to defuse the radical nature of Fuller’s life was intended to protect her posthumous reputation, I argue that
Emerson’s idealism in his portrayal of Fuller reveals the limits of his support for women’s rights. In the letter to Furness quoted above, Emerson describes how he “just escaped from a task that has absorbed near six months, a labor of love but of very questionable judgment, –Margaret Fuller Memoirs, – a great deal of labor bestowed to very small effect, I fear” (Fruitlands). Based on this quotation, I view Emerson’s strategy to “idealise” Fuller in Memoirs, and women more generally, as a sign of his “failure” to fully support women’s rights. In fact, I believe that his hesitation and anxiety over Transcendentalism and political involvement crystallize in his portrait of Fuller in Memoirs, showing that his engagement with the movement was tentative, gradualist, and often unsupportive.

I – Transcendentalism, Idealism, and Women’s Rights

A) Of Private and Public Conversations: Of Consciousness and Appearances

In “The Transcendentalist”, a lecture from January 1842, Emerson explained that “[w]hat is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism” (CW 1:201). He then noted that if “the materialist takes his departure from the external world, and esteems a man as one product of that. The idealist takes his departure from his consciousness, and reckons the world an appearance” (CW 1:203). Instead of turning to the material world for answers, Transcendentalists looked inwards and focused on “individual consciousness”: as Emerson argued in “The American Scholar” in 1837, “[t]he deeper [the scholar] dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true” (CW 1:63). Not only did they achieve a revolution of the spirit, asserting that there is “a spiritual divinity within each of that is separate and different
from the formalized religion of the Church” (Cramer 55), but Transcendentalists also provided an original outlook on social progress by locating its source within the Self.

Between 1836 (when they first met at Emerson’s home in Concord, Massachusetts) and 1846 (the year Fuller sailed to Europe where she would spend the last four years of her life), Fuller and Emerson often exchanged views on social reform as they interrogated the meaning of concepts like “woman” and “marriage.” An entry in Fuller’s 1842 journal reveals the frequency of those discussions—“We got to talking, as we almost always do, on Man and Woman, and Marriage” (WNC 184). Both in favor of women’s rights, Fuller and Emerson were convinced, as Emerson wrote in his journal in 1851, “that, as long as [women] have not equal rights of property & right of voting, they are not on a right footing.” He explained,

this wrong grew out of the savage & military period, when, because a woman could not defend herself, it was necessary that she should be assigned to some man who was paid for guarding her. Now in more tranquil & decorous times it is plain she should have her property, & when she marries, the parties should as regards property, go into a partnership full or limited, but explicit & recorded.

(Political 155)

Emerson’s defence of a woman’s right to property, which he saw as a symbol of her independence, was based on the fact that times had changed and that it was retrograde to subjugate her to man. Beyond the pragmatic (and yet fundamental) aspects of a woman’s life, Fuller’s notes show that she and Emerson also debated the philosophical nature of “marriage,” as she recounts in an 1842 journal entry—

W. took his usual ground. Love is only phenomenal, a contrivance of nature, in her circular motion. . . . The soul knows nothing of marriage, in the sense of a permanent union between two personal existences. The soul is married to each
new thought as it enters into it. If this thought puts on the form of man or woman [,] if it last you seventy years, what then? There is but one love, that for the Soul of all Souls, let it put on what cunning disguises it will, still at last you find yourself lonely, -- the Soul. (WNC 184)

Although journals and letters are the only existing records relating those discussions, there are correlations between these conversations and Fuller’s and Emerson’s respective public statements on the matter. In 1844, Fuller wrote in her journal that

the distinction of sex lies not in opposition but in distribution and proportion of attributes. Whether this dualism will always continue I know not but at present we cannot conceive of active happiness without it. To find oneself in another nature, likeness and unlikeness. Sun acting on the earth are conjugal, - sun and moon fraternal. (MHarF 37)

Just a year later, she stated in Woman in the Nineteenth Century that “[t]here is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman” (WNC 69). In Marshall’s biography, she remarks that

Perhaps Margaret herself was not aware of how bold her statement was. Had she been present at the first meeting of the Transcendental Club three years before, when Waldo Emerson complained to the six males present that even the best thinkers of the day were hobbled by a ‘feminine or receptive’ frame of mind rather than a ‘masculine or creative’ one, what might she have said? But of course she had not been invited. (139)

If we look at Emerson’s public statements on women’s rights—in “Manners” from Essays: Second Series, in his 1855 address “Woman” or in his 1869 lecture—it is clear that he agreed with Fuller that “woman” and “man” were not discrete
categories as opposed to what the proponents of the concept of “separate spheres” wanted people to believe in nineteenth-century America. In 1869, Emerson asserted, “We look upon the man as the representative of intellect and the woman as the representative of affection; but each shares the characteristics of the other, only in the man one predominates and in the woman the other” (Gougeon, “Woman” 588)⁴. There is a definite resemblance here between Fuller’s and Emerson’s words: by focusing on the soul, they moved beyond the gendered roles of “wife” and “husband” as they looked, instead, at “man” and “woman” as fluid concepts which share a set of common characteristics, although in different proportions.

In a letter to Fuller written in July 1839, Emerson noted that women “always add religion to talent, and so give our hope an infinite play until society gets possession of them and carries them captive to Babylon. If they would only hold themselves at their own price, if they would not subdue their sentiments, the age of heroes would come at once!” (EL 2:210-211). Focusing on internal change (he asked women to “hold themselves at their own price”), Emerson wished that that would engender social change for women (“if they would not subdue their sentiments, the age of heroes would come at once”). Emerson’s quote is a good illustration of what David M. Robinson has written on the matter, that “Idealism was not, for the transcendentalists, a philosophy of detachment or escapism” (“New York” 279). Transcendentalists indeed “connected idealism with the concept of hope and felt that the capacity to recognise the injustice of present social arrangements signified that the present was not fixed or permanent” (Robinson, “New York” 279).

⁴ I rely on Len Gougeon’s transcription. The lecture was originally printed in Bow Bells magazine, “Woman.” Bow Bells: A Magazine of General Literature and Art for Family Reading, vol. 11, no. 265, 1869, p. 118. Also, see Chapter Three for a more in-depth discussion of Emerson’s public support of the women’s rights movement.
B) From the Personal to the Collective

Urging “woman [to] think of herself as soul still more than as woman” (MHarF 37-38), Fuller thought of gender as a pivotal element of the transformation of the self. She addressed the struggles of being a woman in the 1840s during her Boston Conversations, during which she recounted how “she constantly heard people talk as if men were only animals & women were only plants- That men were made to get a living-to eat & drink – and women to be ornaments of society-as if these were the ultimate aims of being” (Simmons 217). At a later time, Fuller similarly ridiculed these kinds of views asking “And yet where lies this difference betwixt male and female? I cannot trace it more than in the plant world farther than function” (WNC 202). She used her own example to show that “How all but infinite the mystery by which sex is stamped in this germ? . . . here am I the child of masculine energy & Eugene [her brother] of feminine loveliness” (WNC 202).

Many of the Conversations were centred on Greek mythology, a choice that Fuller explained during the second conversation held in November 1839: “It is quite separated from all exciting local subjects- It is serious without being solemn, without excluding every mode of intellectual action it is playful as well as deep. It is general subject for it is a complete expression of the cultivation of a nation- It objective & tangible” (Simmons 204). In her notes of the March 1841 series which also included a male audience, Dall recorded that “To understand this Mythology, we must denationalize ourselves” (Margaret 28). Relying on ideas to defamiliarize her readers from typical gender normative frameworks was a technique that Fuller would adopt throughout her career: in one of her most famous Dial essays entitled “Leila” (1841), she described a very dematerialized Leila, who was “a spirit under a mask, which she might throw off at any instant . . . [f]or she ever transcends sex, age, state and
all the barriers behind which man entrenches himself from the assaults of Spirit” (WNC 169).

In her exploration of woman’s powers, Fuller relied on the world of ideas to think about woman unimpeded by form. As Steele suggests, “Representing idealized images of female power, such figures allowed her to remap her society’s vision of female potential” (“Political Sympathy” 125). She meant to counter the common assertion that woman was less than man; for Fuller, not only was woman equal to man, but women and men actually shared a set of common characteristics (“Man partakes of the feminine in the Apollo, woman of the Masculine as Minerva” [“Lawsuit” 419]). As she would write in Woman, “Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism” (68). Fuller admired the Greeks because, at least at a theoretic level, they considered the feminine and the masculine as equals: she reflected in Woman

We are told of the Greek nations in general, that woman occupied there an infinitely lower place than man. It is difficult to believe this when we see . . . such ideals as Cassandra, Iphigenia, Macaria, where Sybilline priestesses told the oracle of the highest god, and he could not be content to reign with a court of fewer than nine muses. Even victory wore a female form. (WNC 31)

She continued coincidingly “But whatever were the facts of daily life, I cannot complain of the age and nation . . . Male and female heads are distinct in expression, but equal in beauty, strength and calmness” (WNC 31).

As is apparent from the transcripts of some of the Conversations (Simmons; Dall), Fuller employed embodied ideals and in particular ancient Greek gods and goddesses in order to inspire women to rethink the oppressive norms that characterised antebellum America. Neptune, Diana, Apollo, “[a]ll were the
embodiments of Absolute Ideas, of ideas that had no origin, -that were eternal” (Dall, *Margaret* 27). Using Minerva as a symbol for woman’s strength, Fuller relied on idealism to advance her feminist ambition. Steele notes the connection between Fuller’s feminist use of idealism and self-reliance: “Fuller’s image of Minerva represented female spiritual independence as the foundation of self-reliance. In a sense, she claimed for herself and her American sisters an independence of spirit . . . as profound as that asserted by Emerson” (“Political Sympathy” 128). Centring her discussions on Greek goddesses had important practical implications for it indeed allowed Fuller to liberate her students from the constraining limitations that society imposed on woman’s quotidian existence: by claiming “for herself and her American sisters an independence of spirit,” she allowed them to be “women thinking.”

Fuller also aligned herself with Emerson in the way she modelled her Conversations—Russell Goodman notes that by “requir[ing] that her students not simply listen to her, but that each woman be ‘willing to communicate what was in her mind’. . . she was in accord with Emerson’s idea that everyone has something original to say and do, and with his conception of the scholar as an ‘active soul’” (165-166). However, Fuller’s method also contrasted Emerson’s. During the only series of the Boston Conversations that was also opened to men, held in March 1841, Elizabeth Peabody observed that

Mr. E. only served to display her powers. With his sturdy reiteration of his uncompromising idealism, his absolute denial of the fact of human nature, he gave her opportunity and excitement to unfold and illustrate her realism and acceptance of conditions. …. She proceeds in her search after the unity of things, the divine harmony, not by exclusion, as Mr. E. does, but by
comprehension, - , and so, no poorest, saddest spirit, but she will lead to hope and faith. (Chevigny 228)

In her record of the 1841 Conversation series, Dall similarly reported how Peabody “got into a little maze trying to introduce Margaret and R.W.E. to each other, – a consummation which, however devoutly to be wished, will never happen!” (Margaret 118-119). The incompatibility of their two characters is inexorably doomed to last, Dall remarked. The two friends, Dall’s quote suggests, were simply too different to be compatible. At the conclusion of the Conversations, in a letter from July 1844, Fuller explained such difference to Emerson himself, to whom she wrote “You are intellect, I am life” (FL 3:209). This strong statement that opposes a somewhat purely theoretical, abstract and/or idealistic view to a more embodied one might be explained by another similar remark Fuller made this time in her private journals two days earlier (July 11th): “He read me his essay on Life. How beautiful, and full and grand. But oh, how cold. Nothing but Truth in the Universe, no love and no various realities” (WNC 197). Two years earlier, Fuller similarly noted with a disappointed, somewhat melancholic tone, “we had an excellent talk: We agreed that my god was love, his truth. W. said that these statements alternate of course, in every mind, the only difference was in which you were most at home, that he liked the pure mathematics of the thing” (WNC 182). Of course, as critics have described, it is this discrepancy that caused Fuller and Emerson’s friendship crisis in 1840–1841: Fuller’s letters to Emerson from that period show her intense desire to be emotionally closer to him, but they also relate her frustration at his inability to understand her requests. Hanlon, in “Knowing by Heart,” describes how “Emerson’s friendship with Fuller represented an intersection of experiential planes definable not simply in terms of intellectual exchange or ‘influence’ but also of affective disjunction” (53). Fuller
eventually resigned herself to the fact that between her and Emerson there “was an interchange of facts but no conversation, yet it was pleasant to be with him again” (WNC 181), “my expectations are moderate now: it is his beautiful presence I prize, far more than our intercourse” (WNC 182).

For Fuller, idealism was not a rejection of life just as Transcendentalism was not a rejection of the collective. Acknowledging what Steele has since called Emerson’s “platonized poetics,” Fuller wrote about her friend in a journal entry in August 1844, “He is hard to know, the subtle Greek!” (WNC 201).

II – “He is Hard to Know, the Subtle Greek!”

A) Emerson’s Idealism and “Woman”

I argue that Emerson’s views on women’s rights were characterised by an opposition between the ideal and the material world. First, that tension manifested itself in Emerson’s writing as a resistance towards organized action. Although like other major Transcendentalists he supported the idea that women should be able to vote and to own property, Emerson was initially disapproving of the movement. In a journal entry in 1851, written while he was working on Memoirs, he remarked “I do not think a woman’s convention, called in the spirit of this at Worcester, can much avail. It is an attempt to manufacture public opinion, & of course repels all persons who love the simple & direct method. I find the Evils real & great” (Political 155).

According to Goodman, Emerson stepped out of his comfort zone when writing his “polemical addresses,” and his style changed as a consequence of that: Goodman indeed remarks that these “do not have the shape or living thought of the Emersonian essay, and they were more effective for this absence. Although they are congruent with Emerson’s philosophy at certain points—on freedom, self-reliance,
and morality, they are quite different from the rest of Emerson’s writing” (198). The tension between ideal and material also appears in Emerson’s reflections on womanhood. In the same journal entry quoted above from 1851, Emerson remarked how

as soon as you have a sound & beautiful woman, a figure in the style of the Antique Juno, Diana, Pallas, Venus, & the Graces, all falls into place, the men are magnetized, heaven opens, & no lawyer need be called in to prepare a clause, for woman moulds the lawgiver. I should therefore advise that the Woman’s Convention should be holden in the Sculpture Gallery, that this high remedy might be suggested. (Political 155)

Here, the strong emphasis on aesthetics (“beautiful”, “Venus, & the Graces,” “magnetised”) juxtaposes the perfect proportions of sculpture to the imperfect appearance of the real world. Emerson elevates goddesses and the artists able to pay tribute to them through art, but he also reduces “womanhood” to how women appear in the eyes of “the men.” The suggestion, however ironic or unrealistic, of holding a “Woman’s Convention” in a “Sculpture Gallery” signals the degree to which Emerson misunderstood the spirit of the women’s rights movement as it first started in the 1850s. On the one hand, Emerson admired the “ideal” woman’s religious and moral power: as he declared in his lecture from 1869, “We know woman as affectionate, as religious, as oracular, as delighting . . . .In all ages woman has been the representative of religion” (qtd. in Gougeon 588). Here, the “power” of woman is seen as a power “over” man: in 1869, Emerson similarly wrote that “She holds a man to religion. There is no man reprobate, so careless of religious duty, but what delights to have his wife a saint. All men feel the advantages that abound of that quality a woman” (qtd. in Gougeon 588). During the only series of the Boston
Conversations that also involved a male audience, one of Fuller’s remarks (reported by Dall in *Margaret and Her Friends*) reads as an ironic reply to the tendency to emphasise beauty and softness in woman, even within Transcendentalist circles: “Margaret said the Olympian Deities were like modern men, who talk to women forever about their softness and delicacy, until women imagine that the only good thing in man is a strong arm” (101).

At the same time, however, Emerson held very different opinions on “real” women. Quoting Plato, he stated: “‘Women,’ Plato says, ‘are the same as men in faculty, only less.’ I find them all victims of their temperament” (*Political* 155). This shows how Emerson’s belief in a certain fluidity between men and women did not stop him from utilising negative gendered stereotypes about women to differentiate between the two sexes. Described through the “colored atmosphere they emit,” his descriptions of women show them as dematerialized, and the passivity of their status ironically places them far from any sense of political agency.

Emerson’s remarks on woman in his lecture “Manners” from *Essays: Second Series* (1844) show that he did not see how this type of idealisation could harm women, but rather he saw it as an argument in support of women’s rights,

---

5 In *Woman*, Fuller also commented on Plato’s misogyny: “Plato, the man of intellect, treats woman in the Republic as property” (60).
Certainly let her be as much better placed in the laws and in social forms as the most zealous reformer can ask, but I confide so entirely in her inspiring and musical nature, that I believe only [woman] herself can show us how she shall be served. The wonderful generosity of her sentiments raises her at times into heroical and godlike regions, and verifies the pictures of Minerva, Juno, or Polymnia; and by the firmness with which she treads her upward path, she convinces the coarsest calculators that another road exists than that which their feet know. (145-146)

Here as well, Emerson’s support for women’s rights rests on a contradictory approach to women by which he, on the one hand, defends their autonomy in claiming new rights (“I believe only [woman] herself can show us how she shall be served”) and, on the other hand, he proposes again a view of woman as sentimental, in spite of herself (“her inspiring and musical nature,” “wonderful generosity of her sentiments raises her at times into heroical and godlike regions”) which celebrates the same qualities used to discriminate against women.

**B) “O queen of the American Parnassus”: Emerson on Fuller in Memoirs**

Although he was often critical of her personality, Emerson’s chapters in *Memoirs* are filled with complimentary remarks about Fuller’s talents. The manner in which he does so deserves to be analysed, for the vision of womanhood that transpires from it says a lot about his thoughts on the subject in 1852. Loyal to the word’s etymology, Emerson calls Fuller not woman but uses the word “queen” instead,

Her arrival was a holiday, and so was her abode. She stayed a few days, often a week, more seldom a month, and all tasks that could be suspended were put aside to catch the favorable hour, in walking, riding or boating, to talk with this
joyful guest, who brought wit, anecdotes, love-stories, tragedies oracles with her, and, with her broad web of relations to so many fine friends, seemed like the queen of some parliament of love. (MMFO 1:213)

Here the term “queen” is used to suggest a certain moral elevation. In particular, the phrase “her arrival was a holiday” implies that there was a somewhat saintly element in Fuller’s presence. In a letter written in 1840, Emerson similarly described Fuller’s elevating nature by insisting on the contrast between frivolity and morality: “I thought you a great court lady with a Louis Quatorze taste for diamonds & splendor, and I find you with a ‘Bible in your hand,’ faithful to the new Ideas, beholding undaunted their tendency” (EL 2:337). Fuller’s reply to that letter shows that she did not completely agree with her friend’s depiction: “To L. [Lidian Emerson] my love. In her, I have always recognized the saintly element. That, better than a bible in my hand, shows that it cannot be to me wholly alien. Yet am I no saint, no anything, but a great soul born to know all, before it can return to the creative fount” (FL 2:160). Fuller rejected Emerson’s praise by insisting that “I am no saint, no anything”: she showed that she not believe in such disembodied characterisations, mentioning instead her thirst for knowledge and describing herself as “a great soul born to know all.”

In Memoirs, Emerson emphasised Fuller’s “love of truth”: “Margaret crowned all her talents and virtues with a love of truth, and the power to speak it. In great and small matters, she was a woman of her word, and gave those who conversed with her the unspeakable comfort that flows from plain dealing” (MMFO 1:303). In connection with that “love of truth,” however, Emerson referred again to the theme of elevation: his sentences are filled with hints of moral and physical ascent, as in “It requires a clear sight, and, still more, a high spirit, to deal with falsehood in the decisive way” (MMFO 1:305). In a letter to Fuller, written in 1840, he called her “queen of the
American Parnassus” (EL 2:316). Interestingly, Emerson also used the noun “queen” to describe Anna Barker, Samuel Gray Ward’s wife, as “a vision of grace & beauty – a natural queen.” The remark about Barker suggests that Emerson understood the noun “queen” as a connection between physical beauty and morality. The theme of “elevation” also pervaded his later writings, such as this journal entry from March 1843 in which he declared his great admiration for Fuller, “A pure & purifying mind, selfpurifying also, full of faith in men & inspiring it” (WNC 190), and described how “[s]he rose before me at times into heroical & godlike regions, and I could remember no superior women, but thought of Ceres, Minerva, Proserpine, and the august ideal forms of the Foreworld” (WNC 190). This is clearly the journal version of his later remarks on “Manners.” In the same entry, he wrote “Her experience contains, I know, golden moments, which if they could be fitly narrated, would stand equally beside any histories of magnanimity which the world contains” (WNC 191).

Less than ten years later, Emerson did narrate those “golden moments”—and yet, his assessment of that narrative was not really positive as shown by his letter to William Furness quoted in my introduction (in the letter, he described Memoirs as “a labor of love but of very questionable judgment,” “a great deal of labor bestowed to very small effect” [Fruitlands]). In his lecture “Being and Seeming”, read for the first time in January 1838, Emerson declared that “a work of art, of whatever kind, sets us in the same state of mind as the artist was when he made it” (EL 300). With Memoirs, we can as readers feel the author’s desire to protect Fuller’s reputation and the awkward work it resulted in. Besides the numerous similes of Fuller as queen, Memoirs is also pervaded with negative comments by Emerson about Fuller’s personality that focus on her “constitution”—a term which denotes the physical, the material as opposed to the abstract and remote dimension of a “queen.”
“Temperament,” Emerson notes “She had a strong constitution, and of course its reactions were strong; and this is the reason why in all her life she has so much to say of her fate.” (1:227) In a section entitled “Letters,” Emerson narrates how “I have looked over volumes of her letters to me and others. . . . They are tainted with a mysticism, which to me appears so much an affair of constitution, . . .. In our noble Margaret, her personal feeling colors all her judgment of persons, of books, of pictures, and even of the laws of the world” (MMFO 1:279). The term “constitution” seems in these quotes to have become the instrument of a pejorative, gendered framing of certain practices.

Elevating the eternal feminine in Margaret and distinguishing it from the real woman was eminently Platonic. However, it also shows that in 1852, as Eckel writes with regards to his 1855 address “Woman,” “Emerson seems more like a man tangled in his historical context than a thinker who transcends it” (“Gender” 193). Indeed, his celebration of woman as “queen” reads like a reaffirmation of the qualities that were typically associated with womanhood in the early nineteenth-century (particularly the association between external beauty and morality), without making any attempt to revolutionize it. Emerson and women’s rights is a subject on which critical attention is turning more and more often (in fact, such will be the title of one of the chapters in the forthcoming The Oxford Handbook to Ralph Waldo Emerson edited by Christopher Hanlon, due to be published in 2024), and this section has shown that Memoirs has an essential part to play in our understanding of such a topic. What emerges from our analysis is that the use of “idealism” as a framework to understand “womanhood” was part of both Fuller’s and Emerson’s Transcendentalisms. That said, while he seemed
to have remained entangled in it in his depiction of Margaret in *Memoirs*, Fuller utilized the world of ideas as means of fostering female empowerment.

Fuller’s approach was a subversive attack on patriarchal hegemony, yet it was also subtle and, for that reason, prone to misunderstanding: Harriet Martineau, for instance, did not appreciate Fuller’s combination of idealism and reformism and attacked Fuller for the way in which she tackled the issue of women’s rights. As Emerson recounts in *Memoirs*, Martineau was initially very fond of Fuller and it was she who insisted that he and Fuller should meet. The feeling was reciprocated; Fuller liked Martineau as soon as she met her. She held great memories of their exchanges, “In that hour, most unexpectedly to me, we passed the barrier that separates acquaintance from friendship, and I saw how greatly her heart is to be valued” (*MMFO* 1:152). However, Martineau’s opinion on Fuller changed over the years and in her *Autobiography* (1855), which she wrote twenty years before her death, she criticised Fuller’s “life in Boston” and defined it “little short of destructive,” for “In the most pedantic age of society in her own country, and in its most pedantic city, she who was just beginning to rise out of pedantic habits of thought and speech relapsed most grievously” (73). Martineau then compared her and Fuller,

> The difference between us was that while [Fuller] was living and moving in an ideal world, talking in private and discoursing in public about the most fanciful and shallow conceits which the transcendentalists of Boston took for philosophy, she looked down upon persons who acted instead of talking finely. . . . While Margaret Fuller and her adult pupils sat ‘gorgeously dressed,’ talking about Mars and Venus, Plato and Göthe, and fancying themselves the elect of the earth in intellect and refinement, the liberties of the republic were running out as fast as they could go. (*Autobiography* 71)
Martineau’s denunciation of Fuller’s strategy consisted in qualifying her idealism as inaction. She was also irritated by what she called Fuller’s snobbish attitude, both in terms of manners (sat “gorgeously dressed”) and in looking down on people who focused on action. Of course, that is a misunderstanding of Fuller’s thinking, for she was a firm believer in the fact that action should accompany intellect. In hindsight, Martineau’s comments seem completely unfair, and yet Marshall provides an honest explanation in her biography as to why Martineau should think so: “Bold as she was as a thinker and writer, Margaret never considered mounting the podium despite her extraordinary capacity for extemporaneous speech” (136). Marshall points out that while in “1839, only a few fervent abolitionist women dared to cross that barrier, stirring up outrage wherever they held forth, as much for speaking in public as for their reformist views, . . . Margaret still clung to the few vestiges of Boston prestige that remained to her, and she continued to emulate an Old World gentility” (136).

Gender not only animated Fuller’s and Emerson’s conversations, but it also played a decisive role in their understanding of friendship: in the next section of this chapter, I shall analyse Fuller’s take on friendship in her Dial article “Bettine Brentano and her Friend Günderode,” showing how gender was a primordial aspect of her reflection on friendship and comparing her vision with Emerson’s views on friendship in Memoirs.
Conversation was a fundamental aspect of Fuller’s career. Etymologically, the word comes from Latin “convertere” to turn around, which perfectly encapsulates the life of a thinker whose work acted as major precursor to America’s first-wave feminism. Described by Emerson as the best conversationalist in America in Memoirs, Fuller excelled at this oratory art which defined both her intimate relationships and her career. Her Boston Conversations allowed her to engage critically with topics such as “Greek mythology,” “Ethics,” and “Woman,” while remaining within the confines of what was considered acceptable for women (as opposed to the more “masculine” lecture). With participants paying a fee, these encounters also enabled Fuller to earn a living. As Capper explained, “each woman paid ten dollars for a ticket of admission to the two-hour, thirteen-week series,” which “was over three times what Alcott brought in . . . from his conversations, and about two-thirds of what Emerson then made from an equivalent number of lectures” (293). What's more, Fuller's writing was characterised by an innovative “conversational” method: in “Conversation as Rhetoric,” Judith Mattson Bean describes how Fuller’s “style serves the purpose of her feminist work” (29) by creating “involvement or engrossment, establish[ing] bonds of trust, initiat[ing] interaction with the reader, and emphasiz[ing] immediacy, fluidity, and interaction among multiple voices” (29). Mattson also pinpoints that the “duality of [Fuller’s] style, integrating formal rhetoric with conversation, provoked
criticism for both its informality and its formality” (29). Indeed, many of Fuller’s contemporaries thought that her written work was highly inferior to her conversation.6

Conversation is also a term that characterises the communities to which Fuller belonged and in which she revolved, for, as Avallone points out, “Fuller’s discussion of ‘woman’ entered a dialogue in progress” (337). One of the communities in which Fuller took great interest, perhaps more than any other Transcendentalist, was that of German Romantics. A major proponent of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe at a time when he was under regular attack in America, Fuller translated his Torquato Tasso (shortening the title to Tasso) sometime around 1833. Unlike her translation of Johann Peter von Eckermann’s Conversations with Goethe which appeared in 1839, Fuller’s Tasso was never published in her lifetime except for a few passages which were included in an 1842 Dial review of a book entitled “Conjectures and Researches concerning the Love, Madness, and Imprisonment of Torquato Tasso.” In the same issue of the Dial, Fuller also included a partial translation of Bettine Brentano-von Arnim’s second epistolary novel Die Günderode (1840),7 which related her relationship with the Karoline von Günderode.8 It is on that specific work that this section focuses, aiming to examine Fuller’s rendering of the “friendship” between these women intellectuals by analysing her article/translation “Bettine Brentano and Her Friend Günderode” (1842). In this section of Chapter One, I compare Fuller’s account of the Brentano-Günderode relationship with Emerson’s depiction of Fuller in Memoirs, focusing specifically on a section entitled “Woman, or Artist?”, in order to

---

6 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for instance, thought Fuller’s “writings [were] curiously inferior to the impressions her conversation gave you” (1:460).
7 Fuller translated the first third of its 600 pages. This was published in 1842 by Elizabeth Peabody. The last two-thirds were translated by Minna Wesselhoeft and published in 1861 (Sotiropoulos, “Truth” 36n3).
8 The friendship lasted from 1804 until Günderode’s suicide, in 1806.
show how Fuller’s gendered commentary allowed her to resolve the constraining nineteenth-century dichotomy that weighed on all women writers at the time. Fuller’s idealisation of the friendship between the two women, I argue, is a celebration of the transcending power of “life” (intended both as sexual and artistic “reproduction”) and the way in which she constructs the “interior of German life” around them is a crucial early expression of both her transcendentalism and her feminism.

Translation was in itself an act of feminist agency: Zwarg notes that “[i]t is telling that most of her published translations were from German, the one language she taught herself” (61). For Fuller, learning European languages by herself was an accomplishment that compensated for the fact that, until 36 years old, she had never been to Europe—about that, she wrote,

Italian, as well as German, I learned by myself, unassisted, except as to the pronunciation. I have never been brought into connection with minds trained to any severity in these kinds of elegant culture. I have used all the means within my reach, but my not going abroad is an insuperable defect in the technical part of my education. (MMFO 1:241)

In Feminist Conversations, Zwarg establishes a clear link between translation and gender, arguing that the dynamics at play in language are also reflective of human relationships: Fuller, she writes, “understand[ood] that gender itself depended on a collision of languages, which is another way of saying that a determinate part of our experience imitates the array of divisions issuing from translation” (60). In her article on “Goethe,” published in the Dial in July 1841, Fuller reflected on her choice to translate a few excerpts of Goethe’s Iphigenia (1779) noting that like “all pure productions of genius, this may be injured by the slightest change, and I dare not flatter myself that the English words give an idea of the heroic dignity expressed in
the cadence of the original" (25). Fuller’s caution as a translator is palpable, and her meta-commentary shows the real breadth of her commitment as a vector of German literature. Karen English calls Fuller a “cultural mediator” for her “interest in Latin, French, German, and Italian went beyond the scholarly acquisition of language or the academic study of literature; she wanted to act as . . . promoter, of various cultures to a circle of private friends and subsequently for her public readers” (145). In her review of Die Günderode, Fuller’s role of “cultural mediator” positions her at the intersection of gender, nationality, and age—I have followed as much as possible the idiom of the writer as well as her truly girlish punctuation. Commas and dashes are the only stops natural to girls; their sentences flow on in little minim ripples, unbroken as the brook in a green field unless by some slight waterfall or jet of Ohs and Ahs” (“Brentano” 8). In this passage, Fuller does not linger on the linguistic challenges of bringing a German text to an American audience; instead, she celebrates the “girlish” style of Brentano’s exchanges, which she views as the mark of their uniqueness, as well as the young age of its authors (“girls”), which in turn becomes responsible for charming stylistic features (“their sentences flow on in little minim ripples”).

After writing two articles on Goethe\(^9\) which both appeared in the Dial—“Menzel’s View of Goethe by Margaret Fuller” in January 1841 and “Goethe,” which Emerson deemed “on many accounts, her best paper” (\textit{MMFO} 1:244)—Fuller turned to Brentano-von Arnim, a figure very close to the German thinker. Author of Goethe’s \textit{Correspondence with a Child} (1835), which Fuller described as “genuine transcripts of private experience” (“Brentano” 3), Bettine was in fact an intimate friend of the

\(^9\) These two would be followed the next year by a brief commentary on a translation of “Goethe’s ‘Egmont’,” which appeared in the Dial in January 1842.
famous writer. As Fuller recounted, “Bettine, belonging to a large and wealthy family of extensive commercial connexions, and seeing at the house of grandmother Me. La Roche, most of the distinguished literati of the time, as well as those noble and princely persons who were proud to do honor to letters, if they did not professedly cultivate them, brings before us a much wider circle” (“Brentano” 4). Bettine was the sister of Romantic writer Clemens Brentano, the wife of Achim von Arnim, also famous for his poetry and novel writing, and the granddaughter of the pre-Romantic popular novelist, Sophie von La Roche. Bettine’s mother, Maximiliane, and Goethe had been friends—however, the friendship ended abruptly and 35 years later her daughter took her place. Brentano idolized Goethe (who was 57 when she first met him); she had frequently visited Goethe’s mother in Frankfurt and recorded tales of the poet’s childhood.

To Goethe’s Correspondence with a Child, Fuller, however, preferred von Arnim’s Die Günderode published five years later. In a journal entry written in February 1841, she noted “I meant to have translated the best passages of ‘Die Günderode,’ - which I prefer to Bettine’s correspondence with Goethe. The two girls are equal natures, and both in earnest” (MMFO 2:58). Fuller perceived a sense of balance between the two female friends which she did not otherwise see in Bettine’s relationship with Goethe. In the preface of Günderode, a longer version of her Dial article that was published by Elizabeth Peabody, Fuller declared “as the loveliest woman is better seen in the love she inspires in some heroic man, than in anything done or said by herself, so we see Günderode even better in her influence on Bettine than in her own letters” (vii). This quote, I argue, exemplifies the subversion and suppression of male authority by Fuller, who in her essay “Bettine Brentano and Her
Friend Günderode” creatively replaces the need for “some heroic man” (note the ironically vague adjective “some”) with a celebration of two female artists.

In this section, I shall first comment on the fact that Fuller used two male figures, Goethe and Emerson, as foils for her portrayal of the Brentano-Günderode friendship. As she wrote in her “Günderode” article, “the relation in which [Bettine] stands to Goethe is not a beautiful one” (1), “it is too unequal” (2). In her journal, she noted more bluntly that “Goethe [had] made a puppet-show, for his private entertainment, of Bettine's life” (MMFO 2:58). Commenting on the notion of “friendship,” Fuller was critical of such imbalance: comparing Bettine with George Sand, she located the source of her discontent in the former’s lack of self-esteem, and wrote in 1839, “When I first knew George Sand, I thought to have found tried the experiment I wanted. I did not value Bettine so much. She had not pride enough for me. . . . I love ‘abandon’ only when natures are capable of the extreme reverse. I know Bettine would end in nothing; when I read her book I knew she could not outlive her love” (MMFO 1:248). Emerson, too, compared “our wonderful Bettine” with Sand: he wrote in a letter to John Heath in 1842, “we are indebted to her for the most remarkable book ever written by a woman. She is a finer genius than George Sand or Mme de Stael . . . And where shall we find another woman to compare her with” (EL 3:77). However, his laudatory remarks did not include the same criticism that Fuller reserved towards Bettine’s “abandonment,” which she commented again on in 1842 writing that “her boundless abandonment to one feeling must hinder for a time her progress and that her maturer years are likely to lag slowly after the fiery haste of her youth. She lived so long, not for truth, but for a human object” (“Brentano” 3).
Secondly, I shall focus on Emerson’s section in *Memoirs* “Woman, or Artist?” and examine Fuller’s and Emerson’s different understanding of such a dichotomy. After he was asked “to write some Life of Margaret” in 1850, Emerson explained to his friend Samuel Gray Ward on August 2nd, “I think it could really be done, if one would heroically devote himself, and a most vivacious book written, but it must done tête exaltée, & in the tone of Spiridion, or even of Bettine” (*EL* 4:222). Two years later, he confessed to Furness that a “great deal of labor [had been] bestowed to a very small effect” (Fruitlands). In the end, Emerson did not manage to narrate Fuller’s life “in the tone of . . . Bettine,” and the sense of disappointment underlying Emerson’s remarks matches most readers’ reaction to reading *Memoirs*, a work that struggles to represent the radicalism of her career and feminist work.

On the contrary, Fuller’s *Dial* article “Bettine Brentano and her Friend Günderode” does not shy away from these women’s nonconformist agency. The last part of this section centres on Fuller’s powerful reflection on friendship and, more particularly, on how she portrays the harmonious Brentano-Günderode relationship as both intrinsically feminine and “essentially poetic.”

I – Of Women and Men, Of Friends and Foils

**A) Goethe as Foil: Circles and the Ambivalent Power of Influence**

One thing that Brentano’s and Goethe’s relationship lacked according to Fuller was a sense of balance—and it is on that lack of balance that Fuller’s essay first centres, focusing on Bettine’s fascination for the writer and leaving Karoline aside. Günderode is indeed curiously absent from the beginning of Fuller’s text, which opens on the dangers of idolatrous relationships. While noting that “[i]dolatries are natural to youthful hearts,” Fuller states that “when this worship is expressed, there
must be singular purity and strength of character on the part both of Idol and Idolater, to prevent its degenerating into a mutual excitement of vanity or mere infatuation” (“Brentano” 2). As she wrote in 1839, Fuller believed that Bettine’s fascination with Goethe was one that had “degenerated” for characterised by a very uneven balance of power—“She has followed like a slave where she might as a pupil” (3). Zwarg hypothesizes on the origins of Fuller’s interesting word choice, noting that Fuller’s insertion of the words captive and slave can be said to provide a feminist gloss to Hegel's treatment of *Lordship and Bondage in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). It is possible she had heard something about this aspect of Hegel's thought from her friend Frederick Henry Hedge, whose command of German and interest in philosophy made him a particularly useful contact. (76)

As the word “slave” implies, Bettine was actually the victim in Fuller’s eyes—and Goethe, the perpetrator. In her essay on *Die Günderode*, Fuller is indeed highly critical of his condescending attitude toward Bettine—“there is an air as of an elderly guardian flirting cautiously with a giddy, inexperienced ward, or a Father Confessor, who, instead of through the holy office raising and purifying the thoughts of the devotee, uses it to gratify his curiosity” (“Brentano” 1). What Fuller is describing or denouncing here is a case of abuse of power—a power granted by experience (the “elderly guardian” versus the “inexperienced ward”) and by status (“a Father Confessor” using the “devotee”). For Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos, “Fuller dethrones Goethe as male hero,” and her article shows that “Fuller’s transformation pertained not only to breaking through values imposed by patriarchy but also to revaluing the importance of female friendship in the process of deconstructing her ideal male hero” (*Toward* 84). Surely, Fuller’s denunciation confirms what she herself wrote in the
“Preface” of her translation of Eckermann’s *Conversations* in 1839—that although Goethe was “an object of peculiar interest and constant study” (175), she was “not a blind admirer” of his (Chevigny 180). However, Fuller also praised Goethe’s influence, which she viewed as the aura of the Romantic thinker par excellence.

Originally denoting “an influx, flowing matter” or “the flowing in of ethereal fluid,” the word “influence” perfectly describes the nature of Goethe’s effect on Bettine according to Fuller. It is indeed Goethe’s “atmosphere” (from the Greek “atmós,” meaning steam, vapor) that caused Bettine’s fascination,

She [Bettine] had grown up in the atmosphere he [Goethe] had created. Seeing him up there on the mountain, he seemed to her all beautiful and majestic in the distant rosy light of its snow-peaks. Add a nature, like one of his own melodies, as subtle, as fluent, and as productive of minute flowers and mosses, we could not wonder if one so fitted to receive him, had made of her whole life a fair sculptured pedestal for this one figure. (“Brentano” 2)

The words “atmosphere”, the series of adjectives “subtle,” “fluent,” “beautiful,” “majestic,” and the reference to “nature” and “flowers and mosses,” as well as the idea of elevation suggested by the noun phrases “up there on the mountain,” “a fair sculpture pedestal,” all partake of a kind of impressionistic and Romantic portrait of the German writer. Goethe’s charming hue absorbed Bettine and seems at first to have taken away both agency and responsibility from her. This description resembles a passage in Fuller’s article on “Goethe” published in 1841. Just as Emerson had written about conversation, which he defined as a “game of circles” (*CW* 2:184), for Fuller, Goethe’s genius consisted in a certain kind of “circle”:

I never felt so completely that very thing which genius should always make us feel, that I was in its circle, and could not get out till its spell was done, and its
last spirit permitted to depart. I was not carried away, instructed, delighted more than by other works, but I was there, living there, whether as the platan tree, or the architect, or any other observing part of the scene. The personages live too intensely to let us live in them, they draw around themselves circles within the circle, we can only see them close, not be themselves. (“Goethe” 20-21)

The circle, to which the etymology of the word “conversation” perfectly alludes, was a fundamental aspect of Fuller’s Transcendentalism: she believed that it was indeed by expanding one’s “circle” to new horizons (which explains her thirst to travel to Europe) that the individual could grow. She writes “where to find fit, though few, representatives for all we value in humanity? Where obtain those golden keys to the secret treasure-chambers of the soul? No samples are perfect. We must look abroad into the wide circle, to seek a little here, and a little there, to make up our company” (MMFO 2:297). Fuller continued to expand her circle throughout her life, through a series of geographical moves—first to New York, and then to Italy—which matched an internal sort of growth, “I have no castle, and no natural circle, in which I might live, like the wise Makaria, observing my kindred the stars, and gradually enriching my archives. Makaria here must go abroad, or the stars would hide their light, and the archive remain a blank” (MMFO 2:297).

While the atmosphere of Goethe’s genius absorbed Bettine almost in spite of herself, Fuller’s “Brentano” article suggests that the same halo of charm applied to Günderode too: “Many of the poetical fragments from the pen of Günderode are such as would not have been written had she not been the contemporary of Schelling and Fichte, yet are they native and original, the atmosphere of thought reproduced in the brilliant and delicate hues of a peculiar plant” (“Brentano” 5). We find similar terms as in the previous passage—“atmosphere,” “hues”, “plant”—and
yet we understand that the “transfusion of such energies” does not imply a loss of agency for Fuller, who on the contrary defines Günderode’s work as “[n]ative and original.”

**B) On Goethe and Emerson: “Intelect” and “Life”**

As the critics of Fuller’s “Brentano” essay have already established, there are numerous parallels between the way in which she writes about Goethe and Brentano and her own relationship with Emerson. Written two years after their famous crisis, Fuller’s comments on Goethe are indeed reminiscent of the problems she faced in her friendship with Emerson. About Goethe, Fuller writes that he “is so cold, so repulsive, diplomatic, and courteously determined not to compromise himself. Had he assumed truly the paternal attitude, he might have been far more gentle and tender” ("Brentano" 2). Coldness was something that bothered Fuller tremendously in her relationship with Emerson, to the point that in *Memoirs*, he defined their “war of temperaments” as follows: “Our moods were very different; and I remember, that, at the very time when I, slow and cold, had come fully to admire her genius, and was congratulating myself on the solid good understanding that subsisted between us, I was surprised with hearing it taxed by her with superficiality and halfness” (*MMFO* 1:288). Taking inspiration from their relationship to write about friendship was something both Fuller and Emerson undertook. Emerson’s essay “Friendship,” published in 1841, drew largely on his exchange with Fuller: in a letter written in July 1840, he asked her “Do you happen to possess unto this day,- as I have heard you say, you keep letters,- an old one from me dated 12 Oct, 1838. I have quoted a sentence out of it into my journal which makes me think I may find a word there to fill up a bad hole in a paragraph” (*EL* 2:314). Similarly, in 1842, Fuller’s comments on friendship seem to have been nourished by her recent falling out with Emerson: her
remarks about Bettine’s frustration sound very autobiographical, “We also feel as if she [Bettine] became too self-conscious in the course of this intimacy. There being no response from the other side to draw her out naturally, she bunts about for means to entertain a lordly guest, who brings nothing to the dinner but a silver fork” (“Brentano” 3). Fuller’s conclusion is tinted by a bitterness that seems to reflect her own sufferance, “Sad are the catastrophes of friendships, for they are mostly unequal, and it is rare that more than one party keeps true to the original covenant. Happy the survivor if in losing his friend, he loses not the idea of friendship” (“Brentano” 6). The emotional hardship of friendship is what emerges most strongly out of these remarks; the adjectives “sad” and “happy” encircle Fuller’s reflection and indicate the rawness of her recent disappointment. But as Zwarg states, Fuller’s 1842 Dial article “did not register a turn from her relationship with Emerson so much as an enhancement of that relationship in allegorical form” (87). There are passages in which Fuller envisages a happy ending; she is indeed not hopeless and addresses herself directly to the similarly discouraged reader to reassure them—“Be not faithless, thou whom I see wandering alone amid the tombs of thy buried loves. The relation thou hast thus far sought in vain is possible even on earth to calm, profound, tender, and unselfish natures; it is assured in heaven, where only chastened spirits can enter, — pilgrims dedicate to Perfection” (“Brentano” 6). The confusion between Fuller and her audience (to whom she addresses herself directly, “thou whom I see wandering alone”) speaks to that connection that Fuller “the translator” wanted to establish with her readers, but it also establishes a very intimate sort of link between the two because, by prophesizing a happy ending to the disappointed reader, Fuller is simultaneously promising herself the prospect of a more successful friendship still to come.
That being said, I believe that the parallels between Goethe and Emerson that Fuller establishes in her reflection on friendship extend beyond the factuality of personal misunderstandings. Fuller’s critique of Goethe as a friend of Bettine, which reads as a reflection of her critique of Emerson as her friend, is crucial not only because it acts as a foil to her praise of Günderode and Brentano’s relationship but also because it concurrently captures a fundamental aspect of Fuller’s Transcendentalism—i.e. the tension between “intellect” and “life.” About Goethe, she writes,

Of Goethe, as of other natures, where the intellect is too much developed in proportion to the moral nature, it is difficult to speak without seeming narrow, blind, and impertinent. For such men see all that others live . . . . Yet they are not, nay know not, they only discern. The difference is that between sight and life, prescience and being, wisdom and love. Thus with Goethe. Naturally of a deep mind and shallow heart, he felt the sway of the affections enough to appreciate their working in other men, but never enough to receive their inmost regenerating influence. (“Goethe” 1)

In this excerpt from Fuller’s 1841 article, sight is elevated to the point where it is presented as characteristic of Goethe’s genius, of which “it is difficult to speak without seeming narrow, blind, and impertinent.” Goethe belongs to that category of people who are different precisely because “such men see all that others live”: these men are above others, and they stand in a higher position from which they can observe reality with a certain distance. However, for Fuller, the capacity of “seeing” is also synonymous with a certain lack of “being”: “they are not, nay know not, they only discern,” “he felt the sway of the affections enough to appreciate their working in other men, but never enough to receive their inmost regenerating influence.”
Etymologically related to the notion of “separation,” discernment is what prevents this type of person from uniting affectionally with others.

This characterisation of Goethe cannot be read without also quoting the aforementioned line that Fuller addressed to Emerson “You are intellect, I am life” (FL 3:209). The tension between “intellect” and “life” was indeed a leitmotif of the Fuller-Emerson relationship, which was strained by their different personalities. Elsewhere, Fuller commented—“He has little sympathy with mere life: does not seem to see the plants grow, merely that he may rejoice in their energy” (WNC 184).

Contrary to Emerson, to whom she attributed the role of the observer (one who is gratified through observation), Fuller positioned herself on the side of “life” and of the “plants [that] grow.” Caleb Crain, commenting on Fuller’s remarks on Plato in a letter to Caroline Sturgis from 1839, writes that the “real, including the indelicacy and pain of human relationships, was not a thing to be overcome. That was not how Fuller understood transcendence. Rather, the antagonism between real and ideal had to be fully lived” (197). The tension between “real” and “ideal”, which we might also connect with the dichotomous opposition between human reproduction and artistic production, is at the heart of Emerson’s section “Woman, or Artist?” in Memoirs.

II – Woman, or Artist: A Dichotomy?

A) “Children of Human Birth” and “Children of the Muse”

Creation acts indeed as the main focus of Emerson’s section “Woman, or Artist?” in Memoirs. Separated by a comma, the words “woman” and “artist” stand in apparent opposition to each other, while the question mark included in the title suggests the presumed impossibility of being both “woman” and “artist.” This section of Memoirs is quite similar in its structure to the rest of the work—Emerson’s commentary frames
quotations taken from Fuller’s letters and journals. The passages written by Emerson in this specific section centre on the tension between ideal and real—a tension which echoes the title “woman, or artist.” “Art” could refer to both “craftsmanship” and “higher art.” But here—opposed to “woman,” a term which was mostly tied to the idea of domesticity in the mid-nineteenth century—it denotes a certain elevated detachment from everyday life. In Emerson’s words, this tension is expressed through the contrast between what he calls the “disappointing forms of men and women” and “the children of the muse.” He writes,

Margaret resolved, again and again, to devote herself no more to these disappointing forms of men and women, but to the children of the muse. ‘The dramatis personæ,’ she said, ‘of my poems shall henceforth be chosen from the children of immortal Muse. I fix my affections no more on these frail forms.’ But it was vain; she rushed back again to persons, with a woman’s devotion. (*MMFO* 1:294)

While the expression “children of the muse” associates the reproductive power of woman to the idealised female figure, the final clauses—especially the adjective “vain” and the noun phrase “a woman’s devotion”—portray in a much more negative light a vision of womanhood that is linked to the physical world (“men and women” as opposed to “the children of the immortal Muse”).

Childbirth and childcare are aspects of a woman’s life that Bettine Brentano experienced very early on: married to Achim von Arnim in 1811, Bettine had seven children with him before he died in 1831. She was familiar with and had an obvious first-hand experience of the toll of domestic duties on women: alongside being a mother, she became an influential writer and political thinker. Seen as particularly controversial at the time of its publication, Brentano’s *The King’s Book* (1843)
“exposed social conditions and promulgated the vision of a freer society [and for that] von Arnim was perceived as an oppositionist and admired by freedom seekers despite the fact that the means the book advocated were not revolutionary” (Sotiropoulos, “Truth” 36-37). As Fry remarks, “aspiring authors like Fuller possessed few examples of female artists who transcended established social roles and who expressed creative genius as defined in romantic discourse” (251). Bettine was, at least in some respects, a model of bravery and intellect that Fuller admired, as shown by a letter she wrote to her on November 2nd, 1840:

I write to you in the name of many men and many women of my country for whom you have wrought wonders. . . . Thou art dear to us, thou art the friend of our inmost mood. We do not wish to hear street gossip about thee. We will not hear it. Speak to us thyself [for] you are wise, you have the spiritual sight, the breath of our love will be wafted to you and you will see whether we are yours.

(FL 2:328-329)

It is important to emphasise that Fuller wrote to Bettine using the first-person plural pronoun “we” as if, while showing her admiration, she was also expressing America’s gratitude for Bettine’s service. Service to whom, we might ask. To intellect and to the cause of women’s rights: Bettine was a rare example of a successful woman intellectual but, above all, she was a prime example of someone who had a “spiritual sight.” While Fuller had taxed Goethe of feeling “the sway of the affections enough to appreciate their working in other men, but never enough to receive their inmost regenerating influence (“Goethe” 1), Bettine had on the other hand become the friend of readers’ “inmost mood.”

However laudatory this may have been, this is a letter to which Brentano never replied: Sotiropoulos interrogates Fuller’s silence on Brentano in the years that
followed her 1842 *Dial* article, noting that “Fuller never referred to or attempted to communicate with von Arnim again” (“Truth” 36). Sotiropoulos indeed “invite[s] one to ask why Fuller fell off the von Arnim fan wagon” (“Truth” 36-37) but recognises that one can only speculate as to the real answer to that question. Despite not being a mother until she was 38, Fuller herself, like Bettine, knew what it meant to bear the responsibility of a household. At age twenty-five, upon her father’s death (1835), Fuller shouldered heavy responsibility for her mother and five younger siblings. If by “artist” we mean an intellectual, then Fuller had to find ways to fructify such a speculative position in order to survive as a woman in the nineteenth century.

In the section “Woman, or Artist?”, Emerson reports a comment that Fuller made on the importance of “living” in December 1842,

> I have been reading the lives of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and of Sir Kenelm Digby. These splendid, chivalrous, and thoughtful Englishmen are meat which my soul loveth, even as much as my Italians. What I demand of men, - that they could act out all their thoughts, - these have. They are lives; and of such I do not care if they had as many faults as there are days in the year, - there is the energy to redeem them. (*MMFO* 1:294-295)

This passage shows the importance as well as the meaning of “living” in Fuller’s eyes. It is the capacity for “enaction” that Fuller admired in these men—“They are lives,” she writes, precisely because they are able to “act out all their thoughts.” It is interesting to note that, in *Memoirs*, Emerson links the concept of “action” to Fuller but he presents it in a negative light—there were “practical problems Margaret had to entertain and to solve the best way she could. . . . But she was formed for action, and addressed herself quite simply to her part. She was a woman, an orphan, without beauty, without money” (1:297-298). There is, then, both in Emerson’s and
Fuller’s writing, a parallel that is established between artistic creation and human reproduction. This parallel is a trope that is not infrequent but it is particularly important for it seems to encapsulate all the difficulties linked to the status of women intellectuals and to how their lives were narrated (as in Fuller’s “Brentano” article and in Emerson’s Memoirs).

Fuller’s remarks about her own writing (i.e. artistic creation), which Emerson quotes in Memoirs, are unsurprisingly concerned with the ties between artistic creation and gender—"a woman of tact and brilliancy, like me, has an undue advantage in conversation with men" (295) and "gentlemen are surprised that I write no better, because I talk so well. But I have served a long apprenticeship to the one, none to the other" (MMFO 1:296). Her comments also reveal the difficulty of being both a woman and an artist, "One should be either private or public. I love best to be a woman; but womanhood is at present too straitly-bounded to give me scope. At hours, I live truly as a woman; at others, I should stifle; as, on the other hand, I should palsy, when I would play the artist" (MMFO 1:297). This tension between "public" and "private" is the same on which gender discrimination based itself for a long time (women’s world coinciding with the private sphere, while men were in charge of the public sphere).

**B) Artistic Creation and Women’s Liberation: Bettine and Karoline According to Fuller**

By publishing her letter exchange with her friend Karoline, Bettine had, in some ways, managed to redefine woman’s private life by equating it to genius rather than to domesticity. She provided an insight into the “interior of German life” which fascinated Fuller to the point, perhaps, of blinding her a little about the reality of German society—“not only are these letters interesting as presenting this view of the
interior of German life, and of an ideal relation realized, but the high state of culture in Germany . . . had made them expressions of the noblest aspirations” (“Brentano” 5). Fuller’s deep admiration for Bettine’s letters also resulted in an idealisation of German domestic life—“We think with unmingled pleasure of the two seated together beside the stove in Günderode’s little room, walking in Madame La Roche’s garden, where they ‘founded a religion for a young prince,’ or on the Rhine, or in the old castle on the hill, as described in the following beautiful letters” (“Brentano” 7).

Fuller’s admiration for Die Günderode is palpable throughout her review as she celebrates the literary exploit that such book represented. As Fry states, the “primary problem for women who like Fuller and Brentano-von Arnim wanted to enter the male-dominated sphere of literary production lay in confronting notions of feminine identity that promoted a passive and domestic role for women rather than an intellectually active and liberated one” (247). Bettine had taken self-writing and artistic creation into her own hands by publishing her 1804–1806 correspondence with Günderode, commencing when von Arnim was nineteen, thus thirty-four years before von Arnim’s 1840 publication. As Sotiropoulos indicates, the “title of the epistolary novel is somewhat misleading, as the letters from Bettine far outnumber those from Karoline: thirty-seven from Bettine, twenty-three from Karoline. Thus Bettine is very much a subject and object of her own book, along with Karoline” (Toward 82). The agency of such literary production certainly satisfied Fuller’s feminism.

Unlike the toxic Brentano-Goethe relationship on which Brentano’s first epistolary novel focused, Fuller viewed the friendship “Bettine” and “Karoline” as a much more balanced type of relationship. Indeed, Fuller’s article reads as a celebration of the notion of harmony—intended as complementarity rather than
similarity—on which Fuller writes, “[t]he advantage in years, the higher culture, and greater harmony of Günderode’s nature is counter-balanced, by the ready springing impulse; richness and melody of the other” (5). Musical harmony (alluded to through the words “melody,” “springing impulse,” “richness”) is used to characterise the friendship between the two women who, despite embodying “two different modes of life,” are “the two beautiful figures which animate and portray these modes of life [and] are in perfect harmony with them” (4). Günderode herself, of a more “delicate and reserved nature” than Bettine, wrote “[t]hou hast a much more energetic nature than I, indeed than almost any of whom I am able to judge” (Fuller, “Brentano” 23).

However, Fuller notes that these differences constituted “no drawback upon the beauty of this intimacy—there being sufficient nearness of age to give Günderode just the advantage needful with so daring a child as Bettine, and a sufficient equality in every other respect” (6). Once again, this contrasts with Brentano’s age difference from Goethe, who was 26 years older than her.

Difference, just like harmony, is a key concept in Fuller’s commentary on friendship for, while Fuller begins by opposing the relationship between Goethe and Bettine to the latter’s friendship with Karoline, she then goes on to interpret the “difference” between the women as follows,

I have . . . distinguished the two as Nature and Ideal. Bettine, hovering from object to object, drawing new tides of vital energy from all, . . .— is not this pervasive vital force, cause of the effect which we call nature? And Günderode, . . . harmonizing all objects into their true relations, drawing from every form of life its eternal meaning. (4)

What emerges from this important passage is the transformational power of woman’s genius: “difference” between two friends can be positive, manifesting itself as a
“pervasive force” that “transfigures[s],” “harmonizing” and “drawing new tides of vital energy.” What’s more, Fuller depicts this transformational force by the two women as creative and reciprocal—“The action of these two beings upon one another, as representing classes of thoughts, is thus of the highest poetical significance. As persons, their relation is not less beautiful” (“Brentano” 5). Here, the notion of “action” and of “poetry” come together in this “woman-centered, spiritual alternative” (Avallone 339) to Romantic, male poetic creation.

Several years before she wrote her Dial article, Fuller had told Emerson during one of her stays at his Concord house—“Who would be a goody that could be a genius?” (EJ 5:40). While with that remark Fuller “seemed to dismiss the notions of separate roles or separate spheres for women,” as pinpointed by Barbara Packer (801), her article on Die Günderode actually places gender at the centre of her reasoning, celebrating the all-female power of the Brentano-Günderode relationship. Fuller describes their “relation” as “present[ing] all that is lovely between woman and woman, adorned by great genius and beauty on both sides” (“Brentano” 5). Gender is thus central to her commentary of this “true friendship” (6) between young women, which Fuller clearly distinguishes from the friendship between two young men:

An intimacy between two young men is heroic. . . . As the life of man is to be active, they have still more the air of brothers in arms than of fellow students. But the relation between two young girls is essentially poetic. . . . There is a fluent tenderness, a native elegance in the arrangement of trifling incidents, a sincere childlike sympathy in aspirations that mark the destiny of woman. She should be the poem, man the poet. (“Brentano” 5)

Poetry, as creation, is therefore for Fuller a power emanating from true female relationships, while action seems to more characteristic of male friendships. If
Sotiropoulos argues that “[f]or Fuller, the transformational potential inhering in female friendship complicated the principle of self-reliance inculcated by her father, manifested in her male literary and historical heroes, and formulated into a philosophy by Emerson” (Toward 84), I think that the “transformational potential” of Fuller’s vision lies in the redefinition of friendship between women as “essentially poetic.” After all, “poetry” comes from “poiein” to make, linking elevation through art to the idea of action. For Fuller, Karoline and Bettine’s relationship was a creative sort of union that combined artistic production and intellectual elevation. This is reiterated by Fuller as she compares Cleone and Aspasia, in Walter Savage Landor’s work, to Bettine and Karoline—“Aspasia and Cleone is not unlike this between Bettine and Günderode, in the influences of the two characters upon one another” (“Brentano” 20). Fuller expands on this comparison by describing how, while “Bettine feels in her friend the same joy and pride which is expressed in Aspasia. . . Cleone regards Aspasia with the same admiration, angelic in its pure humility, though melancholy in its smile, as Günderode does Bettine” (“Brentano” 21). And yet Fuller concludes that the “book of ‘Günderode’ is more poetic than ‘Pericles and Aspasia,’ in this, that we see living and changing before us what is only given us as results, of fixed outline in Landor’s book. This breathing life makes us living; that pictured life only commanded us to live” (“Brentano” 21). Not only is creation a property of the Günderode-Brentano relationship, but Fuller concludes that it is also transformative for us readers who benefit from that relation by “living” through it and with it.

Fuller’s idealisation of the friendship between Bettine Brentano-von Arnim and Karoline von Günderode celebrates female artistic genius in a way that frees it
completely from male domination. Creation is described as a female and essentially poetic property: Fuller's redefinition of “womanhood” indeed blurs the lines between artistic creation and human reproduction. Bettine's book, Fuller writes, “is true, and of the rarest excellence, a many-petalled flower on the bosom of nature, from which the dew shall never vanish” (“Brentano” 23). Nature pervades Fuller's characterisations, in which the beauty of the natural world merges with literary production—“Like the sky lark's, these morning songs drop from the clouds which upbear the songster dew from heaven, such as active, lustrous, enduring, prying day shall never boast” (“Brentano” 23). If in one of her letters (translated here by Fuller), Günderode wrote that if Bettine had “been a boy, thou wouldst have become a hero, but as thou art a girl I interpret all these dispositions as furnishing materials for a future life, preparation for an energetic character which perhaps in a living active time will be born” (“Brentano” 24), Fuller suppresses the need for any model of male authority and celebrates the literary and transcending power of a woman's life.

The vision of womanhood that emerges from Fuller's account of the Brentano-Günderode friendship offers a liberating perspective on the status of women intellectuals in the nineteenth century. In the next section of this chapter, I expand my reflection on Transcendentalism and gender by reading Sophia Ripley’s Dial article “Woman” and examining the way in which she resolves the ideal-real womanhood—a dichotomy in which Emerson, while writing Memoirs, remained very much entrapped.
1.3 Transcendentalists in Conversation: Margaret Fuller, Sophia Ripley, and “Woman”

American female writers who fought for women’s rights in the first half of the nineteenth century did so in many different ways for, beyond the shared belief that social and intellectual discrimination of woman should end, every writer seemed to have her own idea about how greater equality should be achieved. Lydia Maria Child, for instance, did not always agree with how her contemporaries were trying to redefine gender. The New-Englander author of *Letters from New-York* (1841–43) noted that “much of the talk about Women’s Rights offends both my reason and my taste. I am not of those who maintain that there is no sex in souls” (250). While she believed that there were essential differences between man and woman, Child insisted that those should not be used to justify the subordination of the latter. She denounced men’s uncontrolled tendency to aggression, lamenting “[t]hat animal instinct and brute force now govern the world, is painfully apparent in the condition of women everywhere” (247), and aligned herself with women’s rights precursor Mary Wollstonecraft, who first ascertained that in order to revolutionize the condition of woman one should also rethink the role of man.10

Fuller also admired Wollstonecraft, to whom she paid tribute in *Woman*, describing her as a “woman whose existence better proved the need of some new interpretation of Woman’s Rights than anything she wrote” (75). However, contrary to what Child or other contemporaries of Fuller such as Elizabeth Peabody argued

10 See “Hailing a New Man: The Rights of Women, Constructions of Masculinity and Solidarity” by Katharina Rennhak, in which she “suggest[s] that in *Rights of Woman* and *Wrongs of Woman* Wollstonecraft invests quite some energy in the project of reforming heterosexual males, since without a reconstruction of masculinity the ‘revolution in female manners’ does not seem possible” (183).
against, Fuller was very radical in her understanding of gender. Blurring the lines between man and woman’s “separate spheres,” she exposed gender as a social construct thus anticipating modern gender theories by over a century. Of course, a chorus of women thinkers both preceded and inspired Fuller’s ground-breaking treatise Woman as well “The Great Lawsuit.” As showcased by Phyllis Cole in “Fuller’s Lawsuit and Feminist History,” works by sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké as well as, of course, Wollstonecraft are echoed in Fuller’s writing.

Despite adopting different approaches to the notion of gender, the texts written in the period leading up to the first women’s movement appear to have been “in conversation” with one another—a mode of exchange by which I mean the ripple effect of mutually inspiring works by women thinkers that also prompted similarly related discussions between women and men. Some of these discussions were formally organized, as is the case for Fuller’s Boston Conversations for which participants paid a fee, while others took the form of epistolary exchanges or of intimate conversations that were later recorded in journal entries. This section focuses on Sophia Ripley’s article “Woman,” which was published in the Dial in January 1841 when Fuller was the editor, with a view to placing Ripley among that chorus of women’s rights defenders. Two years before “The Great Lawsuit” appeared in the same publication, Ripley called her readers to recognise that “All adjusting of the whole sex to a sphere is vain, for no two persons naturally have the same” and asserted that “[c]haracter, intellect create the sphere of each” (362). Opposing the predominant assumption that women belonged to a “separate” (and inherently inferior) sphere, Ripley’s powerful denunciation of well-established social

---

11 For a comparison of Peabody’s and Fuller’s views, see Judith Strong Albert’s “The Debate in Women’s Studies: Contradictory Role Models in the Nineteenth Century - Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody.”
conventions engages in conversation with the work of other Transcendentalist authors such as Fuller and Emerson in order to comment on issues related to woman’s individuality and education.

Ripley’s article originated from her participation in Fuller’s Boston Conversations. Conversation was a type of exchange that Transcendentalists prized immensely: as Bruce Ronda notes, “[c]onversations, in their efforts to follow rules of engagement and their attempts to achieve brief collective harmony, together with their frequent breakdowns as codes shifted and participants broke out of their roles, may in fact be understood as the quintessential Transcendentalist expressive form” (21-22). It is therefore no coincidence that Fuller chose that specific mode of communication for her project of conversations for women, whose goal was to “suppl[y] a point of union to well-educated and thinking women, in a city which, with great pretensions to mental refinement, boasts, at present, nothing of the kind” (WNC 173), as she explained in a letter to Ripley in August 1839. Education for girls stood at the very heart of Fuller’s call for women’s rights. In fact, she believed it un-Christian to deny anyone an education, for enforced ignorance constituted, in her opinion, a rejection of God-given intellectual capabilities. After attending the eighteenth conversation, Peabody reported that “Miss Fuller thought it impious thus to speak of the gifts of God - immortal gifts of God - as if we had a right to tamper with them” (Simmons 217). In line with William Ellery Channing’s principle of “self-culture,” Fuller relied on the latter’s famous call to use our “nobler power, that of acting on, determining and forming ourselves” (11) in order to subvert the hegemonic masculine discourse of her times.

Now regarded as an extraordinary example of early feminist initiative, Fuller’s encounters encouraged her female audience to reflect critically on all topics,
including on “woman.” As Rula Quawas pinpoints, the Conversations had a performative value for, “like contemporary lectures, [they] not only engaged the audience in a process marked by intellectual and emotional reciprocity, but they also supplied access to education from which women were excluded” (135). Originally written as homework for one of these sessions, Ripley’s article deserves our attention for how powerfully it debunks the general assumptions about women that routinely circulated in antebellum America. In her article, Ripley indicts society’s insistence on woman’s “sweet religious sensibility, her gentle benevolence, her balmy tenderness” and questions reductive definitions of woman’s destiny—“Is this woman’s destiny? Is she to be the only adventurer, who pursues her course through life aimless, tossed upon the waves of circumstance, intoxicated by joy, panic-struck by misfortune, or stupidly receptive of it?” (316).

Ripley’s call for woman’s empowerment reads as a kind of reverberation of the objectives Fuller had set for her Conversations, which aimed “to answer the questions, - What were we born to do? and how shall we do it?” (WNC 173). Fuller’s work indeed had a major impact on the way in which her contemporaries wrote about “woman”—Zwarg’s monograph Feminist Conversations, for instance, is almost entirely devoted to demonstrating how Emerson’s conversations with Fuller shaped his views on woman. However, as Tiffany Wayne reminds us in Woman Thinking, it is also true that the “social and intellectual history of Transcendentalism has been limited by a focus on Margaret Fuller as the only woman of ideas associated with the movement. Fuller usually appears as the only Transcendentalist concerned with women’s issues, and her writing stands as the representative female and feminist voice of Transcendentalism” (15).
Seldom mentioned by critics, I believe that Ripley’s article represents an important part of the Transcendentalist conversation on women’s rights that both engages with Emerson’s celebration of individuality and Fuller’s feminist call for women’s education. Offering an exploration of Ripley’s feminist plea, I first examine how her argument is articulated around the dichotomy between “woman” and “muse,” which she debunks in favor of more realistic and fairer visions of womanhood. Secondly, I compare Ripley’s considerations on the reality of women in society with Fuller’s and Emerson’s statements on the matter, reflecting on the different ways in which Transcendentalists expressed their support for women’s rights.

I – An Impending Revelation: Ripley’s Call for Women’s Recognition

A) Of Transcendentalist Activities and Gender Dynamics

Speaking up for the cause of women’s rights was a courageous act: as Fuller observed, it was an exercise “from which women usually shrink, because, if they express themselves on such subjects with sufficient force and cleanness to do any good, they are exposed to assaults whose vulgarity makes them painful” (WNC 67). After the publication of Woman, Child similarly commented that these were “subjects which men do not wish to have discussed, and which women dare not approach” (WNC 220). With this in mind, it is important to note that Ripley’s “Woman” not only acted as a precursor to both Fuller’s “Great Lawsuit” and Woman, but it also preceded the women’s movement by almost ten years. In fact, according to the standard narrative, first-wave feminism begins with the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, during which Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and many others signed the now famous “Declaration of Sentiment.” In those days, American society’s views on gender were based on the “Cult of True Womanhood”—an ideology which
confined women to the hearth by circumscribing “womanhood” to notions of self-sacrifice, passivity, and marital love. As Susan M. Cruea explains, there was an inherent contradiction in the True Woman for while she “was assumed to be a pillar of moral strength and virtue, she was also portrayed as delicate and weak, prone to fainting and illness” (189). Ripley alludes to this in her article, “everywhere, we hear the same oft-repeated things said upon them by those who have little perception of the difficulties of the subject; and even the clergy have frequently flattered ‘the feeble sex,’ by proclaiming to them from the pulpit what lovely things they may become, if they will only be good, quiet, and gentle, attend exclusively to their domestic duties” (314). In other words, women at the time were solely associated with and praised for what related to the domestic (the maternal, the matrimonial, the ornamental); but it was time for women to be seen as a lot more than that.

In “Her Cause Against Herself,” Adam-Max Tuchinsky notes that, in the title of Emerson’s famous 1837 address “The American Scholar,” the adjective “American” stands for “democracy” for it was precisely the role of a public intellectual in a democratic society that Emerson was describing. Yet what was the role, or even the space, allowed to women in that democracy? Not only were women denied basic legal rights such as the right to own property, but they were also the object of social and intellectual forms of oppression. Many areas of the public sphere were closed to them—politics and higher education being the most emblematic of a long list. In the first half of the nineteenth century, women still were, for instance, excluded from the lecture stage: while present when Emerson delivered his speeches, women were confined to other sorts of platforms that were deemed more appropriate for them, such as “conversation.” As David Randall explains in The Concept of Conversation: From Cicero’s Sermo to the Grand Siècle’s Conversation, over the years
conversation gradually went from being a widely respected intellectual form of expression to being denigratingly associated with what was then referred to as “women’s sphere.” A recent *Washington Post* article on “How women invented book clubs”\(^\text{12}\) shows that traces of that are still present in today’s society, where the “book club, dismissed as a feminine, frivolous time to drink wine and gossip is also a radical activity: a rare place where women have long been able to engage with the transformative power of books.” Therefore, no matter how much Fuller’s Conversations were a success, it is important to bear in mind that it was one of the only genres that was considered “suitable” for women. Lectures, on the other hand, were regarded as more appropriately male and were, unsurprisingly, favoured by Emerson and the other male members of the Transcendental Club (Thoreau, Ellery Channing, etc.). The sense of agency that derived from lecturing was seen as essentially “masculine” to such an extent that in “the eyes of their contemporaries, antebellum women risked their ‘womanhood’ by becoming public speakers” (Quawas 133). Quawas points out that by “[a]ssuming the authoritative position of lecturer and educator to adults” Fuller “was trespassing on male intellectual and professional domains” (133).

Even though “every Transcendentalist was ready, and indeed had good reason, to assert that there was ‘no sex in souls’” as Dall explained in her 1895 “Transcendentalism in New England” lecture (677), men and women Transcendentalists lived very different sorts of lives depending on their sex. When, in March 1841, Sophia and her husband George Ripley (founder of Brook Farm)

hosted the only series of Fuller’s Conversations that also involved men, it turned out to be quite an unsuccessful experiment, as it served to reveal the gender imbalance of the Transcendentalist group. Thanks to Dall’s notes on that specific series, we know that introducing men to the Conversations made both its participants and host suffer from the banes of unequal gender dynamics, as men started interrupting women and dialogue became a lot less fluid than it used to be when Fuller’s audience was limited to her female students. As Dall reported, “Margaret . . . never enjoyed this mixed class, and considered it a failure so far as her own power was concerned. She and Mr. Emerson met like Pyramus and Thisbe, a blank wall between” (Margaret 13). It seems, in fact, as though men and women struggled to adjust to this very peculiar atmosphere of inverted gender dynamics: “Emerson,” noted Dall, “pursued his own train of thought. He seemed to forget that we had come together to pursue Margaret’s” (Margaret 46).

Fuller’s “Great Lawsuit,” which had been written so that “[a]s men become aware that all men have not had their fair chance, they are inclined to say that no woman have had a fair chance” (Myerson 7), had a strong impact on male Transcendentalists. After its publication in 1843, Emerson reported that “H. D. Thoreau, who will never like anything” thought “‘Miss F’s is a noble piece, rich extempore writing, talking with pen in hand’” (EL 3:183). Despite being complimentary in tone, the expression “talking with pen in hand” in Thoreau’s comment makes it sound condescending, for it undermines Fuller’s writing by portraying it as more casual and improvised in nature than it should be. On the other

---

13 Dall’s notes from that specific series appear in Margaret and Her Friends: Or Ten Conversations with Margaret Fuller upon the Mythology of the Greeks and its Expression in Art, held at the House of the Rev. George Ripley Boston, Beginning March 1, 1841, which was published in 1895.
hand, Emerson found “the piece very proper and noble, and itself quite an important fact in the history of Woman: . . . It will teach us all to revise our habits of thinking on this head” (EL 3:183). The term “habits,” to which Emerson refers here in the first-person plural, is an allusion to that series of misconceptions about women that still shaped men’s judgement, preventing the vast majority of them from seeing women as equals. As Matteson pinpoints, “Emerson wrote from within a culture that firmly associated womanhood with externality, both because perceptions of women were too often inseparable from female sexual characteristics and because women themselves were generally supposed to maintain a worldview fixated on outward appearances” (34). It is precisely the set of “habits” mentioned by Emerson that Ripley wished to uproot in her 1841 Dial article on “Woman,” in which she debunked the concept of a “sphere of a woman” (314) and indicted its degrading and limiting nature.

**B) Woman and the Muse**

Together with recognition, Ripley and other women were clearly hoping to overthrow such limiting definitions of “womanhood” and aimed to open the eyes of both their male and female counterparts, as shown by the numerous allusions to the notion of “revelation” in their writings. After the publication of Woman, for instance, Caroline Sturgis wrote to Fuller that “It makes me sad that it is necessary such an one should be written but since it is so it cannot but do good to lift the veil as you have done – how hard a thing to do!” (WNC 207). Four years earlier, Ripley also expressed the wish that society’s perception of women could become more just. The metaphor of the lifting of the veil, symbolizing an imminent revelation, is present in Ripley’s text through the use of verbs like “penetrate” and of verb phrases like “tell the world” and “brought to light,” as she imagines a future where “[b]lessed indeed would that man
be, who could penetrate the difficulties of this subject, and tell the world faithfully and beautifully what new thing he has discovered about it, or what old truth he has brought to light” (314). Here, the combination of the idea of “revelation” and of the word “penetration” reminds the reader that it is gender dynamics that are at stake. Similarly, in an article entitled “Femality” that was published in *The Pathfinder* in March 1843, which Fuller quoted both in “The Great Lawsuit” and in *Woman*, we find an analogous desire of wanting to return to a somewhat pre-lapsarian state of gender equality, “the whole end of general, long-during revolution, is to restore the rightful association, with all its accompanying harmonies and beatitudes” (Vethake 35). According to *The Pathfinder* article, society had somehow forgotten about “the rightful association” of the sexes: the belief that a revelation would restore in it the knowledge of “harmonies and beatitudes” is evocative of a kind of Platonic type of reminiscence. Fuller was a keen reader of Plato, as she described in a letter to Sturgis—“Plato’s thoughts have, indeed, so passed into our intellectual life that I feel as if only returning to my native mountain air while with these philosophers and cannot be quite enough of a disciple (FL 2:40). Unity between the sexes, as outlined in Aristophanes’ myth in *The Symposium*, possibly provided Fuller with a picture of harmony between men and women that also appealed to her when reading “Femality.”

For Ripley, the impending “revelation” consisted in society’s overdue acknowledgment that a woman is simply not a “muse.” Her opposition to such idealisation is uncompromising: “the poet's lovely vision of an ethereal being, hovering half seen above him, in his hour of occupation, . . . is not woman, she is only the spiritualized image of that tender class of women he loves the best” (314). Of course, everyone understood the word “muse” as referring to either a Greek
goddess or simply a guiding genius but, according to Ripley, some also tended to believe that woman was—or should be—similarly ethereal. Ripley’s article therefore warns against the danger of such an idealisation and repeatedly insists on the fact that the ideal woman, as is the one created by artists, is not real: the poet “knows [woman] not as she is and must be” (314). As noted by Barbara Welter, “[w]omanhood was believed to be, in principle, a higher, nobler state than manhood, since it was less directly related to the body and was more involved with the spirit” (95), which was in turn used as argument to discriminate against her. It is too easy, too cruel, Ripley explained, to set an unrealistic ideal for the whole sex and then condemn those who don’t meet a canon that was not rooted in reality in the first place—“if the poet could ever be unkind, we should deem him most so when he reproves the sex . . . for its departure from this high, beatified ideal of his, to which he loves to give the name of woman” (314). As well as condemning such attitude, Ripley called for men to be supportive companions and for women to assert themselves as individuals, freeing themselves from the male gaze—“Her own individuality should be as precious to her as [man’s] love. Let her see that the best our most sympathising friend can do for us is, to throw a genial atmosphere around us, . . . but our path can never be another’s, and we must always walk alone” (317).

This invitation to celebrate woman’s “own individuality” reads as a feminist interpretation by Ripley of Emerson’s earlier remarks in “The American Scholar” on “the new importance given to the single person” (CW 1:68).

In the article from The Pathfinder mentioned earlier, moralising attitudes that simultaneously discriminate are also called out, as the author explains that “[a]t the time of, and evidently incidental to the FALL, clothing began; and with it, as a matter of course, moral concealment, deception, misrepresentation and falsehood” (35).
The author condemns the hypocrisy of those who “degrade Femality,” defined as “significant of the whole expansive female world,” “by every possible device and expedient; while a labored and hypocritical adoration is abundantly enacted towards the sex” (35). It is worth noting that Fuller expressed a similar concern about male artists in “The Great Lawsuit” where she focused on one that, together with Emerson, she particularly admired, Dante Alighieri. She did not straightaway condemn idealizing love between woman and man—“In Italy, the great poets wove into their lives an ideal love which answered to the highest wants. It included those of the intellect and the affections, for it was a love of spirit for spirit” (Myerson 404). Fuller described how that “ideal love” that poets spoke about “was not ascetic and superhuman, but interpreting all things” and added that the Italian poet spoke of woman “not only as the bride of his heart, but the mother of his soul” (Myerson 404). However, Fuller also noted that “even with such men the practice was often widely different from the mental faith” (404) and highlighted the contrast between ideal life and real life mentioning that “Dante, almost immediately after the death of Beatrice, married a lady chosen for him by his friends” (Myerson 405). After the death of his beloved in 1290, Dante had indeed married another woman called Gemma Donati (Myerson 426n54). In his journal, Emerson once compared Fuller to Beatrice, writing that “whilst Dante’s ‘Nuova Vita’ is almost unique in the literature of sentiment, I have called the imperfect record [Fuller] gave me of two of her days, ‘Nuovissima Vita’” (WNC 191). That is perhaps foreboding of the critical way in which Emerson would later describe the presence of sentiment in Fuller’s writing in Memoirs. In a section of Memoirs entitled “Letters,” Emerson summarised his critique of Fuller’s writing, declaring that “[i]n short, Margaret often loses herself in sentimentalism” (280). He added that although “[h]er integrity was perfect, and she was led and followed by
love, and was really bent on truth,” she was “too indulgent to the meteors of her fancy” (*MMFO* 280). “Sentiment,” from Latin *sentire* (to feel), denotes a degree of physicality that Fuller juxtaposed in her writing to more idealised versions of “womanhood” (as seen in previous sections, she used the Greek goddess Minerva, a symbol for strength, as an instrument for female empowerment); and yet that degree of physicality, as Ripley states in her article, was often rejected in favor of often male-produced purified visions of women.

II – Transcendentalists in Conversation: Of Social Expectations and Woman’s Education

A) Of Contemplative Lives and Faithful Wives: Discordant Visions of Womanhood

Even for Transcendentalists, there were expectations linked to women specifically that differed from those related to men. In Emerson’s writings, women are indeed often associated with poetry—as is the case in a letter he wrote to Fuller in June 1840, “A woman in every part beautiful is a *practical poet*, is she not? awakening tenderness & hope & poetry in all whom she approaches” (*EL* 2:336). Echoes of that can be found in Emerson’s first official address on “Woman,” written for the Second Annual New England Woman’s Rights Convention in 1855, where the association between women and poetry is reiterated,

> There is no gift of nature without some drawback. . . . More vulnerable, more infirm, more mortal than men, they could not be such excellent artists in this element of fancy if they did not lend and give themselves to it. They are poets who believe their own poetry. They emit from their pores a colored atmosphere, one would say, wave upon wave of rosy light, in which they walk evermore, and see all objects through this warm-tinted mist that envelops them. (*Sacks* 160)
Emerson’s views on women’s rights were progressive for his time and he always openly declared himself in favor of women’s vote; however, his remarks appear particularly problematic when compared to the more radical stances adopted by some of his female contemporaries, who did not only demand more rights, but who proposed a rethinking of gender roles. After listening to Emerson’s lecture on “Being and Seeming,” Child perceived double standards that she felt Emerson was unjustly setting for women and men: in *Letters from New-York*, she recounted how he had “urged women to be, rather than seem . . . [for] all this seeming world would not gain hearts like being truly what God made them” (237). Child expressed her disapproval: although the “advice was excellent, . . . the motive, by which it was urged, brought of flush of indignation over my face” (237). She explained that while “Men were exhorted to be, rather than to seem, that they might fulfil the sacred mission for which their souls were embodied; . . . women were urged to simplicity and truthfulness, that they might become more pleasing” (237). One could make a similar point about Emerson’s definition of “women” as “poets who believe their own poetry” in the 1855 address, in which Emerson stated that women have an inherently poetic nature, an innate tendency to receive inspiration. That essentialist view of womanhood is not surprising for the time; however, what is worth noting, is that Emerson’s argument that women are “poets who believe their own poetry” equates their artistic sensitivity to a certain type of weakness (“drawback”), which suggests women’s vulnerability (“more infirm”) and implicitly serves to justify their inferiority to men (“more mortal than men”). While the anaphoric repetition of the adjective “more”—“more vulnerable, more infirm, more mortal”—reinforces the idea of women’s supposed weakness, phrases like “emit from their pores” and “warm-tinted mist that envelops them” hint at a certain passivity inherent in women, as if their
talent were something they display inadvertently. At another point in the address, Emerson also states that “Man is the will, and Woman the sentiment” (Sacks 158).

As Len Gougeon commented in one of the first articles published on the subject, for “Emerson, the power of sentiment is not insignificant. In fact, it is an expression of mankind’s intuitive strength and divinity,” which for women “expresses itself in marriage, art, and education, and through those activities, women play a fundamental part in shaping society (580-581). Unfortunately, as Gougeon suggested, “It is this sensitivity that Emerson fears will be compromised if women pursue a more public role” (580-581). Such were the barriers that stood between women and equality in antebellum America for, even within the most progressive circles, men were still reluctant to grant the opposite sex all the rights afforded to male citizens.

In response to this kind of problematic reverence, Ripley stated that there was nothing ideal in the vision of woman as aloof from everything. In a swift rhetorical move, she attempted to redefine the concept of “ideal woman” herself and described her as someone who is totally immersed in culture,

> Thought should be her atmosphere; books her food; friends her occasional solace. Prosperity will not dazzle her, for her own spirit is always brighter than its sunshine, and if the deepest sorrow visits her, it will only come to lift her to a higher region, where, with all of life far beneath her, she may sit regally apart till the end. Is this the ideal of a perfect woman, and if so, how does it differ from a perfect man? (366)

Over and over, Ripley debunked the vision of woman as someone who lives a purely “contemplative life,” reminding her readers that women do, in fact, work: she openly critiqued the invisibilisation of women’s domestic labour, pinpointing “that in the spot
where man throws aside his heavy responsibilities, his couch of rest is often
prepared by his faithful wife, at the sacrifice of all her quiet contemplation and
leisure” (315). As Wayne remarks, domestic labour took a toll on “individual thinkers”
like Ripley and Fuller, “But, unlike the majority of their peers, all eventually found
themselves in circumstances that either allowed them some freedom to pursue
writing and lecturing or, in fact, financially compelled them to pursue such activities in
order to support their families” (Wayne 76). In Ripley’s article, the point made about
women’s work is combined with a plea in favor of woman’s contemplative life. On the
one hand, Ripley deplores that “if there is a being exposed to turmoil and indurating
care, it is woman, in the retirement of her own home” for her “life is usually bustle
and hurry, or barren order, dreary decorum and method, without vitality” (316). On
the other hand, she argues that woman “should be seen . . . calmly contemplating
beauty in all its forms, studying the harmony of life, as well as of outward nature,
deciding nothing, learning all things, gradually forming her own ideal” (317). Ripley
hoped that women would be able to benefit from contemplative life as much as men
did and in that way she also indicted the false belief that a life of domesticity equalled
a life of intellectual satisfaction. Her reference to Emerson’s writings on
contemplative life is implicit; while in “The American Scholar,” Emerson stated that
“Action is within the scholar subordinate” (1:94), he added in 1850 that “If I were to
compare action of a much higher strain with a life of contemplation, I should not
venture to pronounce with much confidence in favour of the former. Mankind have
such a deep stake in inward illumination” (CW 4:266). While Emerson deemed it less
satisfactory, he nonetheless viewed the domestic sphere as belonging to both men
and women—Eckel explains that by “exploding the idea of ‘home’ in his early lecture
on ‘Home,’ Emerson reframes the domestic sphere as a shared habitation for men
and women in their pursuit of a ‘deeper Home’ that sheltered both physical selves and spiritual principles” (191). Interestingly, the corollary to that finding according to Eckel is that “[o]nce the home is endowed with global significance, mere housework becomes drudgery for women as well as for men – a point Emerson underscores in a chapter on ‘Domestic Life’” (191).

**B) A Transcendentalist Call for Women’s Rights: Ripley on Education and Self-Assertion**

Commenting on domestic life, Ripley suggests the oppressive conviction that woman only exists as “a faithful wife” had somehow entered the mind of women themselves, as a sort of self-confidence crisis: she acknowledges this by stating that “[v]ery few of her sex suspect even how noble and beautiful is that which they legitimately occupy, for they are early deprived of the privilege of seeing things as they are” (315). In a letter to Fuller written in July 1839, Emerson made a similar observation and remarked, “Is it not wonderful what inspirations women have. . . . If they would only hold themselves at their own price, if they would not subdue their sentiments, the age of heroes would come at once!” (EL 2:210-211). In both Ripley’s and Emerson’s depictions, women appear as lacking the confidence to believe in their own powers and as unaware of their capabilities, a clear consequence of gender discrimination.

With woman deprived of fundamental rights, Ripley deploringly declared that in “our present state of society woman possesses not; she is under possession” (315). In her plea, Ripley explained how a proper education would put an end to this state of numbness in which woman found herself silent and confined, for Ripley knew that while “[h]is wish is law, hers only the unavailing sigh uttered in secret” (316). The use of the word “law” indicates that what was happening within the walls
of the home was also reflected at state-level, in a democracy which still did not recognise woman as a complete, dignified entity. Ripley’s lucidity with regards to the dynamics of gender oppression is astounding—“In the common course of events she [woman] is selected as the life-companion of some one of the other sex; because selected, she fixes her affections upon him, and hardly ventures to exercise upon him even her powers of observation” (364). Her powerful indictment makes clear that without the ability to reflect critically, which she would develop through a proper education, woman would never be free. Through a series of vigorous rhetorical questions, Ripley asks “Why is she not encouraged to think and penetrate through externals to principles?” (317). Her exhortation to educate women comes with a kind reassurance to those who fear such a drastic change: “The faults of those she loves should never be veiled by her affection, but placed in their true relation to character, by the deep insight with which she penetrates beneath them. With high heroic courage, she should measure the strength” (317). Ripley and fellow Transcendentalists—female and male—understood very well that it was fundamental that women were granted the right to education: the fact that the verb “penetrate” is repeated four times in Ripley’s article epitomises her belief in the pivotal importance of education in the fight against gender discrimination. In Woman, Fuller was indeed uncompromising about the fact that “it should be acknowledged that [women] have intellect which needs developing; that they should not be considered completed if being of affection and habit alone” (56). When the idea of a series of conversations came to her, Fuller similarly outlined the need “[t]o systemize thought and give a precision in which our sex are so deficient, chiefly, I think because they have so few inducements to test and classify what they receive” (WNC 173). She knew how important it was to allow women to develop critical thinking and to compensate for a
purposeful, societal lack of institutions that would do the same: with her Conversations, Fuller aimed indeed at “supplying a point of union to well-educated and thinking women in a city which, with great pretensions to mental refinement, boasts at present nothing of the kind” (WNC 86).

Aware of the privilege of having received an education, Ripley, Fuller, and other women continued to extend that opportunity to those who weren’t as lucky. In 1844, one year after “The Great Lawsuit” appeared in the Dial, Fuller visited the women prisoners of Sing Sing. The experience left a strong (positive) mark on Fuller, and she compared meeting these women with her discussions for women in Boston: “They were among the so called worst, but nothing could be more decorous than their conduct, and frank too. All passed much as in one of my Boston Classes” (FL 3:237). In the same letter, written to Elizabeth Hoar in October 1844, Fuller acknowledged that her “path had been a favored one” compared to the majority of women of that time. With regards to the standard of women’s education in the first half of the nineteenth century, Fuller represented in fact an exception: her father Timothy had brought her up in a way that was most often reserved only for boys—by the age of ten, Fuller could read in several European languages. As she would later describe in her “Autobiographical Romance,” Fuller’s upbringing was as rigorous as it was exhausting for a young child. Similarly, Ripley was a rare example of a highly educated woman; she was, however, also denied a college education, unlike her husband who was in his final year at Harvard Divinity School when they first met. Fuller’s—and Ripley’s—commitment to women’s education was utterly democratic in that it went beyond class and aimed to fight discrimination of gender, race, or poverty. A month after her visit, Fuller wrote directly to the women inmates of Sing Sing and asserted, once again, the redemptive quality of culture,
I hope you will accept these books as a token that, though on returning to the
world you may have much to encounter from the prejudices of the unthinking,
yet there are many who will be glad to encourage you to begin a new career,
and redeem the past by living lives of wise and innocent acts, useful to your
fellow-creatures and fit for being gifted with immortal souls. (WNC 205)

Wishing these women well, Fuller insisted on the power of education which she
hoped would give them the strength and confidence to face “the prejudices of the
unthinking” when re-entering society.

The work of women Transcendentalists like Ripley and Fuller should be
regarded as acts of social reformism, for they attempted to create a space for
women which did not exist before. While Fuller’s Conversations encouraged women
to rethink their role in society by countering the common belief that women were
mere “ornaments” (Simmons 217), Ripley’s article on “Woman” insisted on the
pivotal role of education and urged readers to view women as intellectual beings. Not
only do the works of Transcendentalist women appear to have been in conversation
with one another, but the circular exchange also impacted the wider
Transcendentalist community. Published in January 1841, Ripley’s article preceded
just by a few months the creation of the famous Utopian, Transcendentalist
community Brook Farm. As Sterling Delano explains, Brook Farm women enjoyed
freedom from the prevailing social and religious expectations that defined the “Cult of
True Womanhood” in antebellum America. And just as Ripley’s ideas shaped that
experiment, Brook Farm in turn influenced Fuller, who visited the West Roxbury
community in October 1842, months before “The Great Lawsuit” was published in the *Dial*.\textsuperscript{14}

In the longer term, by calling out society’s discriminatory practices and asserting the need for a fair rebalancing of the polis, writings like Fuller’s and Ripley’s inspired women for decades to fight for their rights. Fuller confuted the prevailing claim that woman was inferior to man, she revolted against the fact that women should find themselves in a state of forced ignorance and subsequent inferiority, and touched upon the notion that gender might be more socially construed than people liked to think. Fuller became a major reference for second-wave feminists and the mark of Fuller’s theories on the history of feminism can be traced up to Judith Butler’s gender performativity and beyond. I hope to have provided supporting evidence that will allow us to add Sophia Ripley to the list of precursors to the first American women’s movement, and to later moments of feminist history.

\textsuperscript{14} In *An American Romantic Life* (pp. 63-64), Capper shows that Fuller had quite an ambivalent relationship with Brook Farm and the Ripleys. After briefly considering moving to Brook Farm with her mother at the onset of the project, Fuller abandoned the idea and only occasionally visited the community through the years.
Conclusion

Emerson’s views on womanhood are ambiguous and his stance on the matter remains a point of critical contention today. On the one hand, as Cole remarks, “Wives in his estimation were apparently so embedded in the lives of others as to have no ‘genius & cultivation,’ and he said no more of them” (“Conversing” 157). Looking into Emerson’s personal connections, Cole also states that “[b]enevolent Lidian was excluded from the start in his highest ranks of the spirit” (“Conversing” 157). On the other hand, Gilbert defends Emerson’s feminist credentials by noting that he condemned “poets [who] promoted a stereotyped and generic view of woman,” for they were “like the ‘misogynist’ he had met who ‘looked on every woman as an imposter’” (EJ 11:455) and “because real women did not resemble these bland and homogenized stereotypes” (215).

The way in which Emerson portrayed Fuller in Memoirs is no less ambiguous. In Chapter One, I based my investigation on a series of distinctions: I examined how Emerson, Fuller, and other members of the Transcendentalist circle looked at womanhood by distinguishing between “ideal womanhood” and “real womanhood.” I compared Emerson’s vision of women as “queens” with Fuller’s recourse to the world of Ideas, which she moved beyond by utilizing it as means for female empowerment, and I also examined Ripley’s take on “Woman” by analysing her eponymous Dial article, in which she resolved the woman-muse dichotomy by redefining (and glorifying) the reality of women’s lives.

In Chapter Two, I aim to look more closely at the significance of Emerson’s editorial choices in Memoirs: comparing his approach with the ones adopted by his two co-authors, but also analysing the aspects of Fuller’s life that he purposely
ignored and/or criticised, I further reflect on what Emerson’s depiction of Fuller in *Memoirs* can tell us about his real stance on the woman question.
Chapter Two – Rewriting the Life of an “Ultra Radical”

Introduction – The Problem of Privacy

Either used as a source of biographical information on Fuller, or dismissed for the biased nature of its portrayals, Memoirs is rarely considered for what it actually is—a literary work. Seldom commented on, there is, for instance, an important metaliterary dimension to the biography, in which its authors discuss the book’s conception as well as the difficulties they encountered while writing it. Emerson, Channing, and Clarke all mention feeling a sense of uneasiness, akin to imposture, while dealing with Fuller’s letters and journals for the completion of Memoirs. Confronted with the issue of privacy, they all seem to doubt whether anyone should be reading those texts and, also, how such private writings could ever be made so public.

At the very onset of the biographical project, in 1850, Emerson wrote to Sam Ward: “yesterday, hints from Ellery, that the Journals contain so many allusions to people that they can hardly be seen, or perhaps by one only, meaning me” (EL 4:228). Emerson knew that whoever was going to be editing such work would face great challenges and suggested that only one person should read Fuller’s intimate writings so as to preserve her privacy:

   whoever is editor, it will not be quite plain what he is to take & what he is to leave of these manifold threads, some pale coloured, & some glowing. The personalities are essential; - leave them out & you leave out Margaret. It would be prudentest for all parties to abdicate any part in the matter, - all but the editor, - & make up their hearts to take their fate from his discretion. But when he has finished his task, I think he must bring it to our jury to decide whether it shall go to the press, or to the flames. (EL 4:231)
The solution which the authors of *Memoirs* eventually found in order to deal with such “coloured” and “glowing” writing is that people’s names were erased. Unfortunately, that was not the only thing that was erased from Fuller’s texts; as I go on to demonstrate in this chapter, a great deal of censorship took place in the name of “discretion.”

In the opening pages of “Jamaica Plain,” Channing’s first chapter in *Memoirs*, he addresses the problem of privacy and, speaking directly to the reader, he writes: “I have no hope of conveying to readers my sense of the beauty of our relation, as it lies in the past with brightness falling on it from Margaret’s risen spirit. . . . And much of her inner life, as confidentially disclosed, could not be represented without betraying a secret trust” (2:9). For Channing, remaining loyal to his friend meant that he would not reveal what was “confidentially disclosed.” It is hard to determine what Channing considered to be “confidential,” for the word can both refer to something that is marked by intimacy (of no particular interest, but secret to the person whom it concerns) or something that, if revealed, could be prejudicial to either the person who said it or to other people. Channing summarised his approach to readers stating that “all that can be done is to open the outer courts, and give a clue for loving hearts to follow” (*MMFO* 2:9). Yet this type of admission to cuts and withholdings is what damaged the credibility of *Memoirs* in the first place amongst critics and scholars.

Clarke also wrote about his loyalty to Fuller in his chapter “Life in Cambridge,” yet he did so differently from Channing. Clarke decided that it was fair to break the silence now that Fuller was no longer alive: referring to a specific text, he explained: “In a postscript she adds, ‘No other cousin or friend of any style is to see this note’. So for twenty years it has lain unseen . . . . And now that noble heart sleeps beneath the tossing Atlantic, and I feel no reluctance in showing to the world this expression
of pure youthful ardour" (MMFO 1:68). Clarke felt “no reluctance” in showing what Fuller had asked him to keep private: he believed that by revealing something that Fuller wanted to keep secret he might actually contribute positively to her posthumous reputation, for “It may, perhaps, lead some wise worldlings, who doubt the possibility of such a relation, to reconsider the grounds of their skepticism” (MMFO 1:68). This shows that Clarke was aware that Fuller’s persona might have been misunderstood by some of her contemporaries and he took an active step into trying to safeguard her image after she passed away. Clarke also struggled with the notion of privacy, in that he believed that revealing all about his friendship with Fuller would mean to also lay himself bare: “The difficulty which we all feel in describing our past intercourse and friendship with Margaret Fuller, is that the intercourse was so intimate, and the friendship, so personal, that it is like making a confession to the public of our most interior selves,” “To print one of her letters is like giving an extract from our own private journal” (MMFO 1:61). Yet Clarke somehow decided to sacrifice himself in the name of his friendship with Fuller and recognised that “it seems due to this great soul that those of us who have been blessed and benefitted by her friendship should be willing to say what she had done for us, - undeterred by the thought that to reveal her is to expose ourselves” (MMFO 1:61).

As shown by these various examples, the value of Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli does not exclusively lie in its more or less exhaustive exegesis of Fuller’s life, yet the biography also bears enormous potential for what it can tell us about its writers—all key figures of American Transcendentalism. Overlooked and disregarded, Memoirs provides a unique and exceptional insight into the lives of its authors and into their relationship with Fuller. More specifically, it is fascinating to examine what they chose to say about it, and how they proceeded to do it. In this
chapter’s first section, entitled “‘An Essential Line of American History’: Memoirs and its Authors,” I look at the way in which Emerson, Clarke, and Channing related their first encounter with Fuller as well as how they chose to confront the issue of Fuller’s mysterious union with Ossoli. In the second section of Chapter Two, I examine Fuller’s unpublished journal fragments from 1844 (Fruitlands Museum) in order to further highlight and reflect on Emerson’s omissions and editorial choices. And, thirdly, in “‘Woman, or Artist?’: Emerson and the Fuller Dilemma in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli,” I look at the way in which Emerson’s editorial choices reflect his struggle to reconcile himself with Fuller’s nonconformism.
2.1 “An Essential Line of American History”: Memoirs and Its Authors

Although Emerson ended up taking on the role of editor, the idea to “write some Life of Margaret” originally stemmed from Channing, who first thought of “calling it ‘Margaret and Her Friends’” (EL 4:222). Greeley, too, wrote to Emerson in August 1850, urging him to work on “a proper edition of Margaret’s works” (EL 4:225). Greeley seemed quite adamant that Emerson was the only person who should write a biography of Fuller, and he suggested that Emerson should do so almost out of a sense of moral duty—“all say you ought to write that – must write that” (EL 4:225).

Moreover, Greeley doubted that Channing could be a suitable author/editor for such project, “If Henry Channing will write another, very good; but he is apt to be irresolute and dilatory; and besides, if he would write his memoirs would not injure yours, and scarcely render it less necessary” (EL 4:225). He therefore implored Emerson, “Will you write a Memoir? And will you do any and every thing else in the premises?” (EL 4:225). Richard Frederic Fuller, Margaret’s brother, also reached out to Emerson and “said he considered [him] Margaret’s spiritual representative” (EL 4:227).

After receiving “an invitation from Channing to a conference with him on the subject of a memoir of Margaret” (EL 4:225), Emerson began to gather manuscripts on Fuller in August 1850. Initially, it looked like Emerson and Channing were going to work with Samuel Gray Ward—as shown by a note to Richard Fuller written by Emerson on September 1st, “When Ward, Channing, & I have decided on the part we will take, I shall know whether to use or to restore the trust” (EL 4:227). What’s more, Emerson asked Ward to be the editor of the biography: “Perhaps one person should undertake the whole work, & everything should be put unreservedly in his hands. If
you could, & would, you should be that person” (EL 4:231). But in 1851, Emerson was the editor and Sam Ward’s role had been taken over by James Freeman Clarke: in fact, Ward’s name does not even appear in the “Table of Contents” of Memoirs, despite the fact that his early contributions are thought to have been included in the biography (EL 4:255n52).

From the very beginning, Emerson was well aware that writing a “Life of Margaret” (EL 4:222) would be challenging. He had “[m]any questions” about the feasibility of such work: indeed, he wondered “whether the materials will be surrendered, on all hands? Whether it can be done by one? Whether it is publishable if done?” (EL 4:222). Just like Channing and Clarke, Emerson also addressed those challenges in the Memoirs themselves: “Of the friends who surrounded her, at that period, it is neither easy to speak, nor not to speak. A life of Margaret is impossible without them, she mixed herself so inextricably with her company” (MMFO 1:205).

In August 1850, when Emerson began his work on Memoirs, there was a real effort on his behalf to collect all of her writings: he tried to contact as many friends as possible and asked for anything that could be useful—letters, journals written by Margaret—to be sent to him. Of this, Emerson kept track of in a notebook entitled “Margaret Fuller Ossoli,” later transcribed in volume 11 of The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, in which he collected passages written by Fuller as well as writings by her friends and family, framing some of these quotations with his own biographical commentary. In the notebook, Emerson outlined a preliminary “Table of Contents,” which bears strong resemblances to its definitive version in Memoirs:

15 See Chapter Three, section 3.1, for my analysis of Emerson’s notebook.
Whereas volume 1’s chapters are identical to the published version, chapters in volume 2 differ slightly: chapter VII on “Highlands” was included in the 1852 version as part of “VII - New York (Journals and Letters & C.)” and instead of “X - Wreck,” Memoirs’ last chapter is more subtly entitled “Homeward.” What’s more, the number of pages ended up being redistributed differently to how Emerson had initially imagined: “Youth,” a chapter made of Fuller’s autobiographical writings, was diminished by half its size and ended up consisting of 40 pages in the final version instead of 80 pages as in Emerson’s original plans; the same happened to “New York,” which went from the anticipated 100 pages to 51 in the published version. The final version of the “Table of Contents” of Memoirs both consists of chapters written by one specific author—“Cambridge” is attributed to Clarke, “Concord” and “Boston” to Emerson, and “Jamaica Plain” to Channing—and of collections of Fuller’s writings such as chapter “VIII - Europe, Letters.”

In the first part of this section, I focus on the first pages of Clarke’s, Emerson’s, and Channing’s chapters in Memoirs (respectively, “Cambridge,” “Concord,” and “Jamaica Plain”) as I analyse the rhetorical devices that all three employed to try to protect Fuller’s reputation. In part two, I concentrate on a matter
which was tightly linked to Fuller’s reputation, i.e. her marriage, and examine how the authors dealt with such a delicate issue.

I – Uneasy Beginnings and Textual Confessions: Emerson, Clarke and Channing on First Meeting Fuller

A) Justifying Fuller: Of Bad Impressions and Friendly Justifications

Emerson’s, Channing’s, and Clarke’s chapters all begin in a rather similar way: almost symmetrically, after briefly recollecting their first meeting with Fuller, the three authors praise her but also mention that she tended to leave quite bad first impressions on people. James Freeman Clarke was the first to meet Fuller: as he recounts, his “acquaintance with Sarah Margaret Fuller began in 1829. We both lived in Cambridge, and from that time until she went to Groton to reside, in 1833, I saw her, or heard from her, almost every day” (MMFO 1:62). He explains that the two were actually related—“There was a family connexion, and we called each other cousin,” “I had once before seen Margaret, when we were both children about five years of age” (MMFO 1:62). Critics have commented on that connection, suggesting that Clarke might only have brought it up to quell any doubts of a romantic involvement with Fuller. Whether that truly motivated his comments or not, Fuller actually did the opposite while writing to her “cousin”: she minimized their kinship by signing, ironically, ‘Your cousin only thirty-seven degrees removed, M.’” (MMFO 1:63).

Clarke described his first adult encounter with Fuller very positively, as shown by the enumeration “What fire, what exuberance, what reach, grasp, overflow of thought, shone in her conversation!” (MMFO 1:62). He saw Fuller as a friend who could elevate him spiritually—his appraisal is indeed pervaded with references to “elevation” such as “a friendship which brought light to my mind, which enlarged my
heart, and gave elevation and energy to my aims and purposes,” “we never met without my feeling that she was ready. . . . to demand of me, always, the best that I could be or do” (64), “She accepted me for this friend, and to me it was a gift of the gods, an influence like no other” (MMFO 1:62). Metaphorical expressions such as “gift of the gods”—“gods”, who are up high in the sky—and words like “influence” (etymologically related to the verb “to boil), all partake of an image of Fuller as a spiritually elevating presence, similarly to Emerson’s likening her to a “queen” as seen in Chapter One. However positive Fuller’s influence was in his eyes, Clarke also acknowledged that not everybody shared his impression of Margaret—“at the time of which I write, she seemed, and was to the multitude, a haughty and supercilious person, - while to those whom she loved, she was all the more gentle, tender and true” (MMFO 1:65).

Emerson’s chapter “Concord” similarly insists on the negative impression that Fuller made on people—“It is to be said, that Margaret made a disagreeable first impression on most persons, including those who became afterwards her best friends, to such an extreme that they did not wish to be in the same room with her” (MMFO 1:202). Emerson and Fuller met for the first time on July 22nd, 1836—“It was not, however, till the next July that her first visit to our house was arranged, and she came to spend a fortnight with my wife” (MMFO 1:201-202). About that encounter, Emerson relates how he first thought Fuller was rather unpleasant, noting that “her appearance had nothing prepossessing. Her extreme plainness, - a trick of incessantly opening and shutting her eyelids, - the nasal tone of her voice, - all repelled; and I said to myself, we shall never get far” (MMFO 1:202). However, Emerson also gives the reasons behind his harsh judgment: “she made me laugh more than I liked,” “for I was, at that time, an eager scholar of ethics, and had tasted
the sweets of solitude and stoicism, and I found something profane in the hours of amusing gossip into which she drew me” (*MMFO* 1:202). Emerson’s explanation suggests Fuller had somehow made him feel uncomfortable, and that is the reason why he did not like her at first. However, that also strikes a more positive light on Emerson’s first negative impressions, suggesting that it was because of his “resistances” to her character that he initially struggled to get on with her. Emerson indeed quickly changed his mind: as he recounts in *Memoirs*, “She had an incredible variety of anecdotes, and the readiest wit to give an absurd turn to whatever passed; and the eyes which were so plain at first, soon swam with fun and drolleries, and the very tides of joy and superabundant life” (1:203).

Channing’s chapter “Jamaica Plain” also opens on an account of how he initially misunderstood Fuller: he admits that, “it must candidly be confessed, that I then suspected her of affecting the part of a Yankee Corinna” (*MMFO* 2:7). Corinne, Madame de Staël’s fictional and eponymous character,\(^\text{16}\) was the Romantic female artist par excellence. Channing initially thought that Fuller “seemed to walk enveloped in a shiny fog of sentimentalism” (7), yet he quickly changed his mind and realised that, “conscious as she was of an unfulfilled destiny, and of an undeveloped being, Margaret was no pining sentimentalist” (*MMFO* 2:39). Channing and Fuller first met in 1839, “It was while Margaret was residing at Jamaica Plain, in the summer of 1839, that we first really met as friends” (5), “till the summer of 1839, when, as has been already said, the friendship, long before rooted, grew up and leafed and bloomed” (*MMFO* 2:9). Once he “caught a glimpse of her real self” (7), Channing realised that Fuller “was, indeed, The Friend” (*MMFO* 2:40). Although he quickly became Fuller’s great admirer, Channing also remained aware throughout

\(^\text{16}\) *Corinne, or Italy* was published in 1807.
the years that her character might still be misjudged by others. He justified her apparent faults in a compelling passage:

Her stately deportment, border though it might on arrogance, but expressed high-heartedness. Her independence, even if haughty and rash, was the natural action of a self-centred will, that waited only fit occasion to prove itself heroic. Her earnestness to read the hidden history of others was the gauge of her own emotion. The enthusiasm that made her speech so affluent, when measured by the average scale, was the unconscious overflow of a poetic temperament. And the ardour of her friends’ affection proved the faithfulness of her love. (MMFO 2:114)

The structure of Channing’s sentences repeats itself over and over: the use of adverbs of concession suggests that Fuller’s character was simply misjudged by those who did not like her, while contrasting traits—placed at the beginning and at the end of each sentence and separated by mirror-effect commas—reflect the complexity of Fuller’s temperament (“arrogance” and “high-heartedness,” “haughty” and “heroic,” “average” and “poetic”).

**B) A Matter of Reputation: Of Bad Rumours and Gender Boundaries**

The notion of “reputation” pervades Emerson’s and Channing’s accounts of their first meeting with Fuller. Channing first heard of Fuller years before he actually met her in person, and his acquaintance was initially mediated: “It was through the medium of others, however, that at this time I best learned to appreciate Margaret’s nobleness of nature and principle” (MMFO 2:8). James Freeman Clarke was Channing’s and Fuller’s common friend and it is through his eyes that Channing first started to know Fuller, “My most intimate friend in the Theological School, James Freeman Clarke, was her constant companion in exploring the rich gardens of German literature; and
from his descriptions I formed a vivid image of her industry, comprehensiveness, buoyancy, patience and came to honour her intelligent interest in high problems” (MMFO 2:8). Clarke’s praises fostered Channing’s curiosity: he related how his “curiosity was piqued as to this entertaining personage, I never sought an introduction, but, on the contrary, rather shunned encounter with one so armed from head to foot in saucy sprightliness,” for many were talking about Fuller’s talents, “though young, she was already noted for conversational gifts, and the rare skill of attracting to her society, not spirited collegians only, but men mature in culture and of established reputation” (MMFO 2:6).

Many of the things that Channing had heard about Fuller before he met her had to do with the notion of gender: first of all, Fuller “was considered a prodigy of talent and accomplishment; but a sad feeling prevailed, that she had been overtasked by her father, who wished to train her like a boy” (MMFO 2:5). Because of the way in which Timothy Fuller chose to conduct the education of his daughter, Fuller’s upbringing was very different from that normally reserved to girls in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is as if Fuller had crossed, since a very young age, the gender boundaries that were commonly accepted and therefore “her vivacity, decisive tone, downrightness and contempt of conventional standards, continued to repel” (MMFO 2:6). Fuller’s personality and character were not recognised as feminine, and that might be why “[s]he appeared too intense in expression, action, emphasis, to be pleasing” (MMFO 2:6).

Emerson’s account resembles that of Channing in that he also heard of Fuller before actually meeting her—“I became acquainted with Margaret in 1835. Perhaps it was a year earlier that Henry Hedge, who had long been her friend, told me of her genius and studies, and loaned me her manuscript translation of Goethe’s Tasso”
Yet Emerson’s account also translates a certain uneasiness regarding Fuller’s personality: Emerson mentions Fuller’s negative reputation, and links it unequivocally to her gender: “She had a dangerous reputation for satire, in addition to her great scholarship. The men thought she carried too many guns, and the women did not like one who despised them” (MMFO 1:202). Fuller never conformed to the limited definition of what a woman should be in antebellum America, and that attracted all sorts of unfair criticism: as reported by Emerson, the “rumor was much spread abroad, that she was sneering, scoffing, critical, disdainful of humble people, and of all but the intellectual. I had heard it whenever she was named. It was a superficial judgement” (MMFO 1:203).

It is in order to protect her from such smearing comments that Emerson, Channing, and Clarke wrote Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli. Aware that Fuller could leave very bad first impressions on people, the authors of Memoirs filled their work with justifications of why Fuller should not be misunderstood. Inextricably linked to Fuller’s reputation, the question of Fuller’s marriage, on which I will focus next, shows just how keen they were to protect it.


As recorded in Emerson’s journal, he and Channing talked about the probability of Fuller’s marriage—“W.H.C. fancied that M. had not married: that a legal tie was contrary to her view of a noble life. I, on the contrary, believed that . . . she would feel that this was a tie which ought to have every solemnest sanction” (EJ 11:463). Yet, when confronted with these questions, the editors of Memoirs chose to safeguard Fuller’s reputation and, in 1852, they countered all possible doubts about her
marriage by including the name of Ossoli in the title of their work. What’s more, a full section of Chapter VIII, “Europe,” was devoted to Fuller’s “Private Marriage.”

The thirteen-page long section entitled “The Private Marriage” was entirely drawn from a text written after Fuller’s death by Emelyn Story, her “closest confidante in Rome” (Marshall 292), to which Channing later added annotations and corrections. The heavy marks of his editing are still visible in Emelyn Story’s forty-page long notebook, which has now been digitized by the Boston Public Library. In fact, a “portion of the manuscripts in Channing’s possession was later given to Higginson for his biography. He, in turn, left most of them to the Boston Public Library,” as indicated by Robert Hudspeth (1:63). In Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Higginson commented upon the cuts made by the editors of Memoirs to Story’s text: “If I vary somewhat from this account, as heretofore printed, it is because Mrs. Story’s original letter lies before me; and I have attached importance to certain passages which were omitted, perhaps for want of space or reasons of literary convenience, in the ‘Memoirs’” (238-239). Story’s notebook is only one of the many examples of how original sources were tampered with in order to suit the image of Fuller that the authors wanted to promote.

Having relied on them for his edition of The Letters of Margaret Fuller, Hudspeth drew some damning conclusions about the condition of Fuller’s manuscript letters: he particularly deplored Channing’s editing methods, for his “section of the Memoirs is a briar patch. People are misidentified; separate letters are silently joined together; letters are joined to Tribune essays; and Fuller’s language is often drastically changed” (1:62). Responsible for the last section of Memoirs, “Channing created the most serious problems for his readers. He had the troublesome last half
decade of Fuller’s life to cover, and he seems to have been most willfully capricious in handling the manuscripts" (FL 1:62).

Thanks to the fact that Emelyn Story’s manuscript notebook is still intact, the comparison between the original text and Memoirs’ version of it in “The Private Marriage” gives us a unique chance to take a closer look at Channing’s editing methods and to comment upon the nature of his choices. As has been previously established, Fuller’s marriage was a difficult question to tackle: first of all, there was little information available and, second of all, a large part of Fuller’s reputation depended on it. Hudspeth remarks how “[f]rom the start there were obvious problems, the most conspicuous of which was the secrecy surrounding Fuller’s marriage and the timing of Angelo’s birth. Each of the editors was expected to help clarify this ambiguous and embarrassing situation” (1:60). What’s more, “the mid nineteenth-century did not share our insistence on the sanctity of texts. For them, private writing was just that: private” (FL 1:61): therefore, Channing did not hesitate to alter—and damage—the original text when needed. The following analysis of Channing’s annotations on Story’s text reveals the degree to which his changes impacted the reception of the final version of the story in Memoirs.

A) Of Innocent Annotations and Invasive Corrections

The editing notes that appear on Emelyn Story’s manuscript text were made both with ink and with pencil. Due to their coherence throughout the text and to the resemblance of the handwriting, we can assume that they were made by the same hand. Furthermore, we can also assume that they were made by Channing because of the following signature next to one of the notes, “W.H.C.” (see figure 2):
Channing’s more or less invasive annotations were clearly designed to be read by a printer: one can see their direct application in the *Memoirs*. Some of his annotations are strictly technical: for example, Channing indicated when to begin a new paragraph (see figure 3) and wrote “connect” when he wanted to connect two paragraphs from Story’s original version (see figure 4). Fortunately, this type of annotation does not particularly hinder our reading of the original text.

However, Channing’s syntax and punctuation corrections are much more invasive. Those were also made both with pencil and ink, yet they often covered the word they
were attempting to rectify, preventing us from being able to read what had originally been written underneath. As shown by figures 5 and 6, Channing corrected Story’s writing—as is the case for “though” instead of “but” (see figure 6)—without necessarily altering the meaning of the sentence, but simply by improving its syntax.

(Fig. 5) Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldredge) Story Autograph Manuscript*. Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

(Fig. 6) “though.” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldredge) Story Autograph Manuscript*. Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

**B) Of Substitutions and Subterfuges: Explicit Omissions and Suspicious Additions**

One of the bluntest examples of Channing’s editing lies in a short passage—most likely written by him—that he scissored and glued on top of Story’s original manuscript. Fortunately, the material used to stick the blue piece of paper (see figures 7 and 8) on top of the original manuscript (see figure 9) did not ruin what lied underneath it. We can therefore compare the two passages and hypothesize on why Channing felt the need to replace the original text with a different one.
The story of Fuller and Ossoli’s first meeting in Saint Peters in Rome in *Memoirs* is followed by an account of how “This chance meeting at vespers service in St. Peters prepared the way for many interviews; and it was before Margaret’s departure for Venice, Milan, and Como, that Ossoli first offered her his hand, and was refused. Mrs Story continues:--“ (2:283). This passage of *Memoirs* matches word for word what is written on the blue piece of paper (see figure 7). However, the original passage lying underneath and crossed out with a pencil (see figure 9) differs completely from the one in *Memoirs*—unfortunately, such passage does not figure in Joel Myerson’s transcription of Story’s manuscript in *Fuller in Her Own Time*. I have therefore transcribed Emelyn Story’s passage—“A day or two after this Margaret observed that Ossoli walked before the house as if he had not the courage to enter
but still wished to see her. I think that she saw him only once or twice before she left for Naples but at this point I am not certain.”

(Fig. 9) “Underneath the blue piece of paper. Story’s text.” Story, Emelyn. Mrs. Emelyn (Eldredge) Story Autograph Manuscript. Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

In his biography of Fuller, Higginson also used Story’s notebook to tell the story of her relationship with Ossoli and it seems as though he managed to get rid of the blue piece of paper and read the original passage, which he then rephrased in his own words: “A day or two after this, she observed the same young man walking before the house, as if meditating entrance; and they finally met once or twice before she left Rome for the summer” (239).

Instead of depicting a romantic scene of courtship as the one described by Story and Higginson, Channing chose to relate Ossoli’s first proposal and Fuller’s subsequent rejection. Ossoli’s premature proposal is confirmed in one of Fuller’s letters, “Very soon he offered me his hand through life, but I never dreamed I should take it. I loved him and felt very unhappy to leave him, but the connexion seemed so every way unfit” (FL 5:292). However, narrating her rejection as opposed to telling the story of Ossoli’s shy and tender courting fosters a version of Fuller as more powerful and generally superior to the “poor,” rejected Ossoli. In another instance, after crossing out another section of Story’s notes, Channing wrote a passage to
justify his omission and signed it “W.H.C.” (see figure 10). Indeed, he gave reasons for his editing and explained that “I have omitted this passage, because coming in here, it gives the impression that the Storys knew of the Marriage then & contradicts the after account of Margaret confiding the secret – More than that, I doubt the accuracy of the account in some respects. W.H.C. The whole narrative has more order, [?] & effectiveness by letting the secret tell itself, at the right moment.”

(Fig. 10) “Channing’s justification.” Story, Emelyn. Mrs. Emelyn (Eldredge) Story Autograph Manuscript. Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

As later reported by Higginson, Channing had said that he had left out some passages of Story’s text purely because of “literary convenience” (239). However, the content of the paragraph that was omitted could also be deemed problematic for different reasons than the ones stated in his note. Transcribed by Chevigny in The Woman and the Myth, the section of Story’s text that Channing crossed out relates how, “Not long after coming to Rome, the old Marquis Ossoli died and as Angelo was his youngest <son> and only unmarried <one>, the care of his father during his last illness fell upon him…. When at length his Father died, he told Margaret that he <loved her and> must marry her or be miserable” (405). What is interesting here, is that Fillipo Ossoli—Angelo’s father—died in February 1848 and, thanks to Story’s note, we know that Angelo was then still “unmarried.” Therefore, the passage
implicitly suggests that Ossoli and Fuller could not have married before February, i.e. that they married in or after the spring of 1848, when she was already pregnant (as she had probably been since December 1847).

Some passages of Fuller’s and Ossoli’s private correspondence seem to corroborate such hypothesis. In fact, in April 1849, Ossoli had written to Fuller, “Dear, how much I wish to spend tomorrow with you, since I well believe you will remember that it is the 4th April” (FL 5:224n), to which she had then responded “Mio caro, Quanto e strana che noi non possiamo passare questo giorno insieme. Bisogna prefare essere piu felici un altro anno” (5:222)—“My dear, How very strange it is that we cannot spend this day together. We must pray to be happier another year” (FL 5:223). Since the two met on “Holy Thursday” 1847, April 1st,17 it therefore appears likely that April 4th might have been Fuller and Ossoli’s wedding anniversary—an assumption which a number of scholars have made. In fact, this hypothesis tends to support Marshall’s hypothesis, that “Margaret and Giovanni almost certainly married in secret outside Rome sometime during Margaret’s pregnancy” (355). Therefore, was it merely narrative convenience that forced Channing to omit this passage? Or does the need to justify himself hide a second motive, i.e. the fact that there was a possibility that Nino might have been conceived when Fuller and Ossoli were unmarried?

The motif of “marriage” unsurprisingly pervades Memoirs’ version of Story’s account. Yet, as we can see from figures 11 and 12, a number of references to “marriage” were actually the product of Channing’s interference. In figure 11, the

---

17 “The scrupulously reliable Charles Capper states without equivocation that Fuller’s first encounter with Ossoli took place on April 1” (Matteson 485n10).
expression “of her marriage” was added with pencil by Channing and appears in
Memoirs’ version of the text: “Then she told me of her marriage; where her child was, and
where he was born” (2:289). Although it is not apparent in figure 12, that
passage also underwent a considerable change: the original version “in the event of
her death” (see figure 12) was replaced by “in the event of her and her husband’s
death” in Memoirs (2:289). As noted by Chevigny, Channing “penned into Fuller’s
bedside confession her concern for her ‘husband,’ a word striking for its absence
from all of Fuller’s accounts of Ossoli” (Myth 403).

Although it cannot be established with certainty, it is likely that Ossoli and
Fuller did get married. The danger for children born out of wedlock was too high in
the Papal States—as written by Marshall, “Was there ever a risk that Nino might be
taken from her as a foundling?” (355). Matteson’s conclusion is that in “an age that
could impose crushing disadvantages on children born out of wedlock, however,
going on as before was out of the question”: therefore, although “No researcher has ever been able to unearth a marriage certificate with the names Margaret Fuller and Giovanni Ossoli,” except for the certificate of the Nino’s baptism, as previously noted, “the existing evidence make it more likely than not that they were married, though the time and place remain uncertain” (357).

Comparing Emelyn Story’s notebook of recollections with Channing’s editing of it reveals how strongly the editors of Memoirs shaped their texts in order to fit the image that they had envisioned for Fuller. Channing modified Story’s original testimony and created a somewhat distorted version of reality: the fact that Fuller’s marriage was told through an edited version of an indirect account gives us an indication of just how far Memoirs could depart from the truth. Analysing the way in which Emerson, Clarke, and Channing handled the task of writing the biography reveals a great degree of embarrassment which suggests that on top of wanting to protect Fuller’s reputation, the authors suppressed important aspects of both her private and public life also to protect themselves.

After considering how Channing modified the content of Emelyn Story’s account of Fuller and Ossoli’s relationship, I move on to more direct narratives and look, in the second section of this chapter, at how Fuller told her own story. More specifically, I focus on the unpublished fragments from the Fruitlands archive as I compare Fuller’s self-writing with Emerson’s portrayal of her in Memoirs.
2.2 “I Feel Too Full of Thought, Like Light”: Margaret Fuller’s Unpublished Journal Fragments

In a review of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* published in *The Leader* in 1855, George Eliot remarked that “Margaret Fuller’s mind was like some regions of her own American continent, where you are constantly stepping from the sunny ‘clearings’ into the mysterious twilight of the tangled forest” (*WNC* 233). Fuller’s 1844 journal fragments, on which this section focuses, read as the intimate renderings of those “sunny clearings”—days on which Fuller would write, “I think this must be an important era in my life” (“Fruitlands Transcript” 16)—as well as of darker moments, which she described as times of “inward sadness” (MHarF13).

Eliot’s linking of Fuller’s mind to geography is interesting, for Fuller’s work was greatly influenced by the places in which she lived. In Italy, where she spent the last years of her life, she reported on Giuseppe Mazzini’s revolution in her *Tribune* dispatches. Before moving to Europe, she spent two years in New York where she was confronted with the realities of the urban world and deeply affected by the dynamics of the city’s social system. Indeed, it was all very different from what she had known in Groton, in Cambridge, or even in Boston, where she had spent the first part of her life. Her trip to the Great Lakes and the Wisconsin territory in 1843, which she recounted in *Summer on the Lakes* (1844), also had a major impact on Fuller: as Lance Newman describes, it “forced her to confront the oppressive reality of America’s developing social order and it started a process of rapid and decisive radicalization” (67).

Purchased from The Goodspeed Book Shop by New England author and preservationist Clara Endicott Sears, the manuscripts of Fuller’s 1844 journal

---

18 Hereafter cited as MHarF.
fragments were held at the Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, before being relocated to Sharon, Massachusetts after their acquisition by the Trustees of Reservations in 2016. They include a ten-page long series of observations on woman and gender that Fuller wrote in February 1840, and which she used as notes for her famous Boston Conversations. The rest (and majority) of manuscript material dates from 1844; those pages cover the period during which Fuller finalised and published *Summer on the Lakes* and started expanding “The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men. Woman versus Women.” The end of the journal entries roughly coincides with her decision to go to Fishkill Landing in October, where she would finish writing *Woman*, before moving to New York City in November of the same year. More specifically, the 1844 fragments date from February, April, May, and June, but the corpus also includes several misplaced entries from August and September (Berg and Perry 40n6). These do not appear in Martha L. Berg and Alice De V. Perry’s “‘The Impulses of Human Nature’: Fuller’s Journal from June through October 1844” (1990) and consist of a complementary set of writings from a similar timeframe. Never published in their entirety, the journal fragments under analysis here have only been quoted in a small number of scholarly publications—see, for instance, Jeffrey Steele’s 2001 monograph *Transfiguring America* (chapter 7) and his chapter on “Margaret Fuller” in the *Encyclopaedia of American Poetry* (1998), as well as Joan Von Mehren’s *Minerva and the Muse: A Life of Margaret Fuller* (1994), and Charles Capper’s *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life. The Public Years* (2007). In

---

19 In the second volume of *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life*, Capper quotes briefly from those fragments as part of his account of Fuller’s Conversations (first series). The fragments do indeed match Elizabeth Peabody’s notes on the 16th and 17th conversations, which both took place in February 1840. It is therefore safe to assume that Capper’s hypothesis is correct and that the “Feb 20th” entry was indeed written that year.
1995, Joel Myerson called the Fruitlands archive “perhaps the least-used collection of Transcendentalist-related materials” (Myerson, “Catalog” 1)—and that remains still relatively true today.

The Fruitlands journal fragments offer a more truthful portrayal of Fuller than the one provided in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, in which she appears as rather one-dimensional. While Emerson’s approach to narrating Fuller’s life consisted in minimizing her radicalism—“In reciting the story of an affectionate and passionate woman,” he wrote, “the voice lowers itself to a whisper, and becomes inaudible” (MMFO 1:321)—Fuller’s 1844 journal entries consist in a celebratory self-portrayal that not only showcases her writing process during one of the most productive years of her career, but in which she insists, rather than dimming, on her own talent. The narrative is often metaliterary as Fuller describes her excitement as a writer, “I feel too full of thought, like light” (MHarF 28). Only one paragraph in the 1844 fragments appears in Memoirs, Fuller’s writings being otherwise too personal or too emotional to be reported in the biography. The content of her 1840 observations on gender is also, rather unsurprisingly, completely absent from the posthumous work. Just as Robert D. Habich writes about another set of Fuller’s writings, analysing the Fruitlands fragments provides us with yet another opportunity to let Fuller “speak for herself” (280).

In this section, I wish to show how Fuller’s journal entries from the Fruitlands Transcendentalist Collection contribute to our knowledge of her personal complexities and how they also outline the evolution of her thinking on “woman” during a pivotal time in her career. While in 1840 Fuller had just started her Conversations series—the successful first year was recorded by Elizabeth Peabody (Simmons)—1844 marked the end of the five-year project. For Belasco Smith, 1844
was “the most productive year of Fuller’s professional life” (“Discord” 78). In an article entitled “The Animating Forces of Discord,” Smith indeed describes how “[s]cholars have increasingly regarded the year of 1844 as a transformative moment for Fuller, often seeing it as an annus mirabilis, a time of spiritual crisis and conversion, as well as a time of deep personal disappointment about the men in her life” (77). Smith’s article does not reference the Fruitlands material and instead only relies on Berg and Perry’s publication.

In this section, I first analyse the ways in which the Fruitlands fragments offer a detailed account of Fuller’s emotional and physical journey throughout the first half of 1844. Focusing on “writing the self,” I consider Fuller’s journal entries as literary texts and reflect on the process of self-writing by analysing the relationship between the narrated and narrative “I.” Moving on to another type of “journey,” i.e. Fuller’s physical strolls in nature, I examine her poetic relationship with nature and the way in which nature becomes inspirational, acting as a drive for her literary work. Thirdly, I concentrate on the 1840 section of the fragments and show how these entries constitute an invaluable source of information on the evolution of Fuller’s theories on gender, which she developed in “The Great Lawsuit” and in Woman. Overall, my work aims to highlight those aspects of Fuller’s career that the authors of Memoirs purposefully left out of their account in order to showcase the limitations of the biography as well as to bring a more truthful account of Fuller’s thinking.

I – Writing the Self: An Emotional and Physical Journey

A) Transcendentalist Self-Writing

As Robert Sattelmeyer indicates, “[m]ost of the major figures associated with Transcendentalism kept journals for at least some period of their lives” and their
uses “ranged from the occasional notation of daily activities to highly self-conscious literary composition” (292). In a section of *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* entirely devoted to “Journals,” Sattelmeyer comments on “the dispositions of these journals” describing how “[s]ome have been lost or destroyed, some were posthumously censored, some still lie relatively unexplored in archives, some have been published in highly selective editions” (292). What’s more, Sattelmeyer notes that “gender also complicates the history of Transcendental journal keeping as well as the trajectory of scholarship about it” (295) and accounts for the state of Fuller’s journals as follows,

> Fuller's fame—or perhaps notoriety—was chiefly responsible for the distortion and partial erasure of the record of her private writing. Ironically, the most voluminous, long-lasting, and interesting journal by a woman prominently associated with Transcendentalism—Caroline Healey Dall—owes its preservation to the fact that Dall never quite achieved the sort of public recognition that came to Fuller. (298)

The scattered conditions of Fuller’s journals are partly due to the ill-treatment of her papers by the authors of *Memoirs*, who did not hesitate to cross, annotate, and even cut entire sections of her writing, and also to the circumstances of her death—a shipwreck, during which most of her belongings were lost. While some of her journals did survive and have been published, many of them bear the marks of heavy editing, as shown by a note by Berg and Perry on the 1844 manuscripts’ conditions:

---

The presence of . . . two editorial notations indicating missing pages suggests that there was intention in or a design to their removal, perhaps because their content was too revealing or in appropriate to the image of Fuller that her editors wanted to communicate to the world. Such censoring practices by Emerson, Channing, and Clarke after Fuller's death have been well documented. In handling her letters and journals, her editors may also have been simply careless. (54)

The Fruitlands manuscripts under analysis contain, in parts, annotations that are still visible and that were most likely made by Channing while working on Memoirs. In a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Channing proudly explained that “the book was chiefly mine in conception and execution. All the material with the exception of R.W.E. & J.F.C.’s private contributions passed through my hands” (“Letter”). Although his markings on the Fruitlands papers are quite peripheral, Channing’s “hands” were a major source of damage to Fuller’s writing as shown in previous sections. As Cinthia Gannett, author of Gender and the Journal, points out, these sorts of actions had consequences to women’s writing—“In addition to the workings of literary canonicity, the conditions under which women’s journals have been preserved or published have also worked to blur and trivialize women’s journal traditions” (120).

---

21 These are in orange but were most likely written using red ink at the time (see figure 13).
Although the annotations written in orange were made by Channing, it was Emerson who was in charge of this period of Fuller’s life; it is interesting to look at what he chose to include from Fuller’s life and work from that year. 1844 is the year during which *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* was published (on June 4\textsuperscript{th}) and “the Great Lawsuit” expanded into *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. It is also the year during which Fuller concluded her *Conversations for women* (April 28\textsuperscript{th}), during which she finished her classes for young ladies, and left Massachusetts permanently. However, in *Memoirs*, Emerson offers a very selective account of that period of Fuller’s life. His list of Fuller’s achievements include:

- She could converse, and teach, and write. She took private classes of pupils at her own house. She organized, with great success, a school for young ladies at Providence, and gave four hours a day to it, during two years. She translated Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, and published in 1839. In 1841, she translated the Letters of Günderode and Bettine, and published them as far as the sale warranted the work. In 1843, she made a tour to Lake Superior and to Michigan, and published an agreeable narrative of it, called ‘Summer on the Lakes.’ *MMFO* 1:322)
Emerson also directly addresses Fuller’s contributions to the *Dial*, but he never mentions her most important one, “The Great Lawsuit”—“she bravely undertook to open, in the *Dial*, the subjects which most attracted her; and she treated, in turn, Goethe, and Beethoven, the Rhine and the Romaic Ballads, the Poems of John Sterling, and several pieces of sentiment, with a spirit which spared no labor” (*MMFO* 1:324).

Not only does Fuller’s journal from 1844 inform us about her writing that year, but it also holds literary value in a way that helps us counter the claim Emerson (and others) made in *Memoirs* that “[h]er pen was a non-conductor” (*MMFO* 1:294). In this analysis, I rely on Sattelmeyer’s remark that to “the extent . . . that a journal has high aspirations and holds interest for us as more than a record of minutiae from the past, it becomes subject to the same kinds of interpretive issues and opportunities we consider when reading any complex text, whether fictional or ostensibly documentary in purpose” (293). Certainly, Fuller herself felt insecure about her writing in a way in which she did not feel about her conversation: in April 1840, she wrote, “When I look at my papers, I feel as if I have never had a thought that was worthy the attention of any but myself; and ‘t is only when, on talking with people, I find I tell them what they did not know, that my confidence at all returns” (*MMFO* 1:295). In the posthumous biography, Emerson also reported comments Fuller made specifically about her poetry—“My verses, - I am ashamed when I think there is scarce a line of poetry in them, - all rhetorical and impassioned, as Goethe said of De Stael. However, such as they are, they have been overflowing drops from the somewhat bitter cup of my existence,” “How can I ever write with this impatience of detail? I shall never be an artist; I have no patient love of execution; I am delighted with my sketch, but if I try to
finish it, I am chilled” (MMFO 1:295). And yet it is important to note that there is always a final note in Fuller’s comments that redeems her writing—“such as they are, they have been overflowing drops from the somewhat bitter cup of my existence,” “I am delighted with my sketch.” With regards to journal writing in particular, Sattelmeyer indicates that Fuller “had a conflicted attitude toward journal keeping” for “she favored the conversation and the letter over the journal” (296). However, a note in Fuller’s second 1844 journal reveals how enthusiastic she could be about such task—“I do not begin this volume of journal with the same eagerness as the last. But that fulfilled so fully my expectations from it, was such a good friend, that I cannot relinquish the habit, once begun” (Berg and Perry 56). Fuller referred to her journal as a “good friend,” implying that journaling was a familiar activity that she felt rather happy with. The expression “good friend” could be explained by one of Gannett’s remarks, that for “women, the journal has been one of the few places in which they could be writers and women, without paradox” (147).

Journal writing as “writing the self” is a task that unsurprisingly appealed to the Transcendentalists, for whom as Buell writes “the self became a more important entity . . . than for any of their forbears” (Literary 267). The form of a journal entry particularly appealed to them because of “its very looseness, informality, and irregular nature [that] gave it certain intrinsic advantages over more polished forms of expression” (Sattelmeyer 293). And yet, going back to writing the self, Buell points out that the Transcendentalists didn’t “really” write about themselves: “all shared a

22 Annette Kolodny challenges literal readings of Fuller’s self-deprecating judgment—“This asks us to accept Fuller’s anxieties about her writing skills as authoritative critical judgments when, in truth, every [italics] woman author of the period-British and American-larded her letters, journals and published book prefaces with apologies for her ineptitude with the pen. Fuller was hardly the only woman of her era to complain that in “fulfilling all my duties” to family and society she had lost the precious time required for concentrated writing “and a literary existence” (359).
basic inhibition about revealing themselves” (269) and “most of what they themselves wrote seems quite impersonal, including their own private journals. Their poetry is highly intellectual; their prose metaphysical rather than familiar” (Literary 268). Buell also provides an explanation for this strange phenomenon: for him, it is not so much a Victorian sense of propriety which restrained them, although that did enter in, as it was a matter of principle. If the first axiom of Transcendentalist thought was that the individual is potentially divine, the second was that the individual is valuable only sub specie aeternatis, in his universal aspects. . . . This led to a rather strict self-censorship policy. (Literary 269)

Buell concludes, nevertheless, that “in general, the Transcendentalists fit into the trend toward increasing self-consciousness in western literature as a whole during the nineteenth century” (Literary 282).

**B) Of Emotional and Physical Journeys**

Fuller’s 1844 Fruitlands journal fragments describe—in a fragmented, patchwork-like way—an emotional journey. They are the expression of a series of emotions about which Fuller writes quite openly and bluntly. Her narration of 1844 begins with a certain nostalgia that seems to have accompanied her most days, during various activities: in one entry, Fuller recounts her ride home after having “[t]ea at Ellen’s”

We rode home very swift, the white horses schimmering in the moonlight slow through the woods, so delicate in their half dress to be seen by this light. The wind blew full and soft, the moon waded in thin clouds. We were all silent. I wept and sobbed part of the way. I was glad to, it seemed so much more real than anything else. It seemed perhaps the harrowing up to the needed
The Romantic interlocking of feelings and nature, as the “wind,” the “thin clouds,” and the moon are not only described as phenomena but they are imbued with emotions, makes for a powerful and poetic description. Although she is seated right next to them, Fuller feels apart from the rest of the group: the others do not weep like she does, but instead they are all “silent” and a “wall” seems to stand between her and them. However, this is not a moment of pure sadness for there is appreciation in Fuller’s recollection—“I was glad to be with them thus, the memory will be precious” (MHarF 1). Fuller’s reminiscence is not only about herself, for her analysis extends to the people she was with, about whom she notes “I know not how the others felt.”

Expressions of sadness, solitude, and frustration pervade Fuller’s 1844 journals: at times, solitude is painful—“I am so tired tonight: life is a great weight. I want some help from without, something sweet and joyous but nothing comes” (MHarF 15). At others, it is mixed with beauty or even presented as sacred—“My chamber seems sacred to me, too, in its loneliness. It is full of flowers,” “7th. Another day of outward beauty and inward sadness” (MHarF 13). And in other instances, Fuller does not even describe her sadness in her journal but only hints at it, enigmatically—

There is one thought has come into my mind so painful that I will not write it down but merely mark it thus

(Ultima)
(spoglia)
(donzella)
(lagune)
I shall know what it means. (MHarF 30)

Fuller’s use of the word “donzella” as code exists in other journals as well: as Berg and Perry explain, “‘donzella’ is one of four words she will use as a code for a particularly painful thought” (62n34). And what this “donzella” (which in Italian means “young woman”) reminds us of is that a journal was not an entirely private document in Fuller’s times. It was normal, in fact, for Fuller and the other members of the Transcendentalist circle to exchange journals; and not only was reading others’ journals common practice, but so was discussing their content afterwards. In an interesting mise en abyme, Fuller recounted in her 1842 journal: “Sunday [September 25]. All this morning I spent in reading W’s journals for the last year, or rather finishing them, for I have had them by me for weeks. . . . We talked over many things in the journal” (Myerson, “1842” 340). Fuller’s use of “codes” in her journals should therefore be seen as a means she used to protect her privacy and should inform our reading of the rest of the contents of her journal. What needed to be tacitly omitted, and what was it acceptable to relate?

The “sadness” that pervades Fuller’s 1844 journals has been attributed by critics to a romantic disappointment that she experienced at the beginning of that year when William Clarke, Sarah and James’ younger brother (who had been Fuller’s guide during her Lakes’ tour), did not return her interest. Capper called it “the third big romantic disappointment in her life” (138). This unrequited affection almost put Fuller’s friendship with Caroline Sturgis at risk, when the latter apparently spent time with William—“With Cary a moment. W. did return & they passed many hours together. Ah thou tearful life, how much inward burning & stifling to a little bit of objective reality” (MHarF 27). A sense of despair appears, at times, throughout Fuller’s confessions from 1844; one entry that is particularly poignant in this sense
was quoted by Emerson as well as by George Eliot, who found it deeply moving—“I must, shall conquer, though now I feel so weary, and so sad, I have not a right to say I will. With the intellect I always have always shall overcome, but that is not the half of the work. The life: the life Oh, my God! shall the life be never sweet” (MHarF 24).

But Fuller’s pain is not only “inward” and the Fruitlands journals are punctuated with descriptions of physical pain that Fuller also endured—“Walked, then ended the day with a deplorable headache” (MHarF 22). This is something that Fuller experienced all her life. Georgiana Bruce, a young woman who was mentored by Fuller, and who after Brook Farm went to work at Sing-Sing, described the nature of Fuller’s suffering in her autobiography—

Miss Fuller was a great sufferer from a severe spinal curvature, which had developed after she recovered from typhoid fever, perhaps ten years before this. She was now being treated by a Dr. Legère, a French physician who told her that in six months she would be as straight as an Indian. She always wore a thick pad over one shoulder blade to make it correspond with the other. Her peculiar walk and some gestures indicated the painful distortion, and the acute distress she suffered made it necessary that she should lie down every few hours. (213)

In Memoirs, Emerson recounts how Fuller was often able to work through pain—

“She was all her lifetime the victim of disease and pain. She read and wrote in bed, and believed that she could understand anything better when she was ill. Pain acted like a girdle, to give tension to her powers” (1:229). However, Fuller’s 1844 Fruitlands journal seems to suggest that her suffering was at times too acute and that she had to interrupt whatever she was working on: “I began to arrange my

---

23 She described these lines as “inexpressibly touching” (Von Mehren, Minerva 186).
papers, & write, but I could not do much. I am in much pain today and have to lie down often" (MHarF 28). Headaches seem to have been particularly incapacitating for Fuller. That is the case in various entries from the Fruitlands journal fragments; for example, after she received Greeley’s proposal to move to New York to work for the Tribune, Fuller wrote “Home Three letters, from Georgiana, Cary, Mr. Greeley. The last contained his proposal. O I do hate to have so many things to decide & while my headache demon too is seeming to vow I shall never do anything. I cannot think about it till I am better” (MHarF 22). The letter from “Mr Greeley” has not yet been recovered, but we know that Fuller received it in late August/early September.24 On 25 September 1844, she had already accepted the offer and described her new position to Mary Rotch, “I am to edit the literary department of the N.Y. Tribune. . . . some things that do not glitter might turn to gold. It is a position that offers many advantages and may be turned to much good” (FL 3:230).

On top of strong headaches, Fuller’s journal also reveals that she suffered from insomnia. Many of Fuller’s poems are about the moon, which she lay awake gazing at when unable to sleep, “Say moon, dost thou suffer like me?” (22), “I sat at the little window. The moon had been but a little time arisen. I felt stronger for the future; clearness seemed dawning on my mind” (MHarF 28). Fuller even recorded prayers in her journal about this—“It is late, I am tired, spirit, aid me in sleep. I make no headway by my waking thoughts. How sweetly this rain falls, on the just and the

---

24 Berg and Perry see this as “further evidence that the material from these particular Fruitlands pages properly belongs in late August and early September. . . . While Greeley’s letter has not been recovered, Fuller received along with it a letter from Georgiana Bruce and one from Cary Sturgis with ‘a noble solemn tone.’ This letter of Cary’s has been recovered. Its date places Greeley’s letter in very late August rather than May or June as the rest of the journal entries in the Fruitlands collection might have suggested. When Fuller received Greeley’s letter, she was suffering a ‘terrible headache,’ which persisted for a week, ‘the most suffering I have ever spent,’ (see the September 8 entry of this journal)” (53).
unjust” (12), “O that some gentle care would lull me to sleep now. When I am so
tired, I can’t sleep” (MHarF 15). Fortunately, it seems as though the insomnia
stopped at some point later in the year—“Thank heaven I have begun to sleeping
again, slept from twelve till seven and woke up feeling as if I had been with the
heavenly hosts so different from my many wakings this spring. Much, much is done
for us in sleep; then the Good Ones have some chance to breathe on us” (MHarF
29).

However, Fuller’s journal entries are not all about pain and sadness; as Smith
reminds us, “scholars may be focusing too narrowly on the notion of crisis in Fuller’s
life and missing the moments of joy, wit, and humor that also characterize Fuller’s
writing during this time” (“Discord” 77). Indeed, 1844 was also a year of joy and of
great self-realisation for Fuller, which she expressed very candidly in her journal as
when she wrote “Ah! I was not born to be patient or peaceful merely, but joyous and
nobly free” (MHarF 10). The degree of self-introspection and analysis here is
noteworthy: Fuller both reflects on her personality as being impatient and a little
restless, and yet decides to counterbalance those traits by positively reinforcing her
“joyous and nobly free” nature. In another instance, although she writes that she is
feeling “very, very sad,” Fuller nevertheless focuses on the positives such as the
beauty of Mt. Auburn—“Spent the afternoon at Mt. Auburn. It was of heavenly
beauty, but Oh, I am very, very sad. It is useless to make resolutions or arrange the
future but the state of my mind is so deep. I think this must be an important era in my
life” (MHarF 16).

These accounts, stories of emotional and physical pain, of reactions to life-
events that affected her both positively and negatively, are part of the reason why
Fuller’s Fruitlands journals are so important. The openness with which Fuller
describes her “self” is invaluable and differs from the way in which other
Transcendentalists narrated their daily lives. Although he is not referring to this
particular journal, Sattelmeyer comments on the peculiarity of Fuller’s journaling,
noting that “what we see in Fuller’s journal makes us conscious that Emerson’s and
Thoreau’s journals (though not Alcott’s, it must be said) usually manifest a
conspicuous silence on the human frictions and social contexts within which this
high-minded enterprise took place” (297). Not only does Fuller relate her emotional
reactions and sensations, but she is also very self-analytical and, while she uses
some codes to hide her true feelings, her journal becomes the place where she
“unmasks” herself and reveals the real workings of her personality. In fact, although
a journal was not as private an object as we might think, Fuller’s entries in the 1844
Fruitlands fragments feel extremely intimate and revealing; there is a tension
underlying a number of her remarks between the “Fuller” in society and the “real”
Fuller who exposes herself in this journal. At one point she writes,

I thought Sam[uel Gray Ward] would certainly come to see me this which they
say is his last Sunday here, but he did not. I went to walk with Richard, then
sang psalm tunes with Lloyd, then wrote to Aunt Mary. When I have not joyous
energy in myself I can do these little things for others; very many of my
attentions are of this spurious sort: they are my consolation; the givers who
thank me are deceived. But what can I do. I cannot always upbear my life all
alone. The heart sinks and then I must help it by persuasions that it is better for
others I should be here and theirs. It is mere palliative, I know. (MHarF 9-10)

In this excerpt, Fuller’s honesty is striking as she reveals that some of her
behaviours were part of a façade—in fact, she explains that “very many of [her]
attentions” would only take place when she was “not joyous” and confesses that
numerous of her friends have thus been “deceived.” In the journal, Fuller is often both self-aware and self-condemning (“I have been thinking tonight how I had found myself like all I had ever condemned” [MHarF 11]): as Buell writes, the Transcendentalists’ “main motive for introspection was self-improvement, in which respect they were the heirs of the Puritans” (Literary 274). In a passage in which Fuller reflects on her relationship with Cary Sturgis, she is clearly hoping to change and improve—“Cary came and lay there with her head on my bosom. We talked till one. Our relation will never be one of my friendships but its perfect sincerity is wholesome. And I will do without friendships. . . . I could pray – O god make me more sincere and ground me more deeply in reality” (MHarF 28).

II – Woman Writing: Of Inspiration and Aspirations

A) Nature as Inspiration

As Zwarg points out, the titles of Emerson’s sections in Memoirs do not describe Fuller’s geographical peregrinations as is the case in the other chapters of the biography, but rather they allow us to read “her through his familiar abstractions: Arcana, Dæmonology, Temperament, Self-Esteem, Books, Criticism, Art, Letters, Friendship, Problems of Life, Heroism, Truth, Ecstasy, and Conversation” (Zwarg, “Feminist” 247). “Nature,” which Zwarg does not mention in this instance, is also the title of one of Emerson’s sub-sections and reads as a critique of sorts of Fuller’s ability as nature-writer. In it, Emerson is quite negative about the way in which Fuller relates to the natural world:

Margaret's love of beauty made her, of course, votary of nature, but rather for pleasurable excitement than with a deep poetic feeling. Her imperfect vision and her bad health were serious impediments to intimacy with woods and
rivers. She had never paid, - and it is a little remarkable, -any attention to natural sciences. She neither botanized, nor geologized, nor dissected. Still she delighted in short country rambles, in the varieties of landscape, in pastoral country, in mountain outlines, and, above all, in the sea-shore. (*MMFO* 1:263)

*Memoirs* is a text that is often unfair to Fuller’s talent, both in its omissions or blatant criticism, but Emerson’s dismissal of Fuller’s nature writing as one that is limited to “pleasurable excitement” and that never reaches the height of “deep poetic feeling” reads as a particularly harsh statement in light of Fuller’s *Fruitlands* journal writing. As she noted in a letter to Channing in September 1844, Fuller felt a very strong connection to the natural world: “I am deeply taught by the constant presence of any growing thing” (*FL* 3:224). In her 1844 journal, she compared her rich and dynamic intellect to natural elements: “I feel too full of thought, like light” (MHarF 28). Fuller’s days were indeed punctuated by writing and walks in nature, which in turn inspired her to write poems about those landscapes.

When leaves were falling thickly in the pale November day,
A bird dropt here this feather upon her pensive way;
Another bird has found it in the chill snowy April day,
It brings to him the music of all her summer’s lay:
Thus sweet birds, though unmated, do never sing in vain,
The lovely notes they utter to free them from their pain,
Caught up by the echoes, ring through the blue dome,
And, by good spirits guided, pierce to some gentle home.
The pencil moved prophetic together now they read
In the fair book of nature and find the hope they need.
The wreath woven by the river is by the seaside worn
And one of fate's best arrows to its due mark is borne.

M.F.

29th May, 1844. (MHarF 24)

This poem beautifully summarises the content of the Fruitlands 1844 fragments by Fuller. On the one hand, “pain” is present and, just as in Fuller’s life, it is apparently interwoven with solitude—the two “unmated” birds fly separately, “A bird” here and “[a]nother bird” there. The speaker, however, finds solace in the fact that this solitude is quickly put to an end as the “feather” that one “bird dropt” is quickly “found [by the other] in the chill snowy April day.” The overall message is optimistic, for the two birds “find the hope they need” and “do never sing in vain.” Nature is perceived through the prism of literature—“the fair book of nature” reinforces that connection just like “the wreath woven by the river” reminds us of the plot woven by the writer. This mingling of solitude, inspiration, and natural surroundings also pervades another poem by Fuller:

Saw the moon for first time in an exquisite sunset sky, but over my left shoulder, & was superstitious eno to be disturbed thereby

A waxing moon,

Shed influence mild

Sweet August moon

Grieve not thy child.

I must perforce follow thee

Demon of my nativity,

But oh succor me,

Angel of my futurity

May Genius, hover near
Drive away these thoughts of fear,
If I indeed be all alone
Cherish the more thy daughter lone
Make the woman all thy own.
Let the man defend
Till this strife and dark doubt end.
Make me purer
Stronger rarer -
O let not deadly fear
Creep so very near.
Centipede and scorpion
So near thy daughter's pillow lone
Send thy dove to brood
Over her shadowy solitude
There must be Love
Below around above
Let the great mind
Untiring rash to find
Steadfast stand to bind,
Till the soft heart the needed peace may find. (MHarF 17-18)

In this second poem, the moon, associated with a negative superstitious feeling, illuminates the meanders of Fuller’s inward solitude. And yet, the speaker also invokes the moon, begging her to “soccor” her—“If I indeed be all alone/Cherish the more thy daughter lone/Make the woman all thy own.” Nature is almost a sublime presence for it is associated both with feelings of fascination in the speaker’s eyes,
as is the case for the “exquisite sunset sky,” and with fear, “O let not deadly fear/Creep so very near.” Just as with the previous poem, this one also ends on an optimistic note: “There must be love,” Fuller ascertains. The poetic means acts as a metaphorical hug, an embrace in which Fuller wraps herself “[b]elow around above.” Solitude (“all alone”), gender (“the woman” and “the man”), nature (“Centipede and scorpion”), and intellect (“Let the great mind/Untiring rash to find”) pervade Fuller’s poem just as they pervade the rest of her journal entries, the “autobiographical” and the “artistic” beautifully merging in her verse.

In Memoirs, however, Emerson comments negatively on Fuller’s “moonlight” poems—“She wrote in her journal or in her correspondence, a series of ‘moonlights,’ in which she seriously attempts to describe the light and scenery of successive nights of the summer moon. Of course, her raptures must appear sickly and superficial to an observer, who, with equal feeling, had better powers of observation” (MMFO 1:263-264); “Margaret, in her turn, made many vain attempts, and, to a lover of nature, who knows that every day has new and inimitable lights and shades, one of these descriptions is as vapid as the raptures of a citizen arrived at his first meadow” (MMFO 1:264). Emerson’s remarks are once again dismissive of Fuller’s nature writing, as he seems to have misunderstood the point of her observations—in a quote from Fuller which Emerson chose to include in Memoirs, she explains “Only through emotion do we know thee, Nature! We lean upon thy breast, and feel its pulses vibrate to our own. That is knowledge, for that is love. Thought will never reach it” (MMFO 1:264).

In the Fruitlands journal fragments, Fuller depicted with great admiration the natural beauty that surrounded her—as on Sunday 2nd June, 1844, when she noted “Wide waved the summer woods. Today earth appears in the luxuriant beauty of
summer; the woods are full leaved, the grass tall enough to wave in the wind. I have a little nosegay of the mot pink. Rich thunderous clouds are stealing over. I hope we shall have a shower” (MHarF 25), or on “Monday morning 6th,” when she wrote “Leaves and blossoms almost in perfection now, by tomorrow they will be quite. The lindens are in a state of exquisite beauty. Not now the stately, the ‘dustere Linden’ as when in the massive foliage of late summer, but just draped and adorned in every line of their fair and noble proportions” (MHarF 11). There seems to have been a great permeability between her and natural beauty; Fuller was able to appreciate the surrounding landscapes with poetic sensitivity. The same sensitivity characterises Fuller’s journal comments on music—“While hearing him [Ole Bull, on June 4th, 1844] I was happy and felt overpaid for existence by that degree in which I possess the power of appreciating genius. I must hear him once more, though this is an inconvenient time” (MHarF 16). During Ole Bull’s concert, Fuller recalls how “happy [she was] there. I like himself much; he is sweet and childlike, and I think I never heard such pure music. It was effortless and heavenly. I soon forgot his playing and was lost. The Adagio religioso carried me entirely with it; it was so hushed, and yet so deeply pleading. O my God! I too am capable of such feelings” (MHarF 15).

The fact that nature should be a key element of Fuller’s life in 1844 is not surprising; on June 4th, 1844 her first book Summer on the Lakes was published, relating her travels West the previous year. This protean travel-narrative was about the new landscapes that Fuller discovered but, as Zwarg explains, it was equally life-changing in terms of what Fuller learnt about the country itself: her travels indeed brought forth the recognition that some of the assumptions and interpretive models she had used to build her feminist argument in ‘Lawsuit’ were directly challenged by
the terrible fate of the Native American. Her faith in the ‘great moral law’ (L: 8) of Anglo-American culture, as well as the progressive view of history, wavered when she saw how both could support the annihilation of cultures resisting those perspectives. As a result, she returned to the essay with a healthy skepticism about the assumptions underlying its argument, including her decision to discuss the fate of women by drawing from various texts of Western culture. (“Feminist” 167)

After *Summer* was published, Fuller began expanding her essay “The Great Lawsuit” into what she called “a pamphlet”—*Woman in the Nineteenth Century* would be published in February 1845. In the Fruitlands papers, one annotation relates the suggestions that Greeley made for this “second edition of book on woman.” The “Notes for improvement” include “Mr. Greeley observ[ations that] I had not said enough as to the study of the physical laws being conducive to virtue / Not enough of the need of providing a greater range of employment for woman” (MHarF 40). More broadly, the 1844 Fruitlands journal fragments offer a deeply interesting account of Fuller’s writing experience that year.

First, she writes about the day when she finished writing *Summer*, on her birthday, 23 May 1844: “Better wrote this morning & finished booklet before one. I hope they will get through printing by tomorrow or Saty eveg & then there will be nothing else to be done about it, except to abuse it & that I shall not have to attend to. Spent the afternoon at Mt. Auburn” (MHarF 16). Fuller recounted this specific episode to numerous correspondents: first, in a letter to Caroline Sturgis written two days later,

On Thursday I finished my book just at dinner time and passed the afternoon at Mt Auburn. I thought much of the time when I, too, should drop this mask of
flesh, and who would finish my work. I had a fancy the child was born that day, and hoped it would have been a boy. However my star may be good for a girl, educated with more intelligence than I was. Girls are to have a better chance now I think. (FL 3:197)

Fuller’s sister Ellen, married to the poet Ellery Channing, had given birth to a girl who they called Margaret and nicknamed “Greta.” Writing to Charles K. Newcomb on 9 June 1844, Fuller returned again to that day “Was it the 23d of this last May that is my birthday and was marked this year with deep strokes in the life of my mind” (FL 3:201). In Memoirs, Channing also reports Fuller’s words about her birthday that year—“The 23d of May, my birth-day, about one o'clock, I wrote the last line of my little book [Summer on the Lakes] then I went to Mount Auburn, and walked gently among the graves” (MMFO 2:120).

The Fruitlands journals also tell the story of the writing process that led to that moment of publication: “I finished preparing the first half of my book for the press a little before six” (9). Once Summer was finally published, Fuller described how she went through the book looking for mistakes, although she had already started working on Woman—“Monday, hard at work till four oclock, arranging clothes & papers & not nearly through yet. At six went to town on some errands, & brought out my book. It looks pleasant, but there are one or two odd bits of carelessness which escaped me, till I saw it as a whole” (MHarF 27). In June 1844, after the publication of Summer, Fuller indeed reflected critically on her book and its reception—in a letter to Channing, she remarked, “The account of the Seeress pleases many, and it is amusing to see how elderly routine gentlemen, such as Dr Francis and Mr Farrar, are charmed with the little story of Mariana. They admire, at poetic distance, that powerful nature that would alarm them so in real life” (FL 3:198).
In the Fruitlands fragments, Fuller’s entries reveal that she liked to alternate walks and writing, "Wednesday, obliged to go on with writing kept going out to take short walks to revive myself" (MHarF 16), “trying to arrange these papers. I shall never get through; they interest me too much and excite too many thoughts as I go along. I had a walk this afternoon, but my thoughts swelled on and carried my steps fast” (MHarF 28). When she couldn’t do so because of the rain, she would note it in her journal,

It rained today, and I could not go into the woods or take the promised drive. But, instead, I wrote all the morning, after playing with the children a short time & filled up the gap in my book, of which I am very glad, as now I shall not feel pressed or vexed by the demand for ‘copy’. It seemed to me I wrote well. I felt more energy, more disengaged from the one or two fixed thoughts that have.

(MHarF 14)

Nature is what motivated Fuller to go Fishkill Landing in October 1844, where she finished writing Woman: as she indicated in a letter to Sarah Shaw on 1 September 1844 “I am desirous for Octr and Novr to go to some beautiful and solitary place, where walking about would be pleasure and excitement enough so that I may give myself undisturbed to some writing and study I have in view” (FL 3:226). She mentioned this in her journal too, in an entry written on 5 September—“I could go to Fishkill & I think I shall. Wrote awhile, feeling somewhat better. Felt a strong desire to go to Cohasset, but knew if I did, it must be the ruin of my writing” (MHarF 23). Fuller did go to Cohasset after all—she informed her brother Richard, on September 20th, “I have suffered much from headach and lost much time. Last week I went to Cohasset for two or three days. There was a noble sea at that time. Since, I have been getting better, but my eyes are much affected” (FL 3:228). In fact,
although she wrote throughout the summer of 1844, Fuller suffered from terrible headaches that prevented her from completing *Woman* and she went to Fishkill for that reason—as she told Georgiana Bruce, in October 1844, “I was prevented from attack of headac from finishing the pamphlet on Women in August. I hope to do it here” (*FL* 3:236).

**B) Writing and/on Woman**

Not only do the Fruitlands fragments contain an account of Fuller’s work, but they also include reflections on her past writings such as this entry about “The Great Lawsuit”:

Last year at this time I wrote of woman, and proudly painted myself as Miranda. At this time, seeing Mr. Tracy, I told him I had found peace. He did not believe me: He was right. Much, much has been unveiled by the past year with its deep cup of bitter sweet. Humbled I am, but as yet too proudly suffering from it. Make me humble rather! (MHarF 4).

Miranda is a fictional character with whom Fuller “converses” in the “Lawsuit”—“I was talking on this subject with Miranda, a woman, who, if any in the world, might speak without heat or bitterness of the position of her sex” (Myerson, “Lawsuit” 394). But here, rather than the “Lawsuit” itself, Fuller is talking about what happened in the year afterwards, about that “recognition,” that Zwarg writes about, of the deep corruption and violence of the advance into the West and of the country as a whole. 1844 was a pivotal year for Fuller in terms of her political and social realisations. In the fall, she visited for the first time the female inmates at Sing-Sing, where her protégée Georgiana Bruce had been working for a year. Bruce worked to help rehabilitate the women inmates and, as part of the programme, she had asked them to write about themselves. Bruce describes how “[t]wo [prisoners], at my request,
agreed to write sketches of their lives for me. It was only natural that some of my old friends should be shocked on hearing that I had thus allied myself to the civilization we condemned” (Experience 194). Fuller, however, wasn’t shocked and asked Bruce to share more of these journals: "Cannot you send me more about those women, or are you willing that I should transmute it into my own forms? I was greatly entertained and instructed by the journals. Continue, I beg, to note for me the salient traits of every day” (Bruce, Experience 206). Fuller was deeply interested in the stories of these women, as is evident from the questions she asked Bruce in October 1844,

You say few of these women have any feeling about chastity. Do you know how they regard that part of the sex, who are reputed chaste? Do they see any reality in it; or look on it merely as a circumstance of condition, like the possession of fine clothes? You know novelists are fond of representing them as if they looked up to their more protected sisters as saints and angels! (FL 3:236)

Sing-Sing was a place of deep injustice, where all the cruelties originating from racism, sexism, and poverty came together. Bruce’s account, which she shared with Fuller, is that

Colored people were at that time convicted and given long terms on the flimsiest testimony. There was one poor ‘aunty’ who had charge of the cooking, who had been sentenced for fourteen years, in place of some one else. She had seven children, who were left to starve, or become criminals. She was as innocent of crime as we were, and her consciousness was noticeable in her looks and deportment. (Experience 201)
Accounts like these as well as her encounters with female convicts had a strong impact on Fuller. In Woman, she recounted meeting “a circle of women, stamped by society as among the most degraded of their sex” (86) and, addressing her female readers, she urged “those women who have not yet considered this subject, to do so” and instructed them to “not forget the unfortunates who dare not cross your guarded way” (WNC 87).

The Fruitlands papers contain fascinating entries about womanhood, motherhood, and gender. May 1844, for instance, was a time when many of the people Fuller knew had children—this includes her sister Ellen, Lidian Emerson, as well as her friends Sarah Shaw and Sophia Hawthorne. In her journal, Fuller describes a sweet scene in which her friend Sarah is nursing her baby, “Sarah S[haw] wears a rosary & the baby plays with the cross, as she nurses. It is a sweet sight. I have in my room a little copy off the Madonna del Sedia. Sarah & her child have just that expression together of mutual bliss, but S seems more young & girlish than this Madonna” (MHarF 14). Nursing is something that Fuller witnessed a lot that year for Sophia Hawthorne, with whom she stayed for a while, was also nursing Ellen’s child. These reflections about the intimate moments of motherhood contrast with other more general musings about womanhood and gender that are also part of the Fruitlands journal fragments. In an entry dated “Feb 20th [1840],” Fuller writes, “I confess myself quite unable to account for no woman having been able to produce a great work of art” (MHarF 39). Many years later, in her book Gender and the Journal, Gannett would try to provide an answer to Fuller’s question: Gannett writes that men have been the “gatekeepers” of “public written forms and have controlled access to writing and publishing, as well as the evaluation of published writing” and that
Women have not had the same access to public written discourse. They have been denied the necessary education; they have been restricted by their domestic roles in their opportunities to write; they have been repeatedly told that women should not and cannot write in the public sphere. When they have written publicly, they have been ridiculed, rebuked, or ignored. These sanctions have conditioned women to think that they cannot be writers. (96)

In her journal, Fuller answered her own question and stated that “the natural history of the sex is that at the period when men begin to be artists, they begin to be mothers, an engrossing and still more disturbing profession” (MHarF 39). “[E]arthly womanhood” (FL 3:226), as Fuller called it in a letter to Sarah Shaw, was as “engrossing” as it was “disturbing” in the life of a woman. Fuller’s hand-written reflections also served as discussion points for her Boston Conversations. Elizabeth Peabody’s notes of the first series are, at times, almost identical to the content of Fuller’s Fruitlands entries—for instance, Peabody relates how “It is true that at the period of life when men gave themselves to their pursuit most women became mothers” (Simmons 215).

Fuller, who in 1840 had no children and was not married, helped other women overcome the obstacles that society put in their way. She did so, for instance, with her Boston Conversations for women, which started in 1839. The Conversations ended in 1844, and Fuller’s comments from her last class, reported in Memoirs by Emerson, show that she felt empowered by how gratifying the whole experience had been, “28 April, 1844. - It was the last day with my class. How noble has been my experience of such relations now for six years, and with so many and so various minds! Life is worth living, is it not?” (MMFO 1:351). But in the Fruitlands journal
fragments, Fuller commented on the end of yet another set of classes—on June 4th, 1844—

Wrote till 12. . . . Went to walk & was tempted too far into the little wood beyond Mt. Auburn. (Did not get home till just before my class came. Was obliged to lie on the bed all the time they were with me. It was the last time & they were pleasant. They love me, and fancy I am good and wise. O that it gave me more pleasure to do a little good, and give a little happiness. But there is no modesty or moderation in me. (MHarF 15)

Writing once again with a remarkable degree of self-analysis, Fuller is here referring to the end of a class for young girls she had taught in her home one afternoon per week during the first half of 1844. Lydia Maria Child, whose niece, Abby, was among the students, wrote to Fuller in August 1844 that her brother Convers "thinks that you have done so much for his daughter's intellectual and moral culture, that you are a prime favorite of his" (qtd. in Berg and Perry, "Impulses," 111n162).

The actions that Fuller undertook to help other women were also accompanied by a more theoretical reflection on the nature of gender, fragments of which appear in the Fruitlands material. As she would write in her "Lawsuit" and in Woman, Fuller believed that "there are moments in the life of each [man and woman] when it seems legitimate to assume the character of the other" (MHarF 38). She identified "infinite gradations on this scale" and concluded that "Are they not [man and woman], as notes of music are, made for each other though dissimilar. . . . He momentarily grows mild while she assumes a bolder gait to wander at his side. Such is the mutual influence" (MHarF 38). Fuller’s claims were extremely bold for her times and the degree of permeability that she was able to identify between sexes is clearly mapped out in the Fruitlands journal fragments. Dividing them between two columns,
she lists attributes that were considered as “typically masculine” and those that were seen as “typically feminine” (see, also, figure 14):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine Attributes</th>
<th>Feminine Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man more Genius</td>
<td>Woman more taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Will</td>
<td>passive Will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determined purpose</td>
<td>delicacy of rejection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>versatile energy</td>
<td>power of adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He collects</td>
<td>She arranges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He strikes out new materials</td>
<td>She harmonizes them for him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has the strife</td>
<td>She is the aim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He more for truth &amp; power</td>
<td>She for Beauty &amp; Love.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(MHarF 38-39)
After this, Fuller wrote conclusively: “Yet is it more & less all through. I see no attribute exclusively masculine, exclusively feminine” (MHarF 39). As Peabody’s records show, Fuller used these writings as notes for her 17th Conversation: “Miss F. then read her own piece as she said that otherwise she should say every thing that was in it, which would make it duller when it came- It was a constant contrast of man & woman- Man had more genius-woman more taste- Man more determination of purpose-woman more delicacy” (Simmons 216).

The Fruitlands fragments do not end there and this reflection on gender fluidity is accompanied by another reinstatement of “the great radical dualism” (Myerson, Reader 418): “the distinction of sex lies not in opposition but in distribution and proportion of attributes. Whether this dualism will always continue I know not but at present we cannot conceive of active happiness without it. To find oneself in another nature, likeness and unlikeness. Sun acting on the earth are conjugal, - sun and moon fraternal” (MHarF 37). This reaffirmation of gender fluidity is accompanied by reflections that do also include more essentialist views of womanhood; for instance, when Fuller interrogates why there aren’t more women artists, she observes that “[w]oman as woman is deficient in concentration, but I see no reason why she should not improve in this respect” (MHarF 37). However, she quickly and ironically doubles her claim by noting that “as the poet is by nature equally deficient in it why should it hurt woman as woman, more than poet as poet” (MHarF 38).

Similarly, while thinking about the relation between the two sexes, “in savage life,” Fuller writes, “[t]he maiden stays at home and tends the rose tree (i.e. cultivates beauty) and in the domestic sphere prepares herself for the succession of petty efforts which are the destiny of woman” only to later write, witily, that “I have no
objection to a succession of petty efforts instead of a few great deeds, if all harmonized by law, if each be really a line or stanza of a poem” (MHarF 37).

Answering Smith’s exhortation that scholars should focus more on the “moments of joy, wit and humour that characterise Fuller’s writing,” I find Fuller’s dialectic on gender fluidity fascinating: Fuller’s conclusion and invitation, “Let woman think of herself as soul still more than as woman and with a general conformity to her lot in indifferent particulars, never dare stifle what God has given” (MHarF 38), beautifully summarises and anticipates the turn that Fuller’s life would take in the second half of the 1840s—“never stifling” and always expanding.

The Fruitlands journal fragments consist in a remarkable self-portrait by Fuller, whose daily recollections are both confident and poetic. The content of her reflections on gender, but also the moments of vulnerability she describes, tell the story of a multifaceted existence which contrasts with Emerson’s monolithic portrayal of Fuller in Memoirs, which I further explore in the next and final section of this chapter by focusing on what I call the “Fuller dilemma.”
2.3 “Woman, or Artist?”: Emerson and the Fuller Dilemma in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*

In 1855, in a preface to Arthur Buckminster Fuller’s edition of his sister’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Greeley wrote that “[i]t is due to [Fuller’s] memory, as well as to the great and living cause of which she was so eminent and so fearless an advocate, that what she thought and said with regard to the position of her sex and its limitations, should be fully and fairly placed before the public” (X). Greeley’s praise of Fuller’s radical views strongly contrasts with the way in which she was portrayed in *Memoirs*. In fact, Greeley seems disappointed that Fuller’s five male biographers (if we count, in addition to the three authors whose names appear on the front page, Sam Ward and Frederic Henry Hedge, who also partly contributed to telling her story) elided such important aspects of her career. Fuller’s feminist views, and what she represented as a woman intellectual, generated great challenges for her male commentators—and that continued to be true long after *Memoirs* was published. As Mary Kelley remarks, “Mason Wade and Perry Miller,” who both wrote biographies of Fuller, respectively in 1940 and 1963, “sensed the challenge that Fuller represented”: while “Wade chose to cast Fuller in the womanly role of muse and thereby denied her the status of an intellectual,” “Miller accorded her that status and simultaneously made her unwomanly” (“Thinking Women” 38).

Fuller essentially posed a dilemma: as pinpointed by Ann Douglas, “Fuller is so disquieting because she does not lend herself to the fantasy life, to the essentially *fictional* identity associated with women. Her image can be attacked or ignored, but it is not malleable” (38). As shown in previous sections, Emerson clearly struggled to reconcile himself with the challenges presented by Fuller’s unconventional persona. In fact, Fuller did not meet the expectations associated with her gender in the first
half of the nineteenth century: while “motherhood was valued as the most fulfilling and essential of all women's duties, a view extending the eighteenth-century ideal of Republican Motherhood” as Susan M. Cruea has remarked (188), Fuller suggested she did not want any children, “I have no child; but now, as I look on these lovely children of a human birth, what low and neutralizing cares they bring with them to the mother!” (MMFO 1:293). What’s more, she also initially rejected marriage, writing that “I remain fixed to be, without churlishness or coldness, as much alone as possible. It is best for me. I am not fitted to be loved” (MMFO 1:292). As Emerson relates in “Problems of Life,” Fuller was aware that she did not really fit any mould:

Practical questions in plenty the days and months brought her to settle, - questions requiring all her wisdom, and sometimes more than all. None recurs with more frequency, at one period, in her journals, than the debate with herself, whether she shall make literature a profession. Shall it be woman, or shall it be artist?” (MMFO 1:294)

The fact that Fuller did not fit in any specific category deeply unsettled Emerson; as Tiffany Wayne explains, “his inability to imagine any social contribution from women at all beyond the domestic role led him to categorize all women as either ‘wives’ or, if freed from the particular duties of marriage (and, presumably, motherhood) to pursue the life of the mind, as ‘muses’” (24). In this section, I demonstrate how the dichotomy between “woman” and “artist,” which pervades Emerson’s portrayal of Fuller in Memoirs, epitomises his difficulty to come to terms with what I call “the Fuller dilemma”—a struggle which stems from both the unconventional nature of her radical views as well as from the complexity of her social position as woman thinker in antebellum America.
I – Of Social Inequalities and the Impediments of Womanhood

A) Of Harvard Education and Social Discrimination

Referring to a passage from Higginson’s biography of Fuller, in which he recounted seeing “Miss Fuller sitting, day after day, under the covert gaze of the [Harvard] undergraduates who had never before looked upon a woman reading within those sacred precincts” (103), Kelley reflects upon the fact that the “image of a solitary Fuller sitting amid books at America’s most famous seat of learning tells us much about a century in which an intellectual woman was considered an oxymoron” (“Thinking Women” 33). Trapped in the antinomies of nineteenth-century womanhood, Fuller’s life was continuously impacted by gender discrimination and, although she knew that “[s]ex, like rank, wealth, beauty, or talent, is but an accident of birth” (Fuller, Kindred Papers 335), her gender ended up defining her entire life and career choices. In fact, when we ask ourselves what mostly differentiated Fuller from Emerson, we find that the answer to that question lies primarily in the fact that Sarah Margaret Fuller was born a woman and Ralph Waldo Emerson was born a man. As Wayne remarks, “Fuller’s vocational choices and crises were philosophically similar to Emerson’s as a Transcendentalist, but practically different as a woman and as a feminist; as one scholar notes of Fuller, ‘in 1835 she was intellectually poised—but for what?’ given the limited options available to women at that time” (90). Fuller did not have the same rights as her male, white counterparts and that had an obvious impact on her career and on her personal life.

Gender was a major factor of discrimination and its impact on Fuller’s life is blatant. First of all, forced into a position of extreme financial insecurity, the need for income defined Fuller’s life as it did for many other literary women. Kelley describes, for instance, the consequences that Timothy Fuller’s death in 1835 had on the life of
his daughter: “Almost at the moment at which Fuller embarked on that career, it looked as if she might have to cast it aside for Fuller died leaving his family with slender means of support” (“Unfinished Revolution” 233). Kelley also emphasises that, had Fuller “been the eldest son, she would have been appointed head of the family and guardian of her younger brothers and sisters” (“Unfinished Revolution” 233). A few years later, still trying to secure for herself some very needed financial income, Fuller began her Conversation series for women in Boston: yet, as Wayne remarks, the “Conversations ultimately brought Fuller an income of approximately $500 per year, a substantial amount considering that the course met only two hours per week for twenty-six weeks out of the year. Still, . . . this would have been ‘about two-thirds of what Emerson then made from an equivalent number of lectures’” (25).

Gender also had an immense and obvious impact on Fuller’s upbringing, starting from her education. Although girls’ schools existed, they rarely equalled the quality and richness of content offered at boys’ schools. Fuller’s father, however, ignored such discriminatory practices and taught Fuller to read and study in many different languages from a very young age. Often criticised for his harshness, Douglas defends Timothy Fuller, suggesting that “another perspective from which to view [his] schooling of his daughter other than the one which highlights its brutality” lies in the fact that “there was nothing unusual about the work expected from the six-year-old Margaret by her father – except that it was demanded from a girl” (44). Setting aside the devastating consequences that her father’s schooling had on Fuller’s health, Douglas praises Timothy Fuller’s approach: “In an age when women were taught to appropriate a special language of politeness and complaisance, Mr Fuller … forcibly cut her off from the feminine subculture, a world governed by etiquette books and sentimental novels” (44). In short, “Timothy Fuller set
‘masculine’ ideals of character for his daughter, and he gave her ‘masculine’ subjects to study” (Douglas 46). Douglas’ claim is particularly useful in so far as she uses gender as a framework to understand the character-building effect that Timothy Fuller’s education ended up having on his daughter. Despite her father’s efforts to secure for her the same education that was reserved to men, Fuller’s struggles continued throughout the years: university life was still formally precluded to young women. As Kelley reminds us, with “the exception of Oberlin College, established in 1833, America’s colleges and universities excluded women until the second half of the nineteenth century” (“Unfinished Revolution” 231).

In Memoirs, while telling the story of his acquaintance with Fuller, Frederic Henry Hedge opened his account with a reference to Harvard College: “My acquaintance with Margaret commenced in the year 1823, at Cambridge, my native place and hers. I was then a member of Harvard College, in which my father held one of the offices of instruction, and I used frequently to meet her in the social circles of which the families connected with the college formed the nucleus” (MMFO 1:90-91). As Hedge’s account suggests, women were only allowed at the periphery of university life and were connected to young male students solely through common “social circles.” Despite all that, Fuller did manage to get closer than normal to college education: the fact that Fuller was the first woman to ever use Harvard’s library “under the covert gaze of undergraduates” was, symbolically, very important.

As a woman intellectual, Fuller posed a challenge to the limitations imposed on her sex in antebellum America. Through its use of the lexical fields of law and justice, “The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men. Woman versus Women” particularly reveals the subversive value that Fuller conferred to the act of “writing” itself, which
she saw as a transgression of discriminating gender norms. Fuller was in fact aware that:

As to the use of the pen, there was quite as much opposition to woman’s possessing herself of that help to free-agency as there is now to her seizing on the rostrum or the desk; and she is likely to draw, from a permission to plead her cause that way, opposite interferences to what might be wished by those who now grant it. (“The Great Lawsuit” 393)

Defying the constraining boundaries of domesticity, the act of writing was eminently political in a society that condemned agency in women and prevented them from developing their own identity. Cole remarks that, in addition to the trope of legal complaint in its title “The Great Lawsuit,” “Fuller presented herself as the needed counsel in women’s cause of regaining what was originally their own; by the essay’s end, she had become prophet and legal advocate at once” (“Fuller’s Lawsuit”13). Yet, as Cole points out, the profession of lawyer was completely closed to any woman and Fuller’s “authorship introduced a metaphoric suit in the absence of any such literal prerogative” (“Fuller’s Lawsuit” 13). Fuller herself was well aware of that and, as she painfully acknowledged in “The Wrongs of American Women. The Duty of American Women,” “We believe there has been no female lawyer, and probably will be none” (487). Moving beyond the fact women could not be lawyers at the time, Fuller addressed a higher law, a “universal law,” which she saw “as an agent of change, above civil inequity” (Cole, “Fuller’s Lawsuit” 14). What clearly appears from these few remarks is how aware Fuller was of the subversive power of writing, an act not only elevating because of its craft and aesthetics but also inflated with a moral dimension. And yet, Fuller’s writing was often and vigorously criticised by Emerson in Memoirs.
B) Could Margaret Write? Emerson’s Violent Critique of Fuller’s “Art”

Emerson’s chapter “Visits to Concord” in *Memoirs* reads as an evaluation or review of Fuller’s intellectual capacities—of her “art” intended as “the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects” (*Webster*). And while Fuller’s conversation skills are unquestionably and loudly celebrated throughout the chapter, her other talents—including writing—are often criticised and devalued. In addition to Emerson’s charge that her “pen was a non-conductor,” Hedge also stated that “She was no artist, - she would never have written an epic, or romance, or drama” (1:95). Even Fuller’s brother commented upon it in his 1855 edition of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, writing that “Those who knew her personally feel that no words ever flowed from her pen equaling the eloquent utterances of her lips” (V). Among her female friends, Elizabeth Barrett Browning also attacked Fuller’s writing. In a letter to Miss Mitford written in September 1850, she wrote:

> the work [Fuller] was preparing upon Italy would probably have been more equal to her faculty than anything previously produced by her pen (her other writings being curiously inferior to the impressions her conversation gave you); indeed, she told me it was the only production to which she had given time and labour. (1:460)

and to Mrs. Jameson, in 1852,

> Her written works are just naught. She said herself they were sketches, thrown out in haste and for the means of subsistence .... In fact, her reputation, such as it was in America, seemed to stand mainly on her conversation and oral lectures. If I wished anyone to do her justice, I should say, as I have indeed said, ‘Never read what she has written.’ (2:59)
It is no doubt that Fuller felt less confident in writing than in conversation: she said it herself, as is reported in *Memoirs*, that “I shall write better, but never, I think, so well as I talk; for then I feel inspired” (296). Yet, what were the reasons for such an insistence on her “bad” writing? Could it have been motivated by a need to denigrate, in some way or another, a female presence that was seen as threatening?

As mentioned by Zwarg, “[t]hose threatened by the [feminist] movement felt the need to demonstrate how Margaret Fuller - the mythic embodiment of the feminist - could ‘fall like a woman’” (“Womanizing” 184). Although Emerson was a great admirer of Fuller, and his personal affection and intellectual camaraderie for her are unquestioned, I believe that the strength of his criticism towards her and the denigrating aspect of some of his remarks remain partially underexplored. As Jeffrey Steele noted in “Transcendental Friendship: Emerson, Fuller, and Thoreau,” “One of the unresolved questions in both Emerson and Fuller scholarship is the extent to which their friendship was shaped by nineteenth-century gender roles that influenced Emerson's reactions both to his wife and to his female friend” (126). Emerson’s critique of Fuller’s writing in *Memoirs* is especially ferocious: in particular, Emerson suggested that the problem of Fuller’s judgment was that it was unreliable: in “Letters”, he wrote “Margaret . . . had a sound judgment, on which, in conversation, she could fall back and anticipate and speak the best sense of the largest company. But, left to herself, and in her correspondence, she was much the victim of Lord Bacon’s *idols of the cave*, or self-deceived by her own phantasms” (*MMFO* 1:279).

The justification provided by Emerson for his critique of Fuller “judgement” in this passage is particularly interesting: it is by placing Fuller in a situation of dependency from others that Emerson differentiated between the “sound judgment” that Fuller showed when in “company” versus Fuller on her own, “left to herself . . . self-
deceived by her own phantasms." The allusion to "Lord Bacon’s *idols of the cave*" implies that when she was alone, Fuller believed "her own phantasms." It also gives full power to others for it is only when she was with "the largest company" that she was able to restore "her sound judgement" and come out of her cavern of illusions. Hedge’s remarks similarly mention the need for some “external pressure,” on which Fuller’s success somewhat depended: “She wanted imagination, and she wanted productiveness. She wrote with difficulty. Without external pressure, perhaps, she would never have written at all” (*MMFO* 1:96). The need to anchor Fuller’s “bad judgement” in a situation of social dependency whereby Fuller was a better thinker when in the company of others makes us wonder whether gender and possible insecurities were motivating Emerson’s comments.

II – Woman, or Artist: Gender and the Oxymoron of a Woman Intellectual

**A) A Masculine Mind: The Oxymoron of a Woman Intellectual**

Part of the struggle to deal with “the Fuller dilemma” was the lack of vocabulary to define her. In fact, in antebellum America, womanhood was mostly associated with passivity, self-sacrifice, and physical beauty according to the precepts of the “Cult of True Womanhood.” Only rarely did “womanhood” rime with intellect or, even less often, did it imply any type of agency. In the titles of recent scholarly work, the adjective “thinking”—as in Wayne’s “Woman Thinking” or Kelley’s “Thinking Women”—is often juxtaposed to the noun “women” to remind us that it was not intrinsically evident that a “woman” could properly “think” in antebellum America. This helps us understand why Fuller was once described as “one eminently womanly by natural impulse, but a man by training and philosophy” (*The Southern Literary Messenger*). Intellect was considered a “masculine” trait, and therefore Fuller was
often referred to as having a masculine mind; *Memoirs of Margaret Ossoli* is no exception to this rule. In Hedge’s account, he struggled to describe Margaret as he juggled with what he considered as hermetically sealed concepts of “femininity” and “masculinity”—

Here let me say a word respecting the character of Margaret’s mind. It was what in woman is generally called a masculine mind; that is, its action was determined by ideas rather than sentiments. And yet, with this masculine trait, she combined a woman’s appreciation of the beautiful in sentiment and the beautiful in action. (*MMFO* 1:95)

Navigating with great difficulty the culturally imposed polarities of his time, Hedge attempted to define Margaret’s genius: she had a “masculine” mind because her actions were determined by ideas, yet she “combined” this masculine trait with “a woman’s appreciation of the beautiful.” These dichotomies, “action versus sentiment” and “masculine versus feminine,” are the same that oppose “woman versus artist,” i.e. socially constructed oppositions. Fuller knew that such firm dichotomies or fixed ideals of what a “man” and what a “woman” were mere “social definitions” (Wayne 89), that “There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman” (68–69).

Fuller’s statement strongly contrasts with the attitudes of the authors of *Memoirs* who, struggling to come to terms with her complex character, awkwardly attempted to fit her into fixed categories to which she did not belong.

**B) The Problem of Fuller’s (Lack of) Beauty**

The rigidity of gender norms in antebellum America made it indeed extremely difficult for the authors of *Memoirs* to narrate Fuller’s life. Gender norms imposed on society a certain ideal of womanhood to which Fuller, who referred to herself as “a radical like me” (*EJ* 11:462), did not comply. Emerson’s chapter “Visits to Concord” and its
subsections in *Memoirs* are haunted by what seems to be a major regret: in
“Problems of Life,” Emerson wonders “why could not she also have been beautiful?
– of the most radiant sociality, why should not she have been so placed, and so
decorated, as to have led the fairest and highest?” (*MMFO* 1:291). The anaphoric
repetition of “why” (“why could she not”/ “why should not”) and of “so” (“so placed”/
“so decorated”) confers a sense of desperation to Emerson’s words. It is as if he
were personally and emotionally distressed by Fuller’s lack of (conventional) physical
beauty. In fact, almost every subsection of Emerson’s chapter “Visits to Concord”
begins with a reference to Fuller’s lack of beauty or starts with a negative comment
on her physique. For example, “Heroism” opens with “She was a woman, an orphan,
without beauty, without money; and these negatives will suggest what difficulties
were to be surmounted where the tasks dictated by her talents required the good-will
of ‘good-society’” (298), and “Friendship” begins with the concession that “It is
certain that Margaret, though unattractive in person, and assuming in manners, so
that the girls complained that ‘she put upon them,’ or, with her burly masculine
existence, quite reduced them to satellites, yet inspired an enthusiastic attachment”
(*MMFO* 1:280). Once more, as Fuller’s physicality exceeded the canons of normative
beauty of her times, Emerson had no other choice but to resort to the adjective
“masculine” to describe her (“her burly masculine existence”). At some point,
Emerson even recounted his surprise when he learned that Fuller had had numerous
suitors in Italy

When I expressed, one day, many years afterwards, to a lady who knew her
well [Elizabeth Hoar], some surprise at the homage paid her by men in Italy, -
offers of marriage having there been made her by distinguished parties, - she
replied: ‘There is nothing extraordinary in it. Had she been a man, any one of
those fine girls of sixteen, who surrounded her here, would have married her.

(*MMFO* 1:281)

Emerson’s surprise is reflected in the journal he kept while writing *Memoirs*: “In Italy, Miciwicski wished to divorce himself to marry Margaret; Mazzini, it is reported, offered marriage: & Ossoli [,] a young nobleman [,] prosecuted his suit against all denial, & married her” (*EJ* 11:503). Emerson’s subsection “Nature” also begins with a negative reference to Fuller’s physique: this time it is her “imperfect vision” and “bad health” that Emerson comments upon, “Margaret’s love of beauty made her, of course, a votary of nature, but rather for pleasurable excitement than with a deep poetic feeling. Her imperfect vision and her bad health were serious impediments to intimacy with woods and rivers” (*MMFO* 1:263). In an attempt to mitigate his own derogatory physical description of Fuller (whom he described as having “a tendency to robustness” and “little regard to hygienic principles” [91]), Hegde listed a series of redeeming qualities about Fuller’s appearance—“I said she had no pretensions to beauty. Yet she was not plain. She escaped the reproach of positive plainness, by her blond and abundant hair, by her excellent teeth, by her sparkling, dancing, busy eyes” (*MMFO* 1:92).

Despite the fact that there is surely some truth in these descriptions (for Fuller herself lamented “I am such a shabby plant, of such coarse tissue. I hate not to be beautiful, when all around is so” [*MMFO* 1:292]), it is necessary to pay a closer look at Emerson’s attitude towards Fuller’s lack of beauty and to ask ourselves why it turned into a quasi-obsession, whereby every one of his sections would begin with a negative comment on Fuller’s physical appearance. While references to Fuller’s “grace” and “ladylike appearance” in *Memoirs* led Zwarg to argue that “[e]mphasizing Fuller's femininity in this way was thought to diminish the power of her example,
securing a conservative model of womanhood” (“Womanizing” 184), I believe that, in the same way, emphasising Fuller’s lack of beauty was a way to react to her non-conformity, which posed a serious threat to the authors’ own masculinity, anchored in such norms. As Zwarg points out, “Fuller was unconventional in every respect: in her appearance, her manner, her thinking and in her writing. Every effort to frame her in conventionality results in a destabilization of that frame” (“Womanizing 164). Perhaps also in an attempt to conform her, disappointed by the fact that she was not beautiful, Emerson kept associating Fuller’s name to other beautiful women. In fact, she is constantly compared to other women in his chapter of Memoirs: “I am to add, that she gave herself to her friendships with an entireness not possible to any but a woman, with depth possible to few women. Her friendships, as girl with girls, as a woman with women, were not unmingled with passion, and had passages of romantic sacrifice and ecstatic fusion” (1:281). The repetition of “girls” (which appears twice), the allusion to “woman” and “women,” and the references to “passion,” “romantic sacrifice,” and “ecstatic fusion” over-emphasise Fuller’s “womanly” circles. Similarly, Emerson adds elsewhere: “She and her friends are fellow-students with noblest moral aims. She is there for help and counsel” (282), “With her practical talent, her counsel and energy, she was pretty sure to find clients and sufferers enough, who wished to be guided and supported” (MMFO 1:286).

Seemingly troubled by the fact that Fuller did not fit the canon of femininity, Emerson kept comparing Fuller to other women (and women only) in these passages. By insisting on the qualities that were typically associated with womanhood (“noblest moral aims,” “passion,” “romantic sacrifice,” “help and counsel,” “practical talent,” “sufferers”), it is as though Emerson had tried to create a fictional, textual separate sphere in which he finally felt that Fuller would be at home.
Fuller herself was aware that women were constantly associated, reduced to, and rewritten so as to belong to a separate sphere: “Much has been written about Woman's keeping within her sphere, which is defined as the domestic sphere” (“The Wrongs” 484). And it is precisely to that sphere, and to the “Cult of True Womanhood,” that some of Emerson’s comments on Fuller directly point: “She was a right brave and heroic woman. She shrunk from no duty, because of the feeble nerves” (MMFO 1:300). As Cruea has outlined, “In a rapidly changing world where men were charged with the task of creating and expanding an industrialized civilization from a wilderness, a True Woman was expected to serve as the protectress of religion and civilized society” (188). The adjectives that Emerson used to describe Fuller, such as “brave” and “heroic,” and the allusions to “duty” and “feeblly nerves,” point to characteristics that were all typically associated with the True Woman. Whether it was to protect her reputation from those who attacked her “lack” of femininity or whether Emerson himself was immersed in the gender stereotypes of his times, the language of the cult of True Womanhood is what he resorted to in his description of Fuller. In particular, there is an emphasis on Margaret’s “domestic” talents in his sections in Memoirs: “Margaret . . . devoted herself to the education of her brothers and sisters, and then to the making of a home for the family” (300), “She was exact and punctual in money matters, and maintained herself, and made her full contribution to the support of her family, by the reward of her labors as a teacher, and in her conversation classes” (300-301), “She was here to help others” (MMFO 1:302). Echoing the principles of True Womanhood, Emerson emphasises Fuller’s charitable personality (“to help others”), her capacity to self-sacrifice (“devoted herself to the education of her brothers”), her domestic talent (“the making of a home”) and her ability to be “exact and punctual in money matters.”
It is as though Emerson felt the need to mitigate the radical, unconventional nature of Fuller’s existence by emphasising some more traditional traits: in “Heroism,” Emerson stated that “Margaret’s courage was thoroughly sweet in its temper” (*MMFO* 1:299), thus reaffirming the traditional separation of feminine sweetness and masculine courage. The need to mitigate her unconventional character and the lack of a vocabulary to describe Fuller forced Emerson into a constant dichotomy.
Conclusion

The fact that Fuller's posthumous biography should narrate her life through the prism of socially constructed gender polarities is both tragic and ironic. Indeed, claiming that there “is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman” (WNC 69), Fuller fought her whole life against what Michael C. Hurst has named “the straightjacket of nineteenth-century gender norms” (9). She undermined the validity of the notion of “separate spheres” and argued that “the distinction of sex lies not in opposition but in distribution and proportion of attributes” (MHarF 37). Eliding the most radical aspects of her life and career, the authors of Memoirs provided a deeply one-dimensional portrayal of Fuller. They did more than just censor her writings; they tampered with original sources while trying to justify their editorial choices.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Fuller's portrayal in Memoirs seems to have been distorted by a sense of embarrassment at anything that pertained to her womanhood—her privacy, her emotions, her physicality. In particular, the way in which Emerson struggled to deal with Fuller's appearance, with her social status, and with her literary talent shows how difficult it was for him to accept her as both as a “woman” and an “artist” and reveals the limitations of his views on womanhood. In the next chapter, I further reflect on the notion of “embodiment” in Memoirs, as I demonstrate that the same dynamics at play in his depiction of Fuller also characterised his addresses on women’s rights.
Chapter Three – The Body Element in *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*

**Introduction – Of Textual Mutilations and Biographical Embalmment**

In July 1853, Emerson wrote a letter to poet Charles King Newcomb in which he apologised for having misplaced some of the letters that he had lent him—“I fear there is no help in Concord, or in the world, for the missing letters” (*EL* 4:373). One year earlier, Newcomb had asked “that Margaret Fuller’s letters, which he had lent for use in the *Memoirs*, be returned through express office in Boston” (4:294n88), to which Emerson had promptly replied, “I shall not fail to send the MSS. letters of Margaret to you, if I have them all, but, it may be, that some of them are in Wm Channing’s charge” (*EL* 4:294-295). After sending those letters back to Newcomb on May 31st (see *EL* 4:373n145), Emerson confessed, however, that although “Mrs Fuller & Mrs Channing made up with much care all the parcels of letters to be returned . . . many letters, & those perhaps the best, never came back to these ladies” (*EL* 4:373). In the same message, he opened up about the way in which Fuller’s papers had been handled during the production of *Memoirs*:

> when the ‘Memoirs’ were being prepared, William Channing undertook to arrange from all the letters in our possession the European journal,—& where he had not a copy, or where nearly the whole letter was available, it was sewed in, (with erasures & brackets) into its place, & went to the printer. When all this ‘copy’ came back, it was too much soiled & injured to be worth preserving — I remember, however, that far the largest part was copied by one clerk, & only
now & then an original letter sewed in to these leaves — As the most part was only a transcript, all of it perished. (EL 4:373)

According to Emerson’s account, not only were letters and journal entries lost forever in the process of printing *Memoirs*, but even when “whole letter[s]” were used as opposed to excerpts patched together, “erasures & brackets” permanently modified their original content. This shows the extent of the damage that Channing’s handling caused to Fuller’s papers and the irreparable, tragic mutilation of so much of her written material.

Because of its highly mediated and corrupt nature, *Memoirs* requires to be read alongside other texts. This is what I call the centrifugal force of *Memoirs*; every analysis of the biography either presupposes a search of its sources or invites a comparison with other similar texts. Although dealing with multiple levels of mediation can be difficult, the intertextuality it entails is quite exciting. For instance, it is interesting to compare Emerson’s depiction of Fuller in *Memoirs* with another posthumous biography of a women’s rights pioneer—William Godwin’s *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798). Just as it ended up being the case for Fuller, Mary Wollstonecraft’s life was as much the centre of attention as her work. As seen in Chapter One, Fuller herself emphasised the importance of Wollstonecraft’s “existence” in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Published shortly after their deaths and written by men—one man in Wollstonecraft’s case, and five men in Fuller’s—both biographies stemmed from a desire to protect the women’s reputation, a task which the authors handled quite differently. As Janet Todd writes, “it is worth pausing to think of the power of personal memoirs over reputation, especially a woman’s” and the fact that these memoirs should be written by men is equally significant: Todd mentions, for instance, how “[Jane] Austen’s life story was
for many years dominated by the portrait, created when her once occluded fame had started to rise, by her nephew” (762).

The two memoirs tell the story of two controversial lives in very different ways. While there is absolutely no mention of sexuality in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Godwin describes his relationship with Wollstonecraft in physical terms: “It was however three weeks longer, before the sentiment which trembled upon the tongue, burst from the lips of either. There was, as I have already said, no period of throes and resolute explanation attendant on the tale. It was friendship melting into love” (159). He openly recounts the reasons that led to his and Wollstonecraft’s marriage: “We then judged it proper to declare our marriage, which had taken place a little before. The principal motive for complying with this ceremony, was the circumstance of Mary's being in a state of pregnancy” (162). This strongly differs from the authors of Memoirs’ silence over the fact Angelino’s conception might have preceded Fuller and Ossoli’s marriage (as discussed in Chapter Two). As Todd explains, “Godwin had made sex a large part of his picture. In so doing he avoided some of the sweetly sentimental terms used so often for worthy dead women whose lives were paraded as role models for the young” (763).

In Woman, Fuller commented on “this little book” by Godwin, describing it as “interesting for no other cause, it would be so for the generous affection evinced under the peculiar circumstances” (43). More specifically, she applauded the fact that “[t]his man had courage to love and honor this woman in the face of the world’s sentence, and of all that was repulsive in her own past history” (43); she observed with admiration that “[h]e loved her, and he defended her for the meaning and tendency of her inner life. It was a good fact” (WNC 44). Fuller’s words about Godwin’s biography pertain directly to the reputation of women intellectuals, a matter
with which Emerson and his two co-authors were also preoccupied when writing *Memoirs*. In *Woman*, Fuller praised Godwin for the way in which he had defended his late wife’s fame—“he believed he saw of what soul she was, and that the impulses she had struggled to act out were noble, though the opinions to which they had led might not be thoroughly weighed” (43). Although his biography somewhat backfired (Angela Monsam remarks how it gathered an “overwhelmingly negative response” [110]), protecting Wollstonecraft’s reputation was a crucial preoccupation for Godwin: as he explained in his “Preface,” “It has always appeared to me, that to give to the public some account of the life of a person of eminent merit deceased, is a duty incumbent on survivors. It seldom happens that such a person passes through life, without being the subject of thoughtless calumny, or malignant misrepresentation” (1). Fuller looked positively at Godwin as a man of the “new era”—“If Godwin’s choice of the calumniated authoress of the ‘Rights of Woman,’ for his honored wife, be a sign a new era”—and welcomed their marriage as a sign of progress, “These marriages, these characters, with all their imperfections, express an onward tendency. They speak of aspiration of soul, of energy of mind, seeking clearness and freedom” (*WNC* 46).

Compared to Godwin, and perhaps in light the disastrous consequences that his biography had on Wollstonecraft’s reputation, Emerson adopted a diametrically opposed approach when writing Fuller’s. Indeed, instead of insisting on her radicalism, he polished it and tried to minimize it as much as possible. In an article entitled “Biography as Autopsy in William Godwin’s *Memoirs,*” Monsam links “Godwin’s assertion that it is ‘a duty incumbent on survivors’ to preserve in literary form ‘the life of a person of eminent merit deceased’” to the practice of embalming (117). She describes how the “inseparability of the self and the physical body
influenced both physical and biographical embalming; time is of the essence in both instances, as the purpose of embalming is to ‘preserve [the subject] from decay’” (Monsam 118). Similar to Godwin’s Memoirs, which was published only one year after Wollstonecraft’s death, Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli appeared less than two years after Fuller’s. Considering how one-sided Memoirs’ portrayal of Fuller is, I believe that Monsam’s embalmment analogy could also be applied to Emerson, Clarke, and Channing’s work. After all, this is what Higginson hinted at in his own biography of Fuller, as he warned audiences to read previous biographies with caution:

It must always be remembered that some previous descriptions of her have been in a manner warped by the fact that they proceeded from the most gifted and intellectual persons whom she knew; all these persons being almost always men who she met under a certain amount of intellectual excitement, to whom she showed her brightest aspirations, her deepest solicitudes. (303)

Higginson insisted on more than one occasion on the fact that numerous aspects of Fuller’s personality had been left out of Memoirs. The way in which the authors handled Fuller’s writing goes against what she would have wanted: “I am not willing to have what I write mutilated, or what I ought to say dictated to suit the public taste” (MMFO 1:168), she noted in 1836 about her work for the American Monthly. The bitter irony is that this statement, quoted by Clarke, summarises what eventually happened in Memoirs. Building on Monsam’s metaphor of the biography as “embalmment,” this chapter centres on the notion of “mutilation” in Memoirs, examining how, while the body of Fuller’s writing was mutilated, her identity was also carefully moulded to fit a certain embodied image of womanhood.
Memoirs—a depiction of a woman thinker whose ideas challenged the established social norms that enforced male, white dominance in the United States—is a text which unwillingly reproduces the very norms that Fuller fought to abolish. Focusing on how the notion of “embodiment” was eminently political in Fuller’s and Emerson’s era, I argue that Emerson’s subjective portrayal of Fuller in Memoirs, whom he anchors repeatedly to the notion of female body, shows that although he wished women to be part of the polis, he also remained firmly convinced that there were essential differences between men and women. In the first section of this chapter, I analyse Emerson’s notebook “Margaret Fuller Ossoli,” which I believe can provide exceptional insight into the reasoning behind Emerson’s editing of Fuller in Memoirs. Highlighting the omissions, changes, and commentary that Emerson made to the texts he was quoting, I reflect on the image of womanhood that emerges from this more private version of his portrait of Fuller, and on how it compares to the final version of his chapter in the biography. Secondly, in “Fuller and Emerson on ‘Dæmonology’: Bodily Functions and Biographical Representations,” I examine Emerson’s and Fuller’s different conceptions of the body, showing how Emerson’s depiction of Fuller in Memoirs, particularly his distaste for her inclinations towards Mesmerism and her faith in bodily intuition, crystallize those divergences. In the third and final section of this chapter, I look at the history of Emerson’s interventions on women’s rights in relation to Memoirs: I show how Memoirs can help us understand the dynamics of Emerson’s timid support for the cause.
3.1 From Emerson’s Notebook to *Memoirs’* Body Text: Of Editing Practices and Gender Discrepancies

In *Sister Outsider* (1984), Audre Lorde stated that the “dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is . . . false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic – the sensual – those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us” (56). Although written more than a hundred years later, Lorde’s words are astonishingly relevant to our reading of Fuller’s writing. Particularly in Fuller’s journals, we recognise “those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest” as Fuller alternates between accounts of psychological joys and pains, expressions of physical suffering, and narrative as well as poetical tributes to the natural world, describing landscapes and writing about gemstones.

In May 1844, Fuller copied into her journal “some lines addrest to Cary [Sturgis] about the gems”: 25

> Slow wandering on a tangled way-
> To their lost child pure spirits say
> The diamond marshal thee by day,
> By night the carbuncle defend
> Hearts-blood of a bosom-friend;
> On thy brow the amethyst
> Violet of secret earth.

---

25 See Hudspeth 3:194 for Fuller’s letter to Sturgis (3rd May 1844). The poem is identical to the version copied in the Fruitlands fragments, except for “kissed” which is spelt “kist” in the letter.
When by fullest sunlight kissed
Best reveals its regal worth;
And when that haloed moment flies
Shall keep thee steadfast, chaste and wise. (MHarF 2)

Further commenting on these “two verses from a letter addressed to Cary several days ago,” Fuller noted how “these little extempore verses have to me a mystical, a prophetic meaning. I remember with special pleasure my Dahlia of four years ago, which was, like these, the full growth of a single moment” (MHarF 3). Fuller’s association of verse with “growth” and “time” seems to be particularly compatible with the way in which Lorde described poetry: calling it “the skeleton architecture of our lives” (38), Lorde explained that for women “poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams towards survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action” (37).

In Memoirs, however, Emerson criticised Fuller’s poetry (about which he wrote, as noted in Chapter Two, “her raptures must appear sickly and superficial to an observer, who, with equal feeling, had better powers of observation”) and was captious about Fuller’s spirituality: about the latter, he wrote that “[t]his catching at straws of coincidence, where all is geometrical, seems the necessity of certain natures” (MMFO 1:222). Despite being overtly critical of Fuller’s fascination with gems, Emerson copied the poem Fuller wrote to Caroline Sturgis into the notebook he kept while working on Memoirs. The notebook, titled “Life and Death of Margaret Fuller Ossoli,” has been transcribed and published in its entirety by William H. Gilman (EJ 11: 455-509), and constitutes a very important, although rarely cited, source of information about the process of Emerson’s biographical composition.
The notebook is especially important in that it allows us to compare what Emerson wrote in it with what was eventually published in *Memoirs*. Indeed, the problematic nature of the biography’s composition makes it necessary that we compare it with its hypotexts. Although Gilman’s footnotes indicate which parts of the notebook were used in the published version of *Memoirs*, he did not highlight any of the changes or erasures that were made. I have compared each passage to the final version in order to find these, and have also looked at Channing’s chapters in volume 2, where some of the quotes transcribed by Emerson in his notebook ended up. I also read the content of the notebook alongside other journals that Emerson kept and more specifically alongside the entries he wrote directly after Fuller’s death. Archival material (both published and unpublished) by Fuller as well as letters by her and Emerson were equally useful, for they allowed me to find original sources and highlight Emerson’s changes.

Going back to Fuller’s poem to Sturgis, copied on page 5 of Emerson’s notebook (*EJ* 11: 457-58), it is interesting to remark that although his transcription is identical to the original version of the poem, located in Fuller’s 1844 journal fragments from the Fruitlands archive, the poem also appears in Emerson’s chapter in *Memoirs* (in the section “Arcana”) where the name of Fuller’s friend Cary is omitted (a practice consistent with the rest of the work) and a few silent changes can be observed,

‘TO ———

‘Slow wandering on & tangled way,

‘To their lost child pure spirits say : —

‘The diamond marshal thee by day,

‘By night, the carbuncle defend,
'Heart's blood of a bosom friend.
'On thy brow, the amethyst,
‘Violet of purest earth,
‘When by fullest sunlight kissed,
‘Best reveals its regal birth;
‘And when that haloed moment flies,
‘Shall keep thee steadfast, chaste, and wise.' (MMFO 1:220)

In addition to a few punctuation changes, the seventh line of Fuller’s poem differs from the version copied by Emerson in his notebook and from the original; indeed, in Emerson’s chapter of Memoirs, “Violet of secret earth” is replaced by “Violet of purest earth.” In a book characterised by an endemic desire to conform Fuller to the normative ideal of womanhood of the time, the substitution of the adjective “secret” with “pure” is not an innocent one.

In this section, I examine Emerson’s editing strategy in the notebook “Margaret Fuller Ossoli,” to which no study has yet been fully devoted. Comparing the notebook to Memoirs, but also to Fuller’s 1844 journals (Fruitlands; Berg and Perry) and to Emerson and Fuller’s correspondence, I highlight the selection, the changes, and the omissions made by Emerson as I try to shed more light on the mysterious end product that is Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli.

---

26 One can only assume that this was Emerson’s doing; this exemplifies the complexity linked to analysing Memoirs: being a shared act of narration, the processes of selection and interpretation indeed remain vastly unknown.
I – Protecting Fuller

A) A Matter of Reputation

As with Memoirs, Emerson’s notebook is concerned with Fuller’s appearance and with her reputation. For instance, Emerson quotes his aunt Mary Moody’s account of Fuller (“Note from M.M.E. to RWE. Aug., 1850.” [EJ 11:501]) in which she “remember[s] her want of beauty.” Aged 76 years old, Mary Moody wrote to her nephew,

I think if [Fuller] had survived only her husband and been impressed with that kind of grief which gives a sort of immortality to certain minds we read about. Her expression &c &c — I may as well confess — that in taking and interest in her fate, I do not love to remember her want of beauty. She looked very sensible, but as if contending with ill health & duties. Had I been favored with one sparkle of her fine wit, — one argument for her dissent <from her fine mind>, —what a treasure to memory. She lay all the day & eve. on sofa, & catechized me, who told my literal traditions like any old bobbin woman.

The tone of Mary Moody’s account is quite amusing; her resentment and bitter remarks seem to have been characteristic of her personality. In Journal AZ, Emerson indeed noted that while Margaret “had great tenderness & sympathy, M[ary].M[oody].E[merson]. has none. If M.M.E. finds out anything is dear & sacred to you, she instantly flings broken crockery at that” (EJ 11:259). Despite his aunt’s attitude, Emerson included part of her account in Memoirs. Without naming her directly, he introduced the author of the quotation as follows:

An acute and illuminated woman, who, in this age of indifferentism, holds on with both hands to the creed of the Pilgrims, writes of Margaret, whom she saw but once: ‘She looked very sensible, but as if contending with ill health and
duties. She lay, all the day and evening, on the sofa, and catechized me, who
told my literal traditions, like any old bobbin-woman.' (MMFO 1:315)

Fuller’s “want of beauty” is something that Emerson repeatedly commented on in his chapter in Memoirs. “The body,” as Xine Yao comments, “privileged as the location of interiority, agency, and subjection, is always a metonym for more” (136). As shown previously, Fuller’s body was one of those aspects that made Fuller’s biographers most uncomfortable. Because she wasn’t considered “attractive” according to the standards of the time, they had to think of ways that would allow them to deal with that type of “non-conformity” while trying to protect her reputation.

Similarly, another aspect of Fuller’s life that Emerson, Channing, and Clarke all addressed with some difficulty was Fuller’s “ego,” or as Emerson famously called it, her “mountainous ME.” While acknowledging the often negative first impression that Fuller made on people, Emerson tried to highlight the fact that she was also very humble. In the beginning of his notebook, he recorded various passages written by Fuller’s close friend Constanza Arconati Visconti. Extremely complimentary of Fuller, Arconati described how “Je n’ai point rencontré dans ma vie de femme plus noble, ayant autant de sympathie pour ses semblables, et dont l’esprit fut plus vivifiant. Je me suis tout de suite sentie attirée par elle. Quand je fis sa connoissance, j’ignorais que ce fut une femme remarquable” (EJ 11:457). This quotation was eventually used as the epigraph to Emerson’s chapter in Memoirs “Visits to Concord” (see “Extract from a letter from Madame Arconati to R.W. Emerson” [MMFO 1:200]).

---

27 “I never met before in my life a woman who was this noble, who showed this much compassion for her peers, and who had such an inspiring intellect. I was immediately drawn to her. When I met her for the first time, I did not know she was a remarkable woman” [my translation].
Quoting Arconati was not only a way to celebrate Fuller, but Emerson also viewed it as a testament to the latter’s humility: he remarked in his notebook,

The tone of the letters to Mme. Arconati is dignified, but respectful. M. seems to have felt a certain awe of her, and in no wise to have assumed the tone of superiority which Mme Arconati’s expressions would seem to have warranted her in taking. Mme Arconati’s language quoted above p. is very significant when one reads all her letters & observes how true, sensible, [49] & dignified she invariably is. (EJ 11: 468)

In another instance, Emerson similarly observed that although Fuller might seem pretentious to some, “the tone of her journal is humble, religious, prayerful” (EJ 11:498).

B) Of Mysterious Erasures and Editorial Behaviours

A close observation of the notebook, i.e. a comparison of its quotations with the original sources, reveals that even in the preparatory stages of the biography, attempts were made to “polish” Fuller’s writings. Texts were silently modified to appear less “dangerous” to Fuller’s reputation and omissions were made to fit a certain narrative. As noted in Chapter Two, the most capricious editor was Channing: he modified texts, and combined letters with journal excerpts from different periods, making them look as a single piece of writing. But he wasn’t the only one who altered Fuller’s original writing; Emerson did so too.

In the notebook, there are numerous examples of such practices by Emerson. At one point, he transcribed a passage from Fuller’s 1844 journal, written when she was staying with the Hawthornes at the Old Manse in Concord. The journal entry, of which the original manuscript survives (see Berg and Perry), reads as follows: “After the young men were in bed I went out and walked till near 12. The moonlight was
beautiful & filled my heart. Never before did I feel the beauty of these embowering elms; they stood in holy blackness the praying monastics of this holy, clear night, full of grace in every sense, their life so full, so hushed, not a leaf stirred” (Berg and Perry 104). In the notebook, Emerson copied the passage indicating that it was from “June, 1844 p95 at Hawthorne’s” (EJ 11:473) and made changes to Fuller’s text: “After they were all in bed, I went out & walked till near 12, o.clock. The moonlight <was beautiful &> filled my heart. I feel the beauty of these embowering elms: they stood in holy blackness[,] the praying monastics of this holy clear night, full of grace, in every sense; their life so full, so hushed, not a leaf stirred” (EJ 11:474). These changes remained in the final version of Memoirs—“After they were all in bed,’ she writes from the ‘Manse,’ in Concord, ‘I went out, and walked till near twelve. The moonlight filled my heart. These embowering elms stood in solemn black, the praying monastics of this holy night; full of grace, in every sense; their life so full, so hushed; not a leaf stirred” (1:264). On top of removing “was beautiful &,” Emerson also substituted “After the young men were in bed” with “After they were all in bed.” Was the noun phrase “the young men” too risky to be linked to a woman’s journal?

In one particular instance, Emerson’s notebook serves to reveal the complete disappearance of certain passages of Fuller’s journals. Writing in pencil, Emerson took note of a reference to Fuller’s June 1844 journal; “See too Journal June, 1844 p67” (EJ 11:500). Berg and Perry, who transcribed that specific journal, have noted that the “fact that in his notebook on Margaret Fuller, Emerson cited one of these missing pages, #67 (by number only), suggests that others removed portions of Fuller’s writing after her death, probably because they contained passages of an intensely personal and emotionally revealing nature” (91n115). We do not know what was written in that entry on page 67; we can only rely on Emerson’s commentary:
“This I doubt not was all the more violent recoil from the exclusively literary &
‘educational’ connections in which she had lived. Mrs Spring told me that
Margaret said to her, ‘I am tired of these literary friendships, I long to be wife &
mother’” (EJ 11:500). The other journal entry Emerson is citing here takes us to
Fuller’s earlier 1844 journal: Emerson notes, “and p<5>49 May, 1844. ‘Where is
Hector?’” which corresponds to an entry in Fuller’s Fruitlands journal fragments. The
“Where is Hector” entry reads as follows,

There are sacred tasks enough before me; but where is Hector? There is no
sincere readiness in me, only a little shallow working from day to day.
Tomorrow, tomorrow, renew my youth like the Eagle’s tomorrow. Make me
again forever young!
Mignon, I have got beyond thee, though;
I would not ask
So let me seem until I be. (MHarF 13).

Mysterious as these entries might be, the disappearance of page 67 is even more
compelling: what was written on that specific leaf of paper that needed to be
destroyed?

II – From Notebook to Biography: Emerson and the “Woman”

A) From Editorial Collage to Biographical Sabotage

Mapping out the collage of texts that constitute Memoirs’ sources can help us better
understand the impact that even the smallest modifications by its authors had on the
image they conveyed of Fuller to the public, for Memoirs was responsible for the
initial construction of Fuller’s reputation.
In the first pages of Emerson’s notebook, numerous passages relate to Fuller’s foreboding about her trip back to America on the “Elizabeth.” Emerson transcribed two letters that Fuller wrote to the “Marchesa Arconati Visconti” in asynchronous order, starting with one written from “Florence, Evg. of 25 Apr. 1850” and then recording another one from “Florence, 6 April, 1850” (EJ 11: 458). The exactitude of Fuller’s premonitions is startling: on April 25th, she confided: “I shall embark more composedly in my merchant ship, praying indeed fervently that it may not be my lot to lose my babe at sea, either by unsolaced sickness, or amid the howling waves; or, that if I should, it may be [8] brief anguish, & Ossoli, he, & I, go together” (EJ 11: 458). Angelino, Fuller’s son, did get sick on board, and the whole family did “go together” as Fuller wrote. The passage, relating to the last moments of Fuller’s life, was included in the second volume of Memoirs, as part of Channing’s chapter: “I shall embark more composedly in our merchant-ship, praying fervently, indeed, that it may not be my lot to lose my boy at sea, either by unsolaced illness, or amid the howling waves; or, if so, that Ossoli, Angelo, and I may go together, and that the anguish may be brief” (2:336). Note how “babe” was replaced by “boy” and the personal pronoun “he” replaced by Nino’s full name “Angelo.” While the latter change might have been motivated by a want of clarity, substituting “boy” for “babe” seems to have been the result of Channing’s personal preferences. Was “babe” too emotionally loaded to be reported in the biography? In the notebook, Emerson also reported this other excerpt of Fuller’s letter to Arconati: “Perhaps we shall live to laugh at these; but in case of mishap, I should perish with my husband & child perhaps to be transferred to some happier state.” That same quote, included in Channing’s section, was also slightly modified: “In case of mishap, however, I shall
perish with my husband and my child, and we may be transferred to some happier state” (MMFO 2:337).

Passages which had been written separately were also merged in Emerson’s chapter in Memoirs. While in his notebook Emerson quoted two passages separately (both passages referring to the end of Fuller’s Boston Conversations), he chose to merge them in Memoirs, therefore altering Fuller’s writing. She wrote, “To W[illiam].H[enry]C[hanning] Cambridge, 28 Apr. 1844,” “It was the last meeting of my class. We had a most animated meeting. On bidding me goodbye, they all & always show so much goodwill & love, that I feel I must really have become a friend to them” (EJ 11: 478) and “To E.H. without date” “Our last meeting yesterday was beautiful: how noble has been <our> my experience of such relations for six years now, & with so many, & so various minds! Life is worth living—is it not?” (EJ 11: 478). But in Memoirs, the two quotes appear together “28 April, 1844. - It was the last day with my class. How noble has been my experience of such relations now for six years, and with so many and so various minds! Life is worth living, is it not? We had a most animated meeting. On bidding me good-bye, they all, and always, show so much good-will and love, that I feel I must really have become a friend to them” (1:351).

Emerson’s notebook is divided into sections—“Ill Health,” “Economics,” “Friends,” “Travelling,” etc. The one entitled “Writing” is particularly interesting because linked to Emerson’s famous charge that “Fuller’s pen was a non-conductor.” As Reynolds remarks, “Too often, male commentators have compared her conversational skills to her written work in order to denigrate the latter, but her digressive, allusive prose style challenges her readers to view conventional topics from unconventional perspectives” (“Fern” 69). In Memoirs, there are numerous passages concerned with Fuller’s “bad writing” and these passages also appear in
the notebook. However, a comparison of the two texts shows that cuts were made that alter the overall meaning of these reflections. In the notebook, Emerson reports Fuller’s comment:

> How can I ever write with this impatience of detail? The first suggestion of a thought delights—to follow it out, wearies & weakens me. I am like Sterling. I shall never be an artist. I have no patient love of execution. I am delighted with my sketch, but the moment I try to finish it, I am chilled. Never was there a great sculptor who did not love to chip the marble. (EJ 11:470)

And yet a section of that quotation is absent from Memoirs, in which the passage reads as follows, “How can I ever write with this impatience of detail? I shall never be an artist; I have no patient love of execution; I am delighted with my sketch, but the moment I try to finish it, I am chilled. Never was there a great sculptor who did not love to chip the marble” (1:295). While that quote seems to suggest that Fuller altogether abandoned the hopes of being an artist, the sentence that she wrote and that was left out of the biography suggests otherwise. Indeed, “The first suggestion of a thought delights—to follow it out, wearies & weakens me. I am like Sterling” showcases Fuller’s desire to write, and the fact that she compares herself to John Sterling shows that she saw herself as an artist. The resulting image of Fuller is of a much less self-deprecating and insecure woman than the one portrayed in Memoirs.

The same happens again a few lines later: in Memoirs, Fuller’s quote reads as follows,

> These gentlemen are surprised that I write no better, because I talk so well. But I have served a long apprenticeship to the one, none to the other. I shall write better, but never, I think, so well as I talk; for then I feel inspired. The means are pleasant; my voice excites me, my pen never. I shall not be
discouraged, nor take for final what they say, but sift from it the truth, and use it. I feel the strength to dispense with all illusions. I will stand steady, and rejoice in the severest probations. (1:296)

But in the notebook, Emerson’s transcription is longer:

Then these gentlemen are surprised that I write no better, because I talk so well. But I have served a long apprenticeship to the one, none to the other. I will write well yet; but never, I think, so well as I talk; for then I feel inspired, and the means are pleasant; my voice excites me, my pen never. —I shall by no means be discouraged, nor take for final what they say, but sift from it the truth, and use it. I feel within myself the strength to dispense with all illusions, & I will manifest it. I will stand steady, and rejoice in the severest probations. (EJ 11:471)

Taken singularly, the small differences that exist between these two passages are of limited importance; if taken all together, however, they amount to a polishing of Fuller’s individuality. Indeed, the passages deleted by Emerson—“by no means,” “within myself,” “I will manifest it”—all express a certain degree of self-confidence. “I shall by no means be discouraged” conveys a sense of relentlessness (much more strongly than “I shall not be discouraged”); “I feel within myself” emphasises Fuller’s subject-position through the doubling of personal pronouns; “I will manifest it” also evokes a strong faith in change and in Fuller’s power to achieve it. So not only does the removal of theses phrases weaken the strength of Fuller’s statements, but the erasure of the adverb “then” at the beginning of the first sentence confers to these “gentlemen”’s comments a universal tone which was never implied in the first place.

28 I underlined the passages that were omitted in Memoirs.
Of Quotations and Accusations: Misunderstanding Fuller

Most of the quotations from Fuller's writings in Memoirs were taken from her journals and letters, an aspect which likely contributed to the biography's success, as it allowed readers to access Fuller's private sphere. Although names were omitted in the final version of Memoirs, these private excerpts are filled with a high emotional charge; Emerson's sparse commentary in the notebook reveals how uncomfortable that made him feel.

Numerous quotations in Emerson's notebook evoke Fuller's sadness: in a letter to her sister Ellen, written from Florence on December 11, 1849, Fuller recounted how “[d]uring the siege of Rome I could not see my little boy. In the burning sun I went every day to wait in the crowd for letters about him. Often they did not come. I saw blood that had streamed on the wall close to where Ossoli was” (EJ 11:491). The violence emerging from this brief excerpt is poignant, as it conveys the suffering of a mother and a wife in times of war. Traces of Fuller's sorrow are also present in other accounts where war is not mentioned, as in a letter to Caroline Sturgis, which Fuller wrote in January 1848, "My days in Milan were not unmarked. I have known some happy hours, but they all lead to sorrow, & not only the cups of wine but if milk seem drugged with poison for me. It does not seem to be my fault, — this destiny: I do not court these things, they come. I am a poor magnet with power to be wounded by the bodies I attract" (11:492), and in March 1849, “All life that has been or could be natural to me, is invariably denied” (EJ 11:493). As these excerpts show, Fuller suffered through life's vicissitudes as a "magnet" who "attract[s]" certain events. The idea of predestination, of "destiny" or, as she also calls it, "fate," also appears in a letter to “Lewis Cass, Jr.” which Emerson transcribed in his notebook,
Your letter was dated 5 Sept <on the anniversary of> which is [the] birthday of my little boy. <5 Sept> ‘I wish I had received it then. I had, instead, the letter of the London publishers, which, indeed, I had foreseen, from previous advices, or rather perhaps, from a feeling of fate. It has been my fate that when I worked for others, I <should> could always succeed; when I tried to keep the least thing for myself, it was not permitted. (EJ 11:492)

While in his essay “Fate,” Emerson rather optimistically described how a “man will see his character emitted in the events that seem to meet, but which exude from and accompany him. Events expand with the character,” Fuller’s account of her “destiny” was tinted with sorrow in a way that equalled “fate” to a certain tragic destiny rather than self-realisation, or “expansion.” In “Fate,” Emerson noted that “[s]ome people are made up of rhyme, coincidence, omen, periodicity, and presage: they meet the person they seek; what their companion prepares to say to them, they first say to him; and a hundred signs apprise them of what is about to befall” (CW 6:13) (as Zwarg remarks, those words were clearly inspired by Fuller). For Zwarg, the similarities between Emerson’s essay “Fate” and Fuller’s thinking show that Emerson was convinced by her feminist reading strategy; that “he also was beginning to accept the idea that the conduct of life was as much an allegorical or writerly field in Fuller’s sense as the field of religion was. That is, both were fluid and not fixed to immutable symbols” (Feminist 279). I argue, instead, that Emerson’s rejection of Fuller’s emotionality as “womanly,” that is, a weakening filter of her intellectual capacities, complicates—if not invalidates—that reading.

Fuller’s writings were indeed unapologetically filled with emotions: as Lorde would write much later, “As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for
the most radical and daring of ideas” (37). But that degree of emotionality seems to have been misunderstood by Emerson, who viewed the expression of sentiment as a deformation. Before transcribing a passage from Fuller’s 1844 journal (“O I need some help. No I need a full a godlike embrace from some sufficient love. I know not why, but the wound of my heart has reopened yesterday & today. My head aches” [Berg and Perry 71]), Emerson noted that the “unlooked for trait in all these journals to me is the Woman, poor woman: they are all hysterical. She is bewailing her virginity and languishing for a husband” (EJ 11:500). The sexism of Emerson’s remark shows that, even though he felt the deepest affection for Fuller, he was unable to sympathize with her. Comparing Fuller’s and Emerson’s reformism, Reynolds pinpoints that “Fuller advocates what Emerson does—self-reliance—yet the key difference in their thought is that Fuller reveals all the obstacles contemporary women face, which are invisible to Emerson and other men, who take their freedoms and privileges for granted” (“Fern” 73). His comment about Fuller “bewailing her virginity” is not sympathetic; it is rather derisory and shows Emerson’s complete lack of awareness, at least in this instance, of the struggles faced by women in nineteenth-century America.

In the notebook, Emerson was also critical of what he called Fuller’s “sentimentalism”—a critique which made it into the final version of Memoirs, unlike the previous comment. As noted earlier in the thesis, the accusation of being “sentimental” was used as an argument to discredit Fuller’s writing and was tightly linked to womanhood. In 1851, he wrote,

Margaret was a sentimentalist. That hitherto odious <n|| . . ||> malformation nature in her case adopted, & was to make respectable. Just as . . .

Alexandrian Platonists clothed their master in brocade & spangles that have
drawn more eyes to him than his own diamonds; so here was a head which [was] so creative of new colours, of wonderful gleams<,> so iridescent that it piqued curiosity, <&> stimulated thought, & communicated mental activity to all who approached her, though her perceptions were not to be compared with her fancy, & she made numerous mistakes. Her perceptions are not accurate, but her integrity was perfect, and she followed by love, and was really bent on truth, but continually deceived by her fancy” (EJ 11:471).

While trying to embellish the fact that being “sentimental” was a bad thing by stating that Fuller made it “respectable,” Emerson defined Fuller’s “perceptions a[s] not accurate,” writing that she was “continually deceived by her fancy.” In Memoirs, he slightly changed his text and sounded a little less harsh—“her perceptions were not to be compared to her fancy, and she made numerous mistakes. Her integrity was perfect, and she was led and followed by love, and was really bent on truth, but too indulgent to the meteors of her fancy” (1:280).

Despite being clearly uncomfortable with the sensual nature of some of Fuller’s writing, Emerson did not avoid the topic of sex and gender in his journal and quoted some passages from Fuller’s private writing about it: “How all but infinite the mystery by which sex is stamped on the germ! By what modification of thought is this caused? Impossible to trace. Here am I the child of masculine energy, & Eugene of feminine loveliness; & so in many other families. / A man’s ambition with a woman’s heart, — ‘tis an accursed lot” (EJ 11:502). Although the word “gender” did not exist, and Fuller could only rely on the notions of “sexes” and “woman” and “man” to articulate her reflections, it is quite fascinating to see how she intercepted great fluidity between these binaries—just as Yao writes, “when it comes to sex, there is
no such thing as the merely biological; when it comes to gender, there is no such thing as the merely sociocultural” (136).

As David Leverenz writes in *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, “Though Emerson challenges the social definitions of manhood and power, he doesn’t question the more fundamental code that binds manhood and power together at the expense of intimacy. Emerson’s ideal of manly self-empowering reduces womanhood to spiritual nurturance while erasing female subjectivity” (44). What emerges from this study of the notebook is how significant Emerson’s editorial practices are, especially when examining his thinking on woman and Fuller’s posterity. Critical about her sentimentalism and judgmental about her sexual needs, Emerson seems afraid of Fuller’s body and, as a result, he modifies the body of the text. The personal relationship between him and Fuller was always a complicated one: in 1841, in Journal E, he wrote:

> You would have me love you. What shall I love? Your body? The supposition disgusts you. What you have thought & said? Well, whilst you were thinking & saying them, but not now. I see no possibility of loving any thing but what now is, & is becoming; your courage, your enterprize, your budding affection, your opening thought, your prayer, I can love, — but what else? (*EJ* 7:400)

*Memoirs* seems to have encapsulated those fears; as Zwarg remarks, “some of Emerson’s circumspection came from guilt and confusion over the nature of his own relationship with Fuller” (*Feminist* 241). Although Zwarg views Emerson’s editing of Fuller’s writing in *Memoirs* as a protective gesture which does not reflect his own opinion of her, Zwarg also mentions Emerson’s somewhat fearful attitude towards Fuller’s body:
The trunk of love letters that drifted onto the Fire Island beach symbolized her erotic life exposed. . . . When he mistakenly believes the trunk to contain letters from a variety of her correspondents (in the last year of her life she corresponded with over a hundred people), he broods about the discovery of his letters to her, observing the ‘panic [that] would strike all her friends, . . . as if a clever reporter had got underneath a confessional & agreed to report all that transpired there on Wall street’. (Feminist 241)

Zwarg is here referring to Fuller’s reputation, which the authors of Memoirs tried so hard to protect. I believe that, in addition to the issue of privacy (i.e. the authors’ concern about what people might think “if a clever reporter had got underneath a confessional & agreed to report all that transpired there on Wall street” [EJ 11:258]), the real cause of Emerson’s struggle was his inability to come to terms with Fuller’s womanhood, and, in particular, with anything that related to her physicality and intimacy.
3.2 Fuller and Emerson on “Dæmonology”: Bodily Functions and Biographical Misrepresentations

In 1839, when Fuller began her Conversation series, she planned to answer two questions, “What were we born to do? and how shall we do it?”. A few years later, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, she provided the following answer: “Let us be wise and not impede the soul. Let her work as she will. 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” (*WNC* 69-70). A universal Soul, that transcends the body, and that is accessed through individual progress by “creative,” “incessant” work on oneself is a belief that Fuller shared with Emerson, Thoreau and the other members of the Transcendental Club. However, it is also characteristic of Fuller’s feminism; detaching the individual from physicality was a way to free them from social discrimination. If Transcendentalists saw the soul as linked to universality, Fuller believed in the centrality of the soul as a way to free woman from constraining sexual identities (for “womanhood is at present too straitly-bounded to give me scope” [*MMFO* 1:297]).

As Cynthia Davis points out in an article entitled “Margaret Fuller, Body and Soul,” Fuller did not dislike the body: Davis explains that “what [Fuller] repudiates is not the body or pain (as did Emerson) but gender” (45). She also pinpoints that “if Fuller perceived the construction of gender in her own time to be restrictive, she was capable of imagining a time when it would not be so -hence her emphasis on the contingency of women’s status” (“Body” 40). Davis emphasises the significance of reflecting on the importance of the body for Fuller, who did not see it negatively even when affected by pain—“Fuller’s struggle for transcendence over pain helps us to locate the place of the physical within Transcendental metaphysics” (“Body” 32).
In “Margaret Fuller, Animal Magnetism, and the Transcendent Female Body,” Deborah Manson similarly demonstrates how “[a]n understanding of Fuller’s physical ailments is critical when considering her feminist ideals, for it was her pained body that led her to the liberating powers of mesmerism” (303). Through pain (mostly, migraine headaches), Fuller came to see the body as a means for transcension. Manson describes how “Fuller’s interest in mesmerism developed in the years before she travelled to Europe, from 1837 to 1845” and adds that although “[t]oday, mesmerism is classified as a nineteenth-century pseudo-science, . . . Fuller believed in the practice and from it derived a strength and confidence that fueled her feminist ideology” (299). Fuller also tried to involve Emerson in these practices, inviting him more than once to attend sessions with the “magnetized” Anna Parsons (FL 3:177). As Manson explains, the “clairvoyant ‘Lady’ at the mesmeric gatherings to which Fuller invited Emerson was Anna Q. T. Parsons”: “While in a mesmeric trance, Parsons would hold unopened letters in her hand or touch them to her forehead and provide psychic character readings of the authors of those letters” (Manson 298). Anna Quincy Thaxter Parsons, active in religious and reform groups, wrote for the New-York Daily Tribune and founded the Boston Women’s Associationists Union (FL 3:179n3).

Emerson politely rejected Fuller’s invitation on 16 February 1844: “As for the metaphysics & ethics of the personal & mesmeric question you have put, I will not now enter so deep waters lest the mail leave my letter” (EL 2:241). He was indeed much less at ease with mesmerism than Fuller was: as he wrote in 1840 to Sturgis, “I am a slow scholar at magnetism, dear sister, & always read the newspaper whilst that subject is discussed. I do not pretend to understand anything in your last letter but its lyric measures wh. are always beautiful to me. . . . I must even leave you and
Margaret to your flights in the sky, wishing you pleasant airs & a safe alighting” (EL 2:346-347). Fuller was aware of Emerson’s skepticism, something which had caused much friction between them throughout the years: in a letter written on January 28th, 1844, she told him, “I suppose Lidian told you of Miss Parson’s reading a letter of yours under Mesmeric influence (of which you make light, so wittily) but as she may not remember all she heard I shall try to write down exactly what James and Sarah told me about it” (FL 3:177). The brackets “of which you make light, so wittily” reveal Fuller’s frustration with Emerson’s long-time refusal to engage in the practices she found so interesting. In another letter to Emerson from 1844, Fuller similarly referred to his skepticism: “Sarah Clarke,” Fuller wrote, had fully intended to invite our new Ecstatica for Monday Evening, and submit to your eye the same revelations as to ours, when she was informed by Caroline that you had spoken of such experiments as ‘peeping through the keyhole,’ and such like. Sarah then says, ‘Have I a right to expose this delicate girl, whom I highly respect, to the scrutiny of one before whom she is to appear as a suspected person?’ (FL 3:181).

After this, Fuller inserted in her letter a fictional dialogue between her and Sarah Clarke, in which she alluded to Emerson’s skepticism—“Margaret. It is to be remembered that many of his friends have been obliged to approach Mr E. in that character. I myself occupied it opposite him for some years” (FL 3:181)

In journal entries from the same year, Fuller mentions Anna Parsons: “I read over Charles's character by Miss Parsons: it is the best, or rather the most searching one I have ever seen by her” (MHarF 29-30). Fuller continues, I dont know that she seizes leading traits better than she did with William or Mr. E. What she says of his being like an ‘eastern magician’, ‘the cells & caverns’
the mirthfulness that gleams across the character like sunlight across the dark pine woods, of him walking with his head down & trailing a little switch, of his starting from God, and then returning to him, of his loving man as the child of God rather than God as the Father of man; these and other traits are very good. (MHARF 30)

Fuller reported this commentary of Parsons’ readings to Newcomb himself: on June 9th, she wrote to him, “I think the reading of you in many respects excellent, of the ‘eastern magician,’ the gleams of sunlight across the dark pine woods, and trailing the little switch. She has seized with force several leading traits, and went much deeper than she did with mine” (FL 3:201).

In this section of Chapter Three, I analyse Emerson’s contradictory approach to the body in his commentary of Fuller’s 1840 turn to mesmerism in Memoirs. While he rejected Fuller’s view of the body as a means of transcendence (both in terms of spirituality and feminism), Emerson simultaneously stressed throughout Memoirs a “sentimental materiality that Fuller spent her brief life struggling to defy” (Davis, “Body” 48). Emerson’s sections “Arcana,” “Dæmonology,” and “Ecstasy” are indeed marked by constant returns to the notion of physicality, which is presented as a defining characteristic of womanhood and as an impediment to a woman’s intellect. This stands in contrast with Fuller’s feminist vision. In fact, as demonstrated by Manson and Davis, Fuller understood that a disembodied vision of transcendence was the privilege of male thinkers and chose to celebrate, rather than to denigrate, the body as an instrument of elevation. While she preferred to speak universally and addressed herself to “mankind,” Fuller simultaneously acknowledged the (female) body as a site, among others, of positive individual transformation.
In my analysis of Emerson’ sections “Arcana,” “Dæmonology,” and “Ecstasy,” I also wish to enter in conversation with Zwarg’s and Hanlon’s commentaries of *Memoirs*. In *Feminist Conversations*, Zwarg contends that Waldo employ[s] familiar title headings such as ‘Nature,’ ‘Dæmonology,’ and ‘Friendship’ in an attempt to show how Fuller embodies a threat to the usual reading of these themes. Once we understand how the text has been built up, layering one ‘hailing’ of the subject upon another, we begin to see how Fuller always encourages the cross-reading of these subjects in Emerson’s work. Waldo is consistently forced to interrupt his way of describing each concept in order to accommodate Fuller’s perspective. (248)

While I agree with Zwarg’s reading that Emerson tries, as much as possible, to include Fuller’s views on spirituality and the body in *Memoirs* (he literally juxtaposes her assertions to his, leaving it to the reader to choose which one to side with), I also believe that his framing, sceptical commentary reveals the failure—and not the success—of Emerson’s attempt to learn from her. I offer a comparative reading of his lecture on “Dæmonology” (1839) and of his sections in *Memoirs* “Arcana, “Dæmonology,” and “Ecstasy” to show how his mistrust of such practices perdured through the years.

Without commenting directly on mesmerism, Hanlon addresses the famous 1840-1841 friendship crisis between Emerson and Fuller in *Emerson’s Memory Loss*, explaining how it was triggered by the former’s refusal to welcome Fuller’s “change,” which primarily consisted in a spiritual revelation that had all to do with mesmerism. Hanlon states that “the shift in Emerson’s affective politics . . . has much to do with his reconsideration of Fuller’s charge that he had failed her as a friend is perhaps most visible in the transformed ways Emerson had of articulating that
abolitionist certainty from the days of their dispute into his period of abolitionist writing during the mid-1850s” (82). I respond to Hanlon’s “reconsideration of Fuller’s charge” and argue that Emerson’s depiction of Fuller’s body in Memoirs represents a step back from and not forward towards that kind of progressive thinking.

I – Fuller and Emerson on the Body

A) Fuller’s Dual Relation with the Body

In an often-quoted passage from Memoirs, Emerson describes Fuller as someone who “had a feeling that she ought to have been a man, and said of herself, ‘A man’s ambition with a woman’s heart, is an evil lot’” (MMFO 1:229). This particular passage is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, Emerson introduces Fuller’s quote in a way that manipulates the reader’s understanding of what she really meant. The fact that she had an ambition that exceeded what was usually expected from women does not necessarily mean that she felt that she should have been a man. Also, the association of the “intellect” with “man” and of the “heart” with “woman” is one on which gender discrimination based itself for a long time, and in that, Emerson acknowledged Fuller as a subversive figure. However easier it might have made things, Fuller did not want to be a man. In fact, as critics have shown, her writing can be seen as a celebration of womanhood. Gustafson demonstrates how instead of adopting traditionally male platforms and manners of expression to gain the trust of an audience more easily, Fuller decided instead to reinforce women’s forms of expression:

Despite Fuller’s celebrated androgyny, her most radical contribution to feminist thought was not her insistence on her ability to speak, write, and think in masculine modes. . . . Rather, Fuller contributed a model for joining feminine
content to feminine form and made that one option among several for women seeking new expressive possibilities to legitimate their public presence.

(Gustafson 40)

If reusing male modes of expression meant sabotaging her feminist message, Fuller’s feminism consisted in utilizing female modes of expression to ascertain female power; and that is precisely what Emerson misunderstood. His accusation of “sentimentalism” in Memoirs resulted from a profound misunderstanding of Fuller’s feminist strategy which, as Gustafson contends, consisted in experimenting “with voice and form within sentimentalism to address the problems of women's relationship to a public language shaped primarily by men” (39).

The tendency to state that Fuller “should have” been a man was apparently quite widespread; and yet, in Woman in the Nineteenth Century, Fuller was much more convinced that one should strive to improve the condition of woman, than that she wished to be a man. A number of passages in Woman show that Fuller did not want to be a man: about “Georges Sand,” whose real name was Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, she wrote “Georges Sand smokes, wears male attire, wishes to be addressed as ‘Mon frère’;—perhaps, if she found those who were as brothers, indeed, she would not care whether she were brother or sister” (WNC 44). Fuller bluntly also addressed her male readers about this issue—"Ye cannot believe it, men; but the only reason why women ever assume what is more appropriate to you, is because you prevent them from finding out what is fit for themselves. Were they free, were they wise fully to develop the strength and beauty of woman, they would never wish to be men, or manlike” (WNC 36). Indeed, Fuller spoke honestly about her desire to celebrate the “feminine” as much as the “masculine”: “an intimate friend of the other sex said, in a fervent moment, that I ‘deserved in some star to be a man.’
He was much surprised when I disclosed my view of my position and hopes, when I declared my faith that the feminine side, the side of love, of beauty, of holiness, was now to have its full chance” (WNC 22).

As Reynolds writes, Fuller was not an activist, she was a reformer (“Fern” 66). In a society which weaponised adjectives such as “sentimental” and “womanly,” Fuller attempted to reevaluate womanhood in writing. Rather than rejecting it, she sought to celebrate the body: Davis notes that “Like Emerson and Thoreau, Fuller sought to defy the reductive equating of identity and physicality, but her efforts were aimed not only at idealistically reconfiguring the physical to unveil its hidden lessons in metaphysics but also at accomplishing the reverse” (“Body” 49). Fuller had a somewhat dual relation with the human body, which was informed by her experience as a woman in nineteenth-century America: unlike her male counterparts, she did not simply emphasise the importance of the spirit, but she also argued in favor of a positive reevaluation of the female body. In fact, although she wanted women to be considered as “souls” (a consideration which implied they were equal to men), she also celebrated the body as a site for spiritual discovery: “The body thus emerges not as the physiological site of gender but as the physical source of metaphysical insights into the intersections between nature and soul, suffering and transcendence” (Davis, “Body” 45). This dual, spiritual and embodied, positive vision of womanhood differs from Emerson’s vision of the body and of the female body more specifically.

In Memoirs, womanhood is not at all celebrated as “transcendence” but, rather, it is used to portray Fuller as vulnerable, in the throes of her emotions and imagination. Emerson’s depiction of Fuller reproduces the “common male assertion was that women were naturally emotional beings and that only men possessed the reason and restraint necessary to succeed outside the home” (Reynolds, “Fern” 65).
The body is not perceived positively, and this is particularly evident in how Emerson addresses Fuller’s interest in mesmerism, but also in how he writes about sentiment and sensuality.

**B) Emerson’s Distrust of the Body and the Bodily**

In a *New Yorker* article entitled “Ecstasy of Influence,” Dan Chiasson comments on Emerson’s poetry of grief, writing that “Emerson was not the poet he had in mind in ‘The Poet.’” Similarly, I argue that in *Memoirs* Emerson was not the women’s rights supporter he had in mind in his lecture “Woman” (1855). In the posthumous biography, despite his best efforts to memorialise her, Emerson was very judgmental about Fuller. Throughout the biography, he disapproved of her spirituality, ignored her feminism, and criticised her writing. Dismissing Fuller’s belief in the supernatural by stating that she was governed by the “meteors of her fancy” (*MMFO* 1:280), Emerson’s rejected Fuller’s faith in the power of intuition, her attempts to cure the body through alternative practices, and her general interest in gems and symbols in the sections “Arcana,” “Dæmonology” and “Ecstasy.”

As Robert Milder notes, “On the issues of gender, race, and class that have become indices of political definition, Emerson was a hesitant or tardy reformer at best.” 29 Milder argues that while “acknowledging that true genius is androgynous, [Emerson] was disabled by his own personal and vocational anxieties about manliness from doing justice to the nascent feminist movement.” Evaluating Emerson’s radicalism, he convincingly identifies a three-fold problem. First, Milder states that “Emerson has been called many things, but except by theological stalwarts outraged by the Divinity School Address, ‘radical’ has seldom been one of

---

29 For a similar reflection, see Gougeon on Emerson’s 1844 “Emancipation Address.”
them” (49). Secondly, he writes about the challenge posed by presentism: “To speak of a ‘radical’ Emerson is necessarily to speak of a historical Emerson. In the fullest sense, this means crediting Emerson with the complex social being we implicitly claim for ourselves as figures enmeshed in history and deeply constructed by it” (49). Thirdly, Milder points out that it is almost impossible to pin Emerson’s thinking down as it evolved throughout the years: “even within the period 1836-1844, Emerson’s Transcendental heyday, there is no univocal or settled ‘Emerson’ any more than there is a univocal or settled ‘America.’” Milder eventually concludes that Emerson’s radicalism is to be found “elsewhere”—“The chief reference point for Emerson’s radicalism is not gender, race, or class but his relationship to a phenomenon that . . . impressed contemporary observers for better or worse as the leading characteristic of the age: the emergence of the individual.” Although he focused on the “individual” regardless of gender, Emerson’s image of womanhood (the one which emerges from his depiction of Fuller in Memoirs) was still in many ways informed by True Womanhood, in its emphasis on woman’s physical appearance, on her morality and self-sacrifice. In the biography, Emerson was unable to sympathise with Fuller’s experience as a woman and bluntly rejected a number of her beliefs, including her interest in “Dæmonology.”

While narrating Fuller’s life, Emerson indeed struggled with a particular phase of her individual growth: two years after Fuller’s death, he still had difficulty accepting the spiritual awakening that Fuller underwent in 1840, which Steele calls her “intellectual coming of age.” Many times in his chapter “Visits to Concord,” Emerson refers to 1840 as a year marked by change: “I have alluded to the fact, that, in the summer of 1840, Margaret underwent some change in the tone and the direction of her thoughts, to which she attributed a high importance” (1:308); “I have already
intimated, in the summer and autumn of 1840, she had retreated to some interior shrine, and believed that she came into life and society with some advantage from this devotion” (MMFO 1:338). Emerson’s repeated use of the indefinite adjective “some”—“some change in the tone and the direction of her thoughts,” “some interior shrine,” “some advantage from this devotion”—shows his confusion over Fuller’s new interests. The vagueness with which Emerson refers to these “change[s]” also suggests a distance and refusal to fully accept them.

Emerson communicated his struggle to accept this new Fuller directly to her: in a letter written in December 1840, he explained, “I once fancied your nature & aims so eccentric that I had a foreboding that certain crises must impend in your history that would be painful to me to witness in the conviction that I could not aid even by sympathy” (EL 2:360). In the section “Ecstasy” of Memoirs, Emerson commented a posteriori, “I observed . . . a certain pathos of sentiment, and a march of character, threatening to arrive presently at the shores and plunge into the sea of Buddhism and mystical trances” (MMFO 1:308). Back in 1840, Emerson had tried to understand what Fuller’s new beliefs were: in August of that year, he had asked her, “how is it that you can leave me in this ignorance, with such a will on your part to teach & on my part to learn?” (EL 2:328). In Memoirs, he explains that “in this year, 1840, in which events occurred which combined great happiness and pain for her affections, she remained for some time in a sort of ecstatic solitude” (1:308). His skepticism about those changes is evident—“[s]he made many attempts to describe her frame of mind to me, but did not inspire me with confidence that she had now come to any experiences that were profound or permanent” (MMFO 1:308).

In December 1839, Fuller had tried to explain those changes to Emerson although she was, clearly, afraid of his criticism,
If you could look into my mind just now, you would send far from you those who love and hate. I am on the Drachenfels, and cannot get off; it is one of my naughtiest moods. Last Sunday, I wrote a long letter, describing it in prose and verse, and I had twenty minds to send it you as a literary curiosity; then I thought, this might destroy relations, and I might not be able to be calm and chip marble with you any more, if I talked to you in magnetism and music; so I sealed and sent it in the due direction. (*FL* 2:104)

Fuller, as her 1844 comments about Miss Parsons reveal, became quickly aware that Emerson did not understand the new type of spirituality she had become interested in: in February 1840, in a letter that Emerson reported in *Memoirs*, she complained, “Gentle Sanscrit I cannot write. My Persian and Arabic you love not. Why do I write thus to one who must ever regard the deepest tones of my nature as those of childish fancy or worldly discontent?” (*MMFO* 1:291).

At the beginning of her 1840 Conversations series, she even informed her students about “the great changes in [her] mind”—

Sunday, Nov. 8th, 1840. -On Wednesday I opened with my class. It was a noble meeting. I told the great changes in my mind, and that I could not be sure they would be satisfied with me now, as they were when I was in deliberate possession of myself. I tried to convey the truth, and though I did not arrive at any full expression of it, they all, with glistening eyes, seemed melted into one love. Our relation is now perfectly true. (*MMFO* 1:339)

In *Memoirs*, Emerson cathartically addressed the misunderstanding: “She was vexed at the want of sympathy on my part, and I again felt that this craving for sympathy did not prove the inspiration” (*MMFO* 308-309). However, instead of sympathizing with Fuller in *Memoirs*, he remained critical, showing the limits of that catharsis.
After their 1840 rift, Fuller became more and more aware and accustomed to the limits of Emerson’s understanding—“Mr. E. scarce knows the instincts. And uses them rather for rejection than reception when he uses them at all” (FL 2:161n1). Although her writings show that she eventually came to terms with Emerson’s coldness and that she accepted him as a friend despite their differences, Memoirs reveals that those differences were very much intact until 1852. While “[u]nder ideal conditions, the body for Emerson is another ‘natural’ manifestation of the soul” (Davis, “Body” 32), Emerson was always distrustful of the faith that Fuller put in body-based spirituality. A refusal to celebrate the body and the bodily therefore pervades Emerson’s writing in Memoirs. Davis provides an interesting explanation to such dislike, stating that “No doubt the untimely deaths of many of those he loved, especially the tragic loss of his only son Waldo at the age of five, deepened his disdain for a body that was foreign to man’s soul yet utterly necessary to his existence” (Douglas, “Body” 32). As Fuller wrote in a letter in December 1844, “you . . . need to be careful of your health. It is so very unnatural to guard against harm; yet it is a pity to let the body become a clog, instead of a plaint vestment and organ to the spirit” (FL 3:251).

II – On Fuller’s Dæmonology

A) Of Gems, the Sistrum, and Flowers: Emerson and Channing on Fuller

In Memoirs, Emerson’s sections “Arcana”, “Dæmonology,” and “Ecstasy” are all three concerned with Fuller’s mysticism—let us first see how each word is defined and what that entails. The word “Arcana,” the title of the first section of Emerson’s chapter “Visits to Concord,” denotes a “mysterious or specialized knowledge, language, or information accessible or possessed only by the initiate” (Webster).
Fuller’s mysticism certainly looked “mysterious” to the authors of Memoirs, who did not share nor really understand her interest in “daemonology”—a term which Fuller defined as follows:

As to the Daemoniacal, I know not that I can say to you anything more precise than you find from Goethe. There are no precise terms for such thoughts. . . . We speak of a mystery, a dread; we shudder, but we approach still nearer, and a part of our nature listens, sometimes answers to this influence, which, if not indestructible, is at least indissolubly linked with the existence of matter.

(MMFO 1:225)

Describing a sort of “influence” (which etymologically denotes something that flows, like a dialogue between “matter” and spirit), Fuller admitted that she was herself drawn by a force to which one “listens” and “sometimes answers.” Indeed, Fuller depicts a sort of attraction (“we approach still nearer”) that pulls the individual (“our nature”) in one direction, and that is “indissolubly linked with the existence of matter.”

It might also be useful to briefly focus on the word “ecstasy,” which held a very different meaning for Fuller and for Emerson. As Manson pinpoints, the term “Ecstatica” “appears in ‘The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men: Woman versus Women,’ in which Fuller argues for the capabilities of woman, as does ecstasy in ‘Leila,’ in which she describes a mystical experience. Ecstasy commonly refers to a mystical, enraptured trance state” (299). Robert D. Richardson writes that, on the other hand, ecstasy “does not mean a technical out-of-body experience” for Emerson “but a joyous consciousness of the rich plenitude of existence” (“Nature” 104).

Emerson’s description of Fuller’s mysticism in Memoirs is characterised by a certain distance he keeps, as narrator, from her, his subject: viewed as an object of study, she is literally dissected, “I have separated and distributed as I could some of
the parts which blended in the rich composite energy which Margaret exerted during the ten years over which my occasional interviews with her were scattered” (*MMFO* 1:311). Channing too writes about Fuller in a similar fashion: “it was quite instructive to watch the moods of a mind so sensitive as Margaret's” (*MMFO* 2:92). The adverb and adjective “so sensitive” bring once again into the picture a sort of over-emotionality generally associated with women and used to justify gender discrimination—“The emotive force in her, indeed, was immense in volume, and most various in tendency; and it was wonderful to observe the outward equability of one inwardly so impassioned” (*MMFO* 2:92). The expressions “impassioned” and “emotive force,” as well as the exaggerations “immense in volume,” “most various in tendency,” “so impassioned,” all point to Fuller’s (womanly) emotionality, and make her seem volatile and impressionable.

Like Emerson, Channing also writes about Fuller as of an object of study—“The more one studied her,” “I was chiefly interested in the processes whereby she was gaining harmony and unity,” “gaining real knowledge of her commanding character” (*MMFO* 2:92). He also comments on Fuller’s spirituality, but his tone differs from Emerson’s: it is much more exaggerated and filled with compliments, while Emerson is more sober and critical. In “The Woman” (a sub-section of Channing's first chapter, “Jamaica Plain”), Channing speaks of Fuller’s sudden change: “In 1839 I had met Margaret upon the plane of intellect. In the summer of 1840, on my return from the West, she was to be revealed in a new aspect” (*MMFO* 2:31). He then explains the nature of that “new aspect”: “There were gems, too, and medallions and seals, to be examined, each enigmatical, and each blended by remembrances with some fair hour of her past life” (*MMFO* 2:32). The adjective
“enigmatical” and the verb phrase “to be examined” both create a distance between Channing and Fuller, suggesting that he, too, struggled to understand her mysticism.

In his sections, Channing tries to explain Fuller’s spirituality in quite mechanical terms, justifying it as a way she found to channel a certain excess of emotions, of imaginative faculties: “In the world of imagination, she had discharged the stormful energy which would have been destructive in actual life. And in thought she had bound herself to the mast while sailing past the Sirens” (MMFO 2:93). Channing’s reference to a deleterious “stormful energy” could be interpreted as a timid, Victorian hint at a possible repressed sexual desire. Channing then continues to explain Fuller’s mysticism as the effect (the “result”) of a cause (“prisoned emotions”): “The result was, that at this period Margaret had become a Mystic. Her prisoned emotions found the freedom they pined for in contemplation of nature’s exquisite harmonies,—in poetic regards of the glory that enspheres human existence, when seen as a whole from beyond the clouds,—and above all in exultant consciousness of life ever influent from the All-Living” (MMFO 2:94). Sexuality, or at least hints at it, then reappears in Channing’s remarks, “Filled thus as Margaret was with ecstasy, she was yet more than willing,—even glad,—to bear her share in the universal sorrow. Well she knew that pain must be proportioned to the fineness and fervor of her organization; that the very keenness of her sensibility exposed her to constant disappointment or disgust” (MMFO 2:124). In this passage, Fuller’s “sensibility,” presented as a feminine bodily constitution, is what exposes her to danger (“constant disappointment”).

Emerson does not try to explain Fuller’s mysticism in “mechanical” terms like Channing, but openly admits that he struggles to understand that part of her life. What Emerson does, however, is to quote repeatedly from Fuller’s mystic writings in
**Memoirs** right after stating his disapproval of such beliefs. Commenting on such odd juxtaposition, Zwarg notes that she sees in Emerson, or more specifically in his philo-feminist alter-ego “Waldo,” the desire to learn from Fuller—“This exorbitant pattern repeats itself throughout the text, indicating that Fuller’s resistances to Waldo’s way of knowing are virtues that Emerson absorbs and structures into the pattern of his work from ‘Nature’ to ‘Fate’” (*Feminist* 251). I argue against such claim: I believe that in addition to not understanding Fuller’s beliefs, Emerson also used them to question her credibility as a Transcendentalist thinker. At the beginning of “Arcana,” he explains,

> It was soon evident that there was somewhat a little pagan about her; that she had some faith more or less distinct in a fate, and in a guardian genius; that her fancy, or her pride, had played with her religion. She had a taste for gems, ciphers, talismans, omens, coincidences, and birth-days. She had a special love for the planet Jupiter, and a belief that the month of September was inauspicious to her. She never forgot that her name, Margarita, signified a pearl. (*MMFO* 1:219)

Here the word “pagan”, the vagueness conveyed through the pronoun “somewhat,” and the use of the indefinite “some” all translate a sense of skepticism and misunderstanding. Emerson repeats himself quite a lot in these pages: if on page 219, he writes about Fuller’s “taste for gems, ciphers, talismans, omens, coincidences, and birth-days” he repeats the almost exact same words on the next page, noting how “[c]oincidences, good and bad, contretemps, seals, ciphers, mottoes, omens, anniversaries, names, dreams, are all of a certain importance to her” (*MMFO* 1:220).
As pointed out by Zwarg, Emerson’s sections are characterised by a very odd juxtaposition: on the one hand, he comments on Fuller’s beliefs with skepticism and distance and, on the other, quotes parts of her writing and admits to disappointing her in friendship. Describing her taste for gems, Emerson explains why she “chose carbuncle for her own stone”: “She valued what she had somewhere read, that carbuncles are male and female. The female casts out light, the male has his within himself. ‘Mine,’ she said, ‘is the male.’ And she was wont to put on her carbuncle, a bracelet, or some selected gem, to write letters to certain friends” (MMFO 1:219). For Fuller, carbuncle was indeed a talisman: as evident from the passage quoted in Memoirs, it embodied that union of the male and the female. Unfortunately, Emerson did not go as far as quoting from Woman in the Nineteenth Century. In Woman, Leila—one of Fuller’s many fictional doubles—is associated with the red carbuncle: “I find her always to have retreated into the secret veins of earth. Then glows through her whole being the fire that so baffles men, as she walks on the surface of earth; the blood-red, heart’s blood-red of the carbuncle” (WNC 170). This fascinating passage from Woman celebrates Leila’s power, symbolized by the carbuncle’s red color, and describes the triumph of her force over the “baffle[d] men.” For Fuller, although gender is present in that reinstatement of woman’s force, Leila’s power transcends gender and is of a universal nature:

She is, like it, her own light, and beats with the universal heart, with no care except to circulate as the vital fluid; it would seem waste then for her to rise to the surface. There in these secret veins of earth she thinks herself into fine gold, or aspires for her purest self, till she interlaces the soil with veins of silver. She knows that fires are preparing on upper earth to temper this sternness of her silent self. (WNC 170)
Fuller admires Leila’s “vital fluid,” which is not marked by her sex, but is a force that transcends all distinctions. However, Fuller also knows that while that “light” shines within “these secret veins of earth,” it is endangered by “ris[ing] to the surface” where “fires are preparing on upper earth to temper this sternness of her silent self” (WNC 170). That passage—especially its conclusion, “temper this sternness of her silent self”—is particularly striking when read alongside Memoirs; for one could argue that that is precisely what its three authors did, they tempered the sternness of Fuller’s silent self.

In her correspondence with Emerson, Fuller did not temper her beliefs; she shared them with him, knowing well that he would receive them with skepticism. She insisted, “My flowers and stones however shabby interest me, because they stand for a great deal to me, and would, I feel, have a hieroglyphical interest for those of like nature with me” (FL 3:309). Although this passage does not appear in Memoirs, Emerson briefly alludes to it, recounting how Fuller “valued, of course, the significance of flowers, and chose emblems for her friends from her garden” (MMFO 1:221). In that same letter, written by Fuller on July 13th, 1844, she added two illustrations of her emblems: one was a “Double Triangle, Serpent and Rays,” and the other was a drawing of a sistrum, a symbol that was very special to her. To this too, Emerson alludes in Memoirs: “She chose the Sistrum for her emblem, and had it carefully drawn with a view to its being engraved on a gem. And I know not how many verses and legends came recommended to her by this symbolism” (MMFO 1:221). The sistrum, a musical instrument (made of wood, metal or clay) used in ancient Egypt and also throughout the Roman Empire and associated with the cult of

---

30 This illustration was used, slightly altered, as frontispiece for the first edition of Woman (WNC 195n9).
the goddess Isis, was a symbol linked to maternity, dance, joy and sexuality. Fuller drew a very close reproduction of the real instrument, but, unlike the other illustration she included in her letter to Emerson, that one was not included in *Woman*. The sistrum did, nevertheless, end up being mentioned in *Memoirs*, amidst Emerson’s sceptical remarks about Fuller’s mysticism.


(Fig. 16) “Sistrum of the Chantress Tapenuca. 1186–600 BC.” Met Museum, New York), www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/553814
B) “Dæmonology”: Emerson’s Lecture and Memoirs

Commenting on Fuller’s “Two Herbergs,” a work published in March 1844 and devoted to Lord Herbert of Cherbury and his younger brother George, Robin Grey states that “[b]y employing in ‘The Two Herbergs’ the genre of a Landorlike imaginary conversation, Fuller is able to acknowledge resemblance yet emphasize the polarity between Emerson and herself in the guise of the two brothers” (89). In *The Complicity of Imagination*, Grey argues that Fuller compared her relationship with Emerson to that of the “Two Herbergs,” viewing herself as more similar to Lord Herbert, and liking Emerson to his younger brother George: Fuller, Grey explains, “chooses to acknowledge the Lord Herbert within herself while distancing herself from George Herbert — the devotional poet most often characterised as ‘the supplicant’ - instead relegating Emerson to that role” (91). Grey pinpoints that “Fuller’s Lord Herbert argues implicitly for self-enabling access to truth, insisting that as long as no one is excluded, there are many ways to truth, even the miraculous” (104). Fuller refers to Lord Herbert as the “spiritual man of the world” who is “able to comprehend all things”: she insists on the all-encompassing nature of his wisdom right from the very first pages of her essay, in which she declares that the world does not need “a saint, martyr, sage, poet, artist, preacher, or any other whose vocations leads to a seclusion and partial use of faculty” (*Papers* 18). Certainly, Fuller was much more open to the “miraculous” than Emerson was.

The opening of Emerson’s section “Dæmonology” in *Memoirs* (*MMFO* 1:221-226), characterised by general, third-person comments, is reminiscent of his 1839 lecture “Dæmonology”: in *Memoirs*, rather than directly speaking about Fuller, he writes, “This catching at straws of coincidence, where all is geometrical, seems the necessity of certain natures” (*MMFO* 1:221). Maintaining a distance from his
deceased friend, whom he refers to indirectly as “certain natures,” Emerson explains mysticism as something inevitable, which is a “necessity” for some. In the next page, his words already shift from observation to judgement: writing in the third-person singular, and talking about “a man,” Emerson condemns those who “to infer Providence, because a man happens to find a shilling on the pavement just when he wants one to spend, is puerile, and much as if each of us should date his letters and notes of hand from his own birthday, instead of from Christ's or the king's reign, or the current Congress” (MMFO 1:222). Similarly, in his lecture on “Dæmonology,” Emerson addresses the “lovers of marvels, of what we call the occult and unproved sciences, of mesmerism, of astrology, of coincidences, of intercourse, by writing or by rapping or by painting, with departed spirits,” to whom he asked “not [to] reproach us with incredulity because we are slow to accept their statement. It is not the incredibility of fact, but a certain want of harmony between the action and the agents” (Biographical 12). The use of third-person pronouns (especially the contrast between “them”—the “lovers of marvels”—and “us” or “me”), the expression “slow to accept their statement,” all recall the way in which Emerson also used to distance himself from Fuller in Memoirs. In Emerson’s letter to Sturgis quoted above, Emerson would express in quasi-identical terms his misunderstanding of such practices—“I am a slow scholar at magnetism.”

As their very name suggests, memoirs are representations of memory, not of history. Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli is in that regard no exception: as Zwarg and Hanlon have both demonstrated, the biography redraws—in addition to Fuller’s life—the psychological journey of Emerson’s remembrance of Fuller. It is a highly subjective, mediated and personal text. However, it is also problematic because, through the abundant quoting of Fuller (and despite the mishandling of her writing)
the biography claims a certain objectivity to which it does not comply. The way in which Emerson writes about Fuller’s interest in mysticism consists in an alternation between “memoirist” and “biographer.” In some respects, he describes Fuller’s interest with a distant objectivity: the third-person singular, the impersonal structures create the effect of a photographic lens which does not distort, but renders as faithfully as possible, the original image— “It will be seen, however, that this propensity Margaret held with certain tenets of fate, which always swayed her, and which Goethe, who had found room and fine names for all this in his system, had encouraged” (MMFO 1:222). As soon as Emerson starts to write in the first-person, the neutrality of the photographic lens is gone and adverbs such as “strangely” impart to his rendering of Fuller’s beliefs a rather disenchanted tone: “and, I may add, which her own experiences, early and late, seemed strangely to justify” (MMFO 1:222). Emerson’s commentary of this aspect of Fuller’s life indeed cyclically retorts back to some form of judgment. When mentioning in Memoirs Fuller’s descriptions of dæmonology to a friend, “In another letter to an earlier friend, she expatiates a little” (MMFO 1:224), Emerson sounds condescending.

For Emerson, continually looking for signs and forebodings equated to having a narrow perspective on life: as he wrote in 1839, “The whole world is an omen and a sign. Why look so wistfully in a corner?” (Biographical 28). Although he recognised that many were attracted by mesmerism, Emerson concluded his 1839 lecture by reinstating his skepticism of such practices and reaffirming the power of Nature,

Willingly I too say, Hail! to the unknown awful powers which transcend the ken of the understanding. And the attraction which this topic has had for me and which induces me to unfold its parts before you is precisely because I think the numberless forms in which this superstition has reappeared in
every time an every people indicates the inextinguishableness of wonder in man; betrays his conviction that behind all your explanations is a vast and potent and living Nature, inexhaustible and sublime, which you cannot explain. (Biographical 27)

As Manson remarks, “in 1839 [Emerson] spoke out against the materiality of mesmerism” (301): for him, “physical and metaphysical insights belonged to separate spheres” (302). Manson further explains that “Emerson continued to assert the division between the spirit and the body, arguing for meditative states in which the spirit transcends bodily concerns or impediments” (Manson 302). Indeed, in 1852, Emerson was still unwilling to accept this part of Fuller’s life.

When expressing his distaste for Fuller’s mysticism, Emerson also made a number of generalisations on women, whom he described as all somewhat obfuscated in their capacity to judge: “In our noble Margaret her personal feeling colours all her judgements of persons, of books, of pictures, & of the laws of the world. This is easily felt in common women & a large deduction is civilly made on the spot, by whosoever replies to their remark” (EJ 4:293). Here, Emerson distinguished between “common women” and Margaret: the two were different in his eyes, as shown by the use of the conjunction “but”—“But when the speaker has such brilliant talent & literature as Margaret, she gives so many fine names to these merely sensuous & subjective objects, that the hearer is long imposed upon, and thinks so precise & glittering nomenclature cannot be of mere muscae voliantes but must be of some real ornithology hitherto unknown to him” (EJ 4:293-294). The “merely sensuous & subjective objects” were to Emerson the symbols of a physicality which he rejected as less important, because far from the universal and the ideal, and which he associated with “women.” However, in the presence of Fuller’s genius
(“brilliant talent & literature,” “so many fine names”), who somehow cast a spell on him (“glittering”), Emerson had started to believe that those “mere muscae volantes” were “some real ornithology hitherto unknown to him.” The metaphor of the spell also shows, however, how ephemerous these episodes were for him. Quickly, Emerson returned to his former opinions: as Hanlon explains, “very regrettably to Emerson—that tendency to surrender judgment to feeling produced in [Fuller] a ‘florid’ prose style, surfeits of discursive warmth” (61).

Emerson’s commentary of Fuller’s mysticism in Memoirs reveals the conflicted attitude he held towards the body, which he both rejected as an impediment to (Fuller’s) intellect and insisted upon as a defining characteristic of woman. This attitude is in marked contrast to Fuller’s views: as Manson writes, “[w]hereas Emerson saw the body as a mere vessel to the spirit, Fuller saw potential harmony and correspondence between the body and the spirit” (302). The relation between body and spirit was often the object of debate among Transcendentalist circles; in her 1843 Dial essay “What is Beauty?”, Lydia Maria Child celebrated the possibility of sensory accessions—“Beauty is felt not seen by the understanding. Mere analysis never attains so high. It can dissect, but it cannot create beauty, or perceive it; because it is thought standing alone, and therefore in self-consciousness. A primal note is wanting, and its tune is ever defective. A primal color is gone, and its painting is deficient.” In viewing Beauty as something which one “feels” rather than “seeing,” Child sided with Fuller’s views of the relationship between body and intellect. The combination of the two is, however, what Emerson criticised in Memoirs, in which he deplored that in “our noble Margaret, her personal feeling colors all her judgment” (MMFO 1:279).
3.3 After *Memoirs*: The Sinusoid Trajectory of Emerson’s Involvement in the Women’s Rights Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Paulina Wright Davis invites Emerson to attend the Woman’s Rights Convention to be held in Worcester, Massachusetts. He declines but authorizes her “to use [his] name as one of the inviter of the convention” (<em>EL</em> 4: 230).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Lucy Stone invites Emerson to attend another convention for women’s rights, also to be held in Worcester. He declines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td><em>Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli</em> is published in the United States (2 vols.) and in the United Kingdom (3 vols.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>Wendell Phillips asks Emerson’s permission to use his name on a printed circular designed to secure signers for a petition to be laid before the constitutional convention. Emerson declines Phillips’s request.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Emerson reads “Woman” before the Woman’s Rights Convention on September 20th, at the Meionaon Hall in Boston.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Emerson repeats the same lecture before the 28th Congregational Society at the Music Hall in Boston.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Emerson gives a lecture for the New-England Woman’s Suffrage Association anniversary on May 26th, at Tremont Temple in Boston. He is elected Vice President of the group at the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>“Mr. Emerson on Woman Suffrage” (1862) is published in the <em>Woman’s Journal</em> (March 26th).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In *Woman*, Fuller stated decidedly “if you ask me what offices [women] may fill; I reply—any. I do not care what case you put; let them be sea-captains if you will” (*WNC* 102). Written in 1845, this passage was—as much then as it is now—among the most quoted from Fuller’s book. In fact, Greeley recounted to the authors of *Memoirs* that he would often quote it to Margaret herself: “Whenever she said or did anything implying the usual demand of Woman on the courtesy and protection of
Manhood, I was apt, before complying, to look her in the face and exclaim with marked emphasis, - quoting from her 'Woman in the Nineteenth Century,' -‘LET THEM BE SEA-CAPTAINS IF THEY WILL!' Of course, this was given and received as raillery, but it did not tend to ripen our intimacy or quicken my esteem into admiration” (MMFO 2:156).31

Ten years after the publication of Woman in the Nineteenth Century, Emerson made a more or less direct allusion to Fuller’s famous words as he stated, in his 1855 lecture on “Woman”, “Let good women sail in the ship, the manners at once are altered and mended” (2:18), “She is to civilize the voting as she has the sailors” (LL 2:19). Twenty years after Woman, he again referred to Fuller’s famous lines in his “Discours Manqué,” in which he wrote, “Let good women go passengers in the ship, and the manners at once are mended” (LL 2:17). While women were exhorted to be all they wanted in Fuller’s work, Emerson’s lecture quite literally put them in the passenger seat. He presented feminine influence as something positively regenerative (“civilize,” “mended”) but insisted on the image of woman as passenger, who sails “in the ship” rather than “who sails the ship.” As shown by these examples, Emerson’s stance on women’s rights differed from Fuller’s although his thinking was influenced by her.

In the eighth chapter of Feminist Conversations, entitled “Emerson's Scene before the Women: Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli and ‘Woman,’” Zwarg establishes a continuity between three works by Emerson that she believes were all about Fuller: first, she mentions Memoirs, which, she observes, was written “to quell

---

31 James Parton, author of The Life of Horace Greeley (1869), included this commentary in his biography, noting, “Mr. Greeley has written a singularly interesting account of the rise and progress of his friendship with Margaret Fuller, which was published, a few years ago, in her fascinating memoirs. A man is, in a degree, that which he loves to praise” (255-256).
the tide of gossip about her,” then Zwarg notes Emerson’s “attempt to deal with Fuller's loss in ‘Woman,’ a lecture he gave before the Boston Woman's Rights Convention in 1855,” and thirdly she cites the essay “Fate” which he wrote “simultaneously with his work on Memoirs, only to publish it years later in The Conduct of Life (1860)” (239). Commenting on “Woman,” Zwarg writes: “Emerson shows that he is less interested (though by no means uninterested) in clearing the route to equality between men and women than in finding the positive, rather than this negative, source of their difference” (Feminist 261). An analysis of Emerson’s characterisations of Fuller in Memoirs and in other texts shows that the qualities he was eager to associate to womanhood were not as positive as Zwarg suggests.

While Zwarg focuses specifically on his 1855 famous address, “Woman” was not Emerson’s only lecture on the subject. On May 26th, 1869, he spoke in support of women’s rights at the New-England Woman’s Suffrage Association.32 That speech bears great resemblance to an earlier text that Emerson wrote sometimes after 1865,33 a text called “Discours Manqué” and which Emerson “never read” (in “Emerson and the Woman Question,” Gougeon identifies the “Discours Manqué” as the basis for the 1869 lecture). In 1881, the Woman’s Journal published a piece entitled “Mr. Emerson on Woman Suffrage” which had apparently been written in

32 See Gougeon, “Emerson and the Woman Question: The Evolution of His Thought,” for a transcription of the lecture. It was originally printed in the Boston Post, on May 28th, 1869: “The Boston Post gives the subjoined report of Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s remarks at the anniversary meeting of the New-England Women’s Suffrage Association in that city on Wednesday”
33 It “must have been written in part after 3 March 1865, when the Freedman’s Bureau was established by Congress. Moreover, it bears a strong resemblance to the address that is summarized in the 27 May 1869 Boston Post, although there are enough variations to make it clear that this is not the exact address that Emerson read on the occasion” (Later Lectures 2:18).
1862,\textsuperscript{34} and which proposed again the content of his 1855 lecture. So, ultimately, Emerson gave two lectures (in 1855 and in 1869), of which he also produced two slightly shorter versions (respectively, in 1862 and in 1865).

Not only are Emerson’s public statements on women’s rights not numerous, but they were first preceded by a series of rejections—instances in which Emerson declined to take part in certain initiatives after having been approached to support the nascent movement (as noted in Chapter One, he rejected invitations from Paulina Wright Davis, Lucy Stone, and Wendell Phillips). When the \textit{New-York Daily Tribune}\textsuperscript{35} reported on the 1851 Worcester Woman’s Rights Convention, which had taken place on October 15\textsuperscript{th}, it included the letters of those who had been invited but who did not participate, such as Harriet Martineau, Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Mann, and of course, Emerson. Some invitees were more conservative than others in their reply to Stone. For instance, Mann wrote that “for the present, at least, I think it better that I should labor in my sphere and you in yours.” A few years later, in 1853, Mann would publish \textit{A Few Thoughts on the Powers and Duties of Woman: Two Lectures}: as he explained to Stone in 1851, “I am just completing a Lecture whose subject is ‘Woman’ and which is designed as a companion to my ‘Few Thoughts for Young Men.’ Should it ever be published, I hope there are some things in it which you would not disapprove.” In the lecture, Mann denounced society’s oppression—“The respect and deference paid to woman in what calls itself fashionable society is degrading rather than elevating”—but he nevertheless remained trapped in highly conservative language (“Between the sexes, then, I hold

\textsuperscript{34} “In 1862 there was a proposition to establish a Woman Suffrage paper in this city. Several articles were contributed for it, but the idea was not carried out, and the papers remained unpublished. The following from Ralph Waldo Emerson is characteristic and as valuable now as then.”

\textsuperscript{35} October 17, 1851.
there are innate and connate distinctions, which nature never loses sight of, unless occasionally in the production of a monster or a *lusus*. They are not alike, but there is a mutuality of superiority”). In Emerson’s case, he told Stone that he could not attend the convention because he was working on *Memoirs* and added “I am by no means sure that I should find any message worth bringing to you if I were free” (7). This differed from what he had stated in his reply to Davis’s invitation in September of the previous year, written before he had begun *Memoirs*, “I . . . shall regret that it is not rather a private meeting of thoughtful persons sincerely interested, instead of what a public meeting is pretty sure to be a heartless noise which we are all ashamed of when it is over” (*EL* 4: 230). Among those who attended the 1851 convention was Emerson’s co-author William Henry Channing, who acted as Vice President, along with Angelina Grimké and Lucretia Mott. Anna Parsons—Fuller and Sturgis’ trusted mystic—was one of the Secretaries that year.

Although Emerson did eventually speak publicly in support of women’s rights, he did so hesitantly—both in terms of the number of his interventions, and of their (not so innovative) content. While Zwarg states that Emerson’s “growing support of the woman’s movement can be said to be directly related to the composition of *Memoirs*” (*Feminist* 257n19), I argue that his misunderstanding of Fuller’s feminism perdured. The following analysis of his addresses shows that the same hesitations about womanhood that transpire in *Memoirs* can be found in his lectures. More specifically, I contend that it is precisely the relation between embodiment and equality that differentiates Emerson’s plea for “mathematical justice” for women from Fuller’s claim for the “equality of the sexes.”
I – Of Woman’s “Organic Office” and Society’s “Organic Impulse”: A Comparative Study of Emerson’s Lectures on Women’s Rights

As Gougeon explains, the evolution of Emerson’s engagement with abolitionism “shows a movement from an individualistic emphasis on personal self-culture to an overt social engagement with the forces of evil in American society” (“Justice” 485). Arguing against the assumption that Emerson was a pacifist in an essay titled “Emerson’s Militant Transcendentalism,” Gougeon states that “Transcendental idealism was never synonymous with pacifism” and that “Transcendentalists as activist reformers were deeply concerned with social justice and the problem of American slavery in particular” (“Justice” 506). Gougeon shows that Emerson was actually in favor of confrontation long before the war, and lists Emerson’s numerous interventions in support of the antislavery movement showing their rapid acceleration after his 1844 address on the “Emancipation of the British West Indies.” While in 1845 Emerson delivered a second emancipation address, he gave another antislavery lecture the following year and, also in 1846, “following the forcible return from Boston to Louisiana of a fugitive slave who had stowed away on the cargo ship Ottoman, Emerson sent a public letter of support to a committee that had been formed to protest the rendition and to prevent a recurrence (Gougeon, “Justice” 502).

The following analysis of Emerson’s lectures on women’s rights shows that his engagement with the movement did not coincide with such linear expansion, that it did not grow with the same intensity throughout the years. In fact, I argue that it almost did not grow at all. While Gougeon states, in his article on “Emerson and the Woman Question,” that “Emerson’s involvement with the women's movement, though initiated at a later date, approximates the trajectory his experience with the antislavery” (572), I believe that his positioning in favor of women’s rights rather
looks like a sinusoid: his addresses are few, they repeat themselves, alternating between progressive and conservative visions of womanhood.

Comparing the two strands of reformism—antislavery and women’s rights—Gougeon notes that “both began with a troubled concern, moved to a reserved commitment, and culminated in unambiguous support” (“Woman” 572). Certainly, Emerson supported the women’s rights movement and believed in social equality: he saluted the movement in the conclusion of his 1855 lecture, “The new movement is a tide shared by the spirits of men and women. You may proceed on the faith that whatever the woman’s heart is prompted to desire, the man’s mind is similarly prompted to accomplish” (2:29); he did so again ten years later, at the beginning of his “Discours Manqué,” “I consider that the movement which unites us today is no whim, but an organic impulse, a right & proper inquiry” (LL 2:16); and in his last intervention on the subject, in 1869, he opened by saying

It seems unnecessary to add any words the statements and arguments which you have already heard, and certainly shall do but little more than to express my sympathy and delight in the rightness of this movement—the rightness of this action, as it is shown by the discourses which you have just listened. . . . I think that the action of this Society, the sentiment of this assembly, is by no means a whim; but is an organized policy—slow, cumulative, reaching a greater height of health and strength. (Gougeon, “Woman” 588)

Besides publicly supporting the movement throughout the years, Emerson’s visions of womanhood remained mostly conservative and the number of his addresses in support of the cause remained limited. In Howe’s words (which Gougeon quotes without commentary as a conclusion to his essay “Emerson and the Woman Question”),
As tenderly conservative nature as he was boldly original in thought, Mr. Emerson would have shrunk most sensitively from any infraction of the sacred sphere of womanhood. . . . Some of us remember the sweet naïf manner in which he did this, the sincerity and the measure with he spoke, as if urged and restrained by a weight of conviction which called for simple and solemn utterance. (592)

Acknowledging the limited scope of Emerson’s support for the movement (“restrained”), Howe nevertheless praised his good intentions (“sweet naïf manner”; “sincerity”) while also recognizing the “conservative” nature of his vision.

The following analysis of Emerson’s interventions on women’s rights is based on the 1855 and 1865 texts, i.e. on “Woman” and “Discours Manqué”—a decision informed by the fact that both texts have been published in scholarly editions (I used Bosco and Myers’s Later Lectures Volume 2) and that manuscript versions of the two addresses are also available (Houghton Library). The 1862 and 1869 texts, respectively published in the Woman’s Journal and in the Boston Post, I used for comparison only for I deemed that since newspaper articles are the only versions available to us, these are also less reliable. My examination of the lectures is aimed at analysing the evolution of Emerson’s support for the women’s rights movement but also at identifying the methodology behind the composition of his addresses.

Written ten years after “Woman,” Emerson’s “Discours Manqué” bears great resemblance to the 1855 lecture to the extent that I consider it a modification of that text rather than a new, original contribution. Some passages, like the last paragraph of the “Discours,” are indeed more or less identical to “Woman.” Below is the 1855 text,
I do not think it yet appears that women wish this equal share in public affairs. But it is they, and not we that are to determine it. Let the laws be purged of every barbarous remainder, every barbarous impediment to women. Let the public donations for education be equally shared by them. Let them enter a school, as freely as a church. Let them have and hold and give their property, as men do theirs. And, in a few years, it will easily appear whether they wish a voice in making the laws that are to govern them. If you do refuse them a vote, you will also refuse to tax them; according to our Teutonic principle, no representation, no tax. *(LL 2:28)*

Although very similar, the 1865 (ca.) text shows small changes were made to the passage (these are underlined, below):

I do not think it yet appears that women wish this equal share in public affairs. But it is they, and not we that are to determine it. Let the laws be purged of every barbarous remainder, every barbarous impediment to women. Let the public donations for education be equally shared by them. Let their interest in each new scientific or literary foundation be equally remembered. Let them have and hold and give their property as men do theirs. It will presently appear whether they wish a voice in making the laws that are to govern them. If you refuse them a vote, you will also refuse to tax them; according to our Teutonic principle No representation, no tax. *(LL 2:18)*

The manuscripts of the two lectures show that Emerson rewrote almost verbatim in 1865 (ca.) what he had written in 1855:
In other instances, passages which appear in the 1855 and in the 1865 texts are also present in the 1869 speech. In 1855, Emerson wrote, “I suppose women feel in relation to men as geniuses feel among energetic workers, that though overlooked and thrust aside in the press, they outsee all these noisy masters. And we feel overlooked,—judged,—and sentenced” (LL 2:19). The statement “we feel overlooked,—judged,—and sentenced” implies quite a strong divide between men and women, reinforced by the fact that Emerson is speaking in the first-person plural.
as if speaking for all men. In the “Discours Manqué,” Emerson copies the same passage but specifies that it is “in the presence of sensible women” that “we feel overlooked, judged,— and sentenced”—“I suppose women feel in relation to men, as ‘tis said geniuses feel among energetic workers, that, though overlooked and thrust aside in the press, they outsee all these noisy masters: and we, in the presence of sensible women, feel overlooked, judged,—and sentenced” (LL 2:16). In the 1869 version, the passage is almost identical, except for the fact that this time “sensible women” has been replaced by “the best women,” which holds a stronger moral connotation:

I think that women feel when they in the press, as men of genius are said to do among energetic workers,—that they see through all these efforts with finer eyes than their noisy masters. I think that all men in the presence of the best women feel over-looked and judged, and sometimes sentenced. They are the educators in all our society. (Gougeon, “Woman” 589).

(Fig. 19) “Address at the Woman's Rights Convention, Sept. 20, 1855.” Ralph Waldo Emerson Lectures and Sermons, MS Am 1280.193-1280.215, MS Am 1280.193-1280.214, MS Am 1280.202 (12). Houghton Library.
In some cases, small variations occur from lecture to lecture according to the historical moment during which they were written. Indeed, changes appear depending on whether the address was written before or after the Civil War. In 1855, Emerson states,

One truth leads in another by the hand; one right is an accession of strength to take more. And the times are marked by the new attitude of Woman; urging, by argument and by association, her rights of all kinds, in short, to one-half of the world; – as the right to education, to avenues of employment, to equal rights of property, to equal rights in marriage, to the exercise of the professions and of suffrage. (LL 2:25)

After 1865, although Emerson’s wording is only slightly different, “Civilization is progressive. One truth leads in another by the hand,” his tone is much more assertive and optimistic as he continues to acknowledge the part played by women in the abolitionist effort,
her activity in putting an end to Slavery, and in serving the Hospitals of the Sanitary Commission in the war, and in the labors of the Freedman’s Bureau, have opened her eyes to larger rights and duties. They claim now her full rights of all kinds,—to education, to employment, to equal laws of property and equal rights in marriage and in the exercise of the professions and of suffrage. (LL 2:17)

This passage, although abbreviated, also appears in the 1869 speech, in which granting rights to women is presented as ineluctable progress—“The claim now pressed by woman is a claim for nothing less than all, than her share in all. She asks her property; she asks for her rights, for her vote; she asks for her share in education, for her share in all the institutions of society, for her half of the whole world; and to this she is entitled” (Gougeon, “Woman” 589).

(Fig. 21) Address at the Woman’s Rights Convention, Sept. 20 1855. Ralph Waldo Emerson Lectures and Sermons, MS Am 1280.193-1280.215, MS Am 1280.193-1280.214, MS Am 1280.202, (12). Houghton Library.
II – Views of Womanhood

A) Of Gender and Pronouns

The previous analysis of “Woman” and “Discours Manqué” suggests that Emerson only wrote one “original” lecture, which he then re-used in slightly different ways over the years. In both texts, Emerson’s call for woman’s right to vote was based on the belief of woman’s feminizing influence, a point on which he insisted both in 1855 and in 1865: in 1855, he wrote “Woman is the power of civilization. Man is a bear in colleges, in mines, in ships, because there are no women” (2:18), only to rephrase this slightly ten years later, “Civilization is her work. Man is rude and bearish in colleges, in mines, in ships, because there, is no woman” (LL 2:17). Similarly, he stated in 1855, “woman asks for her vote. It is the remedy at the moment of need. She is to civilize the voting as she has the sailors, the collegians, the miners” (2:19), and in 1865, he wrote “She is to purify and civilize the voting, as she has the schools, the hospitals, and the drawing rooms” (LL 2:17).
Emerson’s defence of a woman’s right to vote, against those who believed that politics would corrupt woman’s pure nature, was based on the belief that women possessed certain qualities which would help civilize the nation. This reasoning derives from an essentialist vision of womanhood, which Emerson defined as characterised by affection (maternal and romantic), and by purity and innocence: as he declared in 1855, “The starry crown of woman is in the power of her affection and sentiment” (LL 2:23). Years later, in “Discours Manqué,” he would again write, “The distinctions of the mind of Woman we all recognize; their affectionate, sympathetic, religious, and oracular nature;—their swifter and finer perception; their taste, or love of order and beauty, influencing or creating manners” (LL 2:16). He emphasised the differences between man and woman, attributing to the latter qualities which were typically ascribed to the True Woman: “Their distinctive traits—grace, vivacity, and surer moral sentiment, their self-sacrifice, their courage and endurance, have, in every nation, found respect and admiration” (LL 2:17).

Calling it woman’s “organic office,” Emerson stated that because of their nature “[t]he life of the affections is primary to [women], so that there is usually no employment or career which they will not, with their own applause and that of society, quit for a suitable marriage. And they give entirely to their affections; . . . lose themselves eagerly in the glory of their husbands and children” (LL 2:19-20). He repeated this point in the “Discours Manqué”: “The part which women play in education, in the care of young, and the tuition of older children, is their organic office in the world” (LL 2:17). This embodied vision of woman engendered two consequences: on the one hand, it opened the way for patronizing characterizations which insinuated women’s inferiority, in some respects, to man: “Society, conversations, decorum, music, flowers, dances, colours, forms, are her homes and
attendants. . . . There is no gift of nature without some drawback; if we are here, we cannot be there . . . So to woman this exquisite structure could not exist, without its own penalty: More vulnerable, more infirm, more mortal than men” (2:22), “These traits have always characterized Woman. We are a little vain of our women, as if we had invented them” (LL 2:17).

On the other hand, it also led Emerson to believe that women would not necessarily want to be part of the political scene, precisely because of their “womanly” nature: “Their sequestration from affairs, and from the injury to the moral sense which affairs only inflict, aids them” (LL 2:23). The word “sequestration” is striking: while arguing in favor of women’s rights, Emerson also implied that the restriction (the “sequestration”) of their rights was in some respects beneficial to them (“aids them”). In the same lecture, Emerson also contended: “The answer that . . . lies in the mind of well meaning persons, to the new claims, is this: that, though their mathematical justice is not to be denied, yet the best women do not wish these things” (LL 2:26). The expression “mathematical justice” refers to social equality, i.e. that women should have the same basic civil rights as men. However, Emerson simultaneously states that “the best women do not wish these things” implying that the “best,” most moral women would not want to take part to the corrupt world of politics. Again, he repeated, “if the laws and customs were modified in the manner proposed, it would embarrass and pain gentle and lovely persons, with duties which they would find irksome and distasteful” (LL 2:26).

In his lectures, Emerson did, however, recognise that women were taking a more and more prominent role in politics: in 1855, he described how “[a]nother step was the effect of the action of the age on the antagonism to slavery. It was easy to enlist woman in this; it was impossible not to enlist her. . . . it has, among its other
effects, given woman a feeling of public duty, and an added self-respect” (LL 2:25). He also argued against those who were opposed to the idea of women voting—“’Tis very cheap wit that finds it so droll that a woman should vote. Educate and refine society to the highest point; bring together cultivated society of both sexes in a drawing room, to consult and decide by voices on a question of taste, or a question of right,—and is there any absurdity, or any practical difficulty in obtaining their authentic opinions?” (LL 2:26). Writing after the Civil War, in his “Discours Manqué,” he acknowledged that women had now entered the life of the polis: speaking from a woman’s perspective, he stated “her activity in putting an end to Slavery, and in serving the Hospitals of the Sanitary Commission in the war, and in the labors of the Freedman’s Bureau have opened her eyes to larger rights and duties” (LL 2:17). Speaking for American people in general, he declared: “we have ourselves seen the great political enterprize of our times, the abolition of Slavery in America, undertaken by a Society whose Executive Committee was composed of men and women, and which held together until this object was attained” (LL 2:17). After this, Emerson concluded: “And may she well exhibit the history of that as her voucher that she is entitled to demand power which she has shown she can use so well” (LL 2:17-18). In 1869, he would thus unequivocally ascertain, “She asks for her property; she asks for her rights, for her vote; she asks for her share in education, for her share in all the institutions of society, for her half of the whole world; and to this she is entitled.”

For Gougeon, this “total lack of qualification regarding women’s right to full participation in the political process” (590) shows that “Emerson’s views on the Woman Question [had] continued to liberalize following his 1855 address” (“Woman” 586). While I agree that with regards to social equality Emerson’s thinking had certainly evolved, I argue that the lack of renewal in what he said in support of the
movement suggests that his conception of womanhood did not change much over the decades.

Despite acknowledging that women should vote, and that they could play an active part in public affairs, Emerson’s vision of “womanhood” indeed remained rather conservative throughout the years: in 1855, after exhorting to “Let good women sail in the ship” (LL 2:18), he expanded upon the extended metaphor of the nautical world and stated that “Man is the will, and woman the sentiment. In this ship of humanity, will is the rudder, and sentiment the sail. When woman affects to steer, the rudder is only a masked sail” (LL 2:19). This passage also appears in “Discours Manqué,” only expressed in slightly different terms: “We commonly say, Man represents Intellect; and Woman, Love Man looks for hard truth; Woman with her affection, for goodness and benefit” (LL 2: 16). It is interesting to note that in 1845—ten years before Emerson’s “Woman” and twenty before his “Discours Manqué”—Fuller mocked such distinctions: as Kerry Larson pinpoints, “If at one point Fuller ventures the suggestion that it is ‘more native [for woman] to inspire and receive the poem, than to create it’ (68), she elsewhere mocks the same notion: ‘Woman the poem, man the poet! Woman the heart, man the head! Such divisions are only important when they are never to be transcended’ (47)” (162). In his last lecture from 1869, however, Emerson’s words were much closer to Fuller’s as he stated, “We look upon the man as the representative of intellect and the woman as the representative of affection; but each shares the characteristics of the other, only in the man one predominates and in the woman the other” (Gougeon, “Woman” 588).

A closer look at the evolution of Emerson’s sentences, in the 1855, 1865, and 1869 lectures, suggests that he was very uncomfortable when speaking about gender: in particular, it is evident how he utilized personal pronouns and other
linguistic devices to create a distance between himself and his own remarks. If, in 1855, he stated—impersonally—“Man is the Will, woman the Sentiment. In this ship of humanity, will is the rudder, and sentiment the sail” (2:19), in 1865 (ca.), he added “We commonly say Man represents Intellect; and Woman, Love. Man looks for hard truth; Woman with her affection, for goodness and benefit” (LL 2:16). “We commonly say” then became “We look upon” in 1869—“We look upon the man as the representative of intellect and the woman as the representative of affection” (Gougeon, “Woman” 588). Although Emerson then seemed more open to accept Fuller’s possibility of gender fluidity as he declared “but each shares the characteristics of the other,” he nevertheless appeared insecure and uncomfortable even in that last lecture, as when he added “it isn’t for me at this time, after what you have heard, to detain you longer. I only feel the gladness with which such representations as you have heard, such arguments as you have heard, inspire me.” Struggling to reconcile the fact that “each shares the characteristics of the other” with his belief in gender difference, he reinstated: “We know woman as affectionate, as religious, as oracular, as delighting in grace and order possessed of taste.”, “They are the educators of our society,” “Through their sympathy and quickness they are the proper mediators between those who have knowledge and those who want it” (Gougeon, “Woman” 588;589).

The range of personal pronouns that Emerson uses throughout his lectures is also worth examining. Emerson often speaks in the first-person plural “we”: “we feel overlooked,—judged,—and sentenced” (2:19), “Conversation is the last flower of civility, and the best result which life has to offer us. . . . It is our account of ourselves. All we have, all we can do, all we know, is brought into play, and is the reproduction in finer form of all our havings” (LL 2:20). As shown by these two
examples, “we” is both used to refer to men as opposed to women (“they”) and is more rarely employed to refer to both men and women (as in “all we know”). Sometimes, Emerson also implicitly distances himself from others, suggesting that what is often said by the majority (“We commonly say, Man represents Intellect; and Woman”) is not necessarily true. Emerson also, at times, uses the first-person pronoun “I,” as in “I share this belief” (2:19), “I need not repeat to you,—your own solitude will suggest it,—that a masculine woman is not strong, but a lady is” (LL 2:29). But his ventures into the first-person singular are rare. More often, he relies on general statements so as to maintain a distance between what he is saying and his personal convictions—“It is perhaps true that” (2:20), “the general voice of mankind has agreed that” (2:19), “There are plenty of people who believe women to be” (LL 2:25). Women are always referred to through the third-person plural pronoun “they”: “the same mental height which their husbands attained by toil, they attain by sympathy with their husbands,” “They are more delicate than men, and, as thus more impressionable, they are the best index of the coming hour” (2:19), “They could not be such excellent artists in this element of fancy, if they did not lend and give themselves to it” (LL 2:22).

This multiplication of personal pronouns (“I”, “we”, “you”, “they”) recalls Fuller’s conversational method in Woman in the Nineteenth Century: it is as though, within Emerson’s lectures, multiple characters were talking about women’s rights. In “Emerson as Mythologist,” Zwarg compellingly demonstrates how Emerson willingly adopted Fuller’s conversational method to subvert specific discourses: “It is Fuller's use of this radicalized conversational strategy that enables her to expose the reification process at work in the ‘hailing’ of the culture and it is Emerson’s desire, however botched by the ‘dress’ of ‘biography,’ to show that radical critical process as
his" (230). I believe that is also the intention with which Emerson cites male thinkers like Aristophanes and Rabelais, with whom he engages in a sort of conversation: “‘tis very cheap wit that has been spent on the subject, from Aristophanes, in whose comedies I confess my dullness to find good joke, to Rabelais in whom it is monstrous exaggeration of temperament and not borne out by anything in nature . . . The body of the joke is all one, to charge them with temperament—victims of temperament” (LL 2:25). Here, Emerson is ambiguous: on the one hand, he denounces the two thinkers’ misogynistic comments, noting their “monstrous exaggeration of temperament.” On the other hand, he sides with Aristophanes suggesting that, although exaggerated, his jokes (including those on women), are funny—“I confess my dullness to find good joke.”

B) Memoirs and Woman

Quoting other people’s words could have been Emerson’s way to delegate space and opinions because he was feeling uncomfortable when addressing the subject. After all, he did the same in Memoirs, where he (at least partly) delegated the task of narrating Fuller’s life by relying abundantly on what she and her friends had written. Emerson’s remarks on woman’s “temperament,” cited above, recall his section “Temperament” in Memoirs. For Emerson, temperament was an impediment: as he explained in his lecture “Woman,” “Men are not to the same degree temperamented, for there are multitudes of men who live to objects quite out of them, as, to politics, to trade, to letters, or an art, unhindered by any influence of constitution” (LL 2:26). In Memoirs, writing in the first-person singular, he described how “I think, in [Margaret’s] case, there was something abnormal in those obscure habits and necessities which we denoted by the word Temperament. . . . She had a strong constitution, and of course its reactions were strong” (1:227). Once again, being a
woman implied certain (bodily) impediments that were responsible for altering her judgement—“I had the impression that her energy was too much a force of blood, and therefore never felt the security for her peace which belongs to more purely intellectual natures” (MMFO 1:228). Emerson felt different from Fuller, just like men felt different from women in his lecture (“us” and “them”): “For the same reasons, she remained inscrutable to me; her strength was not my strength,—her powers were a surprise” (MMFO 1:228). Fuller’s abnormal “constitution” consisted in a series of “peculiarities” which Emerson did not understand (“I understood these no better”): “Her childhood was full of presentiments. She was then a somnambulist. She was subject to attacks of delirium, and, later, perceived that she had spectral illusions” (MMFO 1:228). These characterizations are comparable to what Emerson wrote about women’s premonitions in his 1855 lecture, “they are the best index of the coming hour,” “what they say and think are the shadows of coming events” (2:19), and again in 1865, “They have divination” (LL 2:17).

Emerson’s essentialist views of womanhood did not preclude a sincere support for women’s rights. In “Woman,” he welcomed the fact that “any remarkable opinion or movement shared by women will be the first sign of revolution” (LL 2:19). In his lectures, Emerson indeed pleaded in favor of social equality, which he referred to as “mathematical justice” for women. He firmly maintained that women “have an unquestionable right to their own property. And if a woman demand votes, offices and political equality with men, as among the Shakers an Elder and Eldress are of equal power, – and among the Quakers, – it must not be refused” (LL 2:26). At the same time, however, he remained trapped in a relatively conservative vision of womanhood, in many ways similar to the True Woman, which led him to rely
excessively on the so-called “sacredness” of woman and to hide behind that concept,

I confide so entirely in her inspiring and musical nature, that I believe only herself can show us how she shall be served. The wonderful generosity of her sentiments raises her at times into heroical and godlike regions, and verifies the pictures of Minerva, Juno, or Polymnia; and by the firmness with which she treads her upward path, she convinces the coarsest calculators that another road exists, than that which their feet know (qtd in Zwarg, Feminist 159).

In some ways Emerson was inspired by Fuller, as when he stated “I think it impossible to separate the education and interests of the sexes. Improve and refine the men, and you do the same by the women, whether you will or no,” but in others, he still portrayed woman as engaged in a relation of dependence to man: “Woman should find in man her guardian. Silently she looks for that . . . . But when he is her guardian,—fulfilled with all nobleness,—knows and accepts his duties as brother, all goes well for both” (LL 2:29). More generally, Emerson struggled to celebrate womanhood for he was troubled by what he perceived as a certain intrinsic physicality in women.

This is evident in the way he characterises woman’s writing. In “Woman,” he comments, “It is perhaps true that in no art or science, not in painting, poetry or music, have women produced a masterpiece. But there is an art that is better than painting, poetry or music, or architecture, better than botany, geology, or any science, namely, conversation: wise, cultivated, genial, conversation” (LL 2:20). When working on Memoirs, Emerson struggled to deal with Fuller’s writing, to which he preferred her undisputedly brilliant conversation. Emerson recorded in more than one instance the dissatisfaction this caused him when working on Memoirs: “In my
memoirs, I must record that I always find myself doing something less than my best task. In the spring, I was writing politics; now am I writing a biography, which not the absolute command, but facility & amiable feeling prompted" (EJ 11:434). He explained that he was troubled by the task of relating the facts Fuller's life for “[t]hese things have no value, unless they lead somewhere.” He continued—“If a Burns, if a De Stael, if an artist is the result, our attention is preengaged; but <no> quantities of rectitude, mountains of merit, <or> chaos of ruins, are of no account without result, —‘tis all mere nightmare; false instincts; wasted lives” (431), “Now, unhappily, Margaret's writing does not justify any such research. All that can be said, is, that she represents an interesting hour & group in American cultivation; then, that she was herself a fine, generous, inspiring, vinous, eloquent talker, who did not outlive her influence; and a kind of justice requires of us a monument, because crowds of vulgar people taunt her with want of position” (EJ 11:431-432). While Zwarg maintains that the fact that Emerson “makes no mention of . . . Woman in the Nineteenth Century or the rest of her published work was meant as ‘a protective gesture’” (“Mythologist” 229), I believe that the aforementioned passages show that this “muting” on Emerson’s behalf was actually due to his disregard of Fuller’s written work. While he never mentioned Woman, Emerson devoted—accordingly to the comments he made, previously quoted—a full chapter to “Conversation” in Memoirs (“V. Conversations in Boston”).

Fuller's published works, which were left out of Memoirs, were the expressions of her most radical thoughts. Years before the “Declaration of Sentiment” was signed (in 1848), Fuller questioned the tenets of the U.S. “Declaration of Independence.” In a Tribune article entitled “Thanksgiving” written in
1844, she declared “No home can be healthful in which are not cherished seeds of
good for the world at large” (Critic 10). A year later, in Woman in the Nineteenth
Century, she remarked that “though the free American so often feels himself free,
like the Roman, only to pamper his appetites and his indolence through the misery of
his fellow beings, still it is not in vain, that the verbal statement has been made, ‘All
men are born free and equal’” (13). Fuller indeed held a “firm belief in the equality of
the sexes” (WNC 21) and understood gender differences in a ground-breaking way.

If Emerson stated that “woman demand[s] votes, offices and political equality
with men,” Fuller’s claim went beyond the demand for social equality: as she wrote in
Woman, “a religious recognition of equality is required” (WNC 42). She implemented
that claim by referring to mankind in general as opposed to insisting—as Emerson
did—on the differences between man and woman: “By man I mean both man and
woman,” Fuller explained, “these are two halves of one thought.” As seen in previous
sections of this chapter, Fuller celebrated the “feminine” while also speaking about
the individual in universal terms: in Larson’s words, “Difference is to be eradicated
inasmuch as it is an instrument of oppression and a denial of equality; difference is
to be embraced inasmuch as it is a mark of self-determination and a validation of
equality” (164). Larson reinterprets Fuller’s apparently contradictory claim that
womanhood was to be both emphasised and ignored: indeed, he explains that “the
judgment that ‘union is only possible to those who are units’ (71) has little to do with
the switching of rhetorical registers. To be equal is to overcome and therefore insist
upon difference” (164).

While Fuller denounced social inequality repeatedly, I find it important to
reiterate Reynolds’s point that she was not a political activist “in the sense that [she]
did not join organizations, attend meetings, give speeches, or participate in
organized political activities” (“Fern” 66). Sotiropoulos similarly remarks that “Fuller's frustration with the shifting political winds that paralyzed reform interventions incited her neither to political action nor to the formulation of a political ideology” (“Truth” 41). Fuller never really took an active stand in favor of abolitionism and only supported the cause in writing: as Hanlon explains, she “expressed only passing support for the antislavery movement, complementing abolition as logically continuous with her own efforts to advocate for wholly transformed relations between men and women in the United States and beyond” (81). Fuller's fight for women’s rights was also flawed, in a sense, by her elitism. As Kathy Kurtzman Lawrence remarks, “Fuller's radicalism was at first an aesthetic radicalism . . . Political sophistication followed and was fused with aesthetic sophistication as she pursued her dream of an America, and later of the world, of equals, but of equals who would read Goethe, appreciate Beethoven, and admire Canova” (273).

Certainly, Fuller had high expectations of her readers. In the “Preface” of Woman, she explained her new title, describing how “The Great Lawsuit. Man Versus Men. Woman Versus Women” had become Woman in the Nineteenth Century: “Objections having been made to the former title, as not sufficiently easy to be understood, the present has been submitted as expressive of the main purpose of the essay.” She then added, “though, by myself, the other is preferred, partly for the reason others do not like it, i.e., that it requires some thought to see what it means, and might thus prepare the reader to meet me on my own ground” (WNC 5). Fuller was clear about what she expected of her readers—Woman “solicit[s] a sincere and patient attention from those who open the following pages at all” (WNC 5).

Unfortunately, many of her readers, among whom Orestes Brownson, who read and reviewed Woman, also failed understand it: “As we read along in the book, we keep
constantly asking, What is the lady driving at? What does she want? But no answer comes” (250).

In her “Preface,” Fuller was not only talking to men and women altogether; she specifically addressed men: “From men I ask a noble and earnest attention to any thing that can be offered on this great and still obscure subject, such as I have met from many with whom I stand in private relations” (WNC 6). She referred herself to male models of virtue, husbands who were also supporters of women’s rights, like Godwin: “The champion of the Rights of Woman found, in Godwin, one who would plead that cause like a brother” (WNC 44). Interestingly, women’s rights activists are still uttering a similar call to their male readers. In a recent interview for GQ magazine, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (the first female politician to be featured on the cover of the magazine) discussed with Wesley Lowery, her interviewer, the recent overturning of Roe Versus Wade by the Supreme Court, stressing the fact that “we need men to be speaking up... as well.” About the specific threat to women’s control of their own bodies, Ocasio-Cortez emphasised the importance of men’s role in achieving change: "In this moment it’s really only going to be the vulnerability of men, and men talking to other men, that gives us the greatest hope of shifting things the fastest, soonest.” Thinking about future generations and how they might be influenced (as they turned out to be) by her work, Fuller wrote Woman “for the daughters and the sons of time; twin exponents of a divine thought” (WNC 5). As Cole notes, by invoking a Higher Law (the law of “truth, unpolluted by prejudice, vanity, or selfishness” [WNC 6]), Fuller “had become prophet and legal advocate at once” (“Lawsuit” 13).
Conclusion

In *The Poetic Discourse of American Transcendentalism* (2013), Albena Bakratcheva remarks that Emerson “valued [Fuller] selectively” and that “despite the admiration she inspired, the very nature of Margaret Fuller’s intellectualism seemed distant to Emerson . . . because its forceful movements had their springs in faraway, transatlantic lands – something Margaret Fuller was far from attempting to hide” (136). Having examined Emerson’s portrayal of Fuller in *Memoirs*, I side with Bakratcheva’s comment that there were only a limited number of aspects of Fuller’s personality that Emerson liked. And although I am not convinced that the distance between Emerson and Fuller was only of a “geographic” nature—it also had to do with gender differences, which transcend national borders—I do think that Fuller’s move to Italy in the last years of her life exacerbated latent differences between the two thinkers.

As critics have shown, Fuller’s Italian years coincided with (and also, fostered) important changes in her political thinking. About this, Daniel Malachuk notes:

Turn finally to Fuller’s actual Dispatches and one finds, alongside her enduring commitment to conscience and higher law, an increasing assurance that it will be democracy—as she witnessed it in the radical pre-1848 activities in Europe—that ultimately enables the realization of sacred persons. (*Two Cities* 94)

Malachuk also describes how those changes in Fuller’s Transcendentalism were inspired in part by the men she met in Italy: “Mazzini’s democratic idealism is specifically associated with the realization of sacred persons. In a February 19, 1847, dispatch, Fuller recalls her notion of the individual’s ‘inheritance’ from ‘The Great Lawsuit’; rather than being achieved through a higher court, however, the
sacred person is to be perfected through participation in democratic revolution” (Two Cities 95). Having experienced social inequality herself, Fuller could easily relate to the cause of European revolutionaries. After all, her trip to Europe was a strong reminder of the continuous discrimination women faced in the nineteenth century. Fuller had long dreamt of going to Europe and, in 1836, she planned to go abroad with her friend Eliza Farrar. The death of her father in October 1835 forced her, however, to cancel the trip as she became responsible for her family, which prompted a violent realisation of how society was built on a system of profound economic inequality. Ten years later, as she was about to leave for Europe, Fuller told her friends that her trip had been too long delayed to have much effect on her intellectual and emotional development. That couldn’t have been more wrong. Mazzini was not the only revolutionary who attracted Fuller’s attention. Eventually chosen as the godfather of her son, Adam Mickiewicz—a Polish poet, essayist, and political revolutionary who lived in Paris as an exile—met Fuller in 1846, and the two became quickly close friends. In a letter written in 1847, Mickiewicz described with powerful clarity the long-lasting effects of Fuller’s avant-gardist socio-political reflections, and the classical nature of her literary and philosophical education: “Her base is in the old world; her sphere of action is in the new world; her peace is in the world to come” (FL 5:176). But among the encounters Fuller made while travelling through Europe, between 1846 and 1850, I consider Fuller’s union with Giovanni Angelo Ossoli, as the embodiment of her transformation through travel (and of her transformation as a woman). For while revolts were erupting in Europe during the years she spent there as a resident, a revolution also took place in Fuller’s personal life: indeed, her passionate support for the emergence of an Italian state was mirrored by a more intimate but equally radical change in her
experience as a person, as a woman. After a series of romantic disappointments, Fuller had fallen in love with Ossoli and, in September 1848, the couple welcomed a son, Angelino. The way in which Fuller commented on such change demonstrates just how different she had become from her fellow Transcendentalists.

The dispatches that Fuller continued to send to Greeley during the years she spent in Europe show that she was totally immersed herself in the culture she wrote about. When she first arrived in Rome, she described it as a place which finally allowed her to feel true happiness: in a letter written in December 1847, she recounted how “My life at Rome is thus far all I hoped. I have not been so well since I was a child, nor so happy ever as during the last six weeks” (FL 4:312). In the spring of that year, Fuller had met Ossoli for the first time, outside Saint Peter’s Cathedral in Rome, soon after which he had also proposed to her. But Italy was more than just a fateful encounter. Experiencing a kind of Platonic Recognition, Fuller reunited with those ideals and culture she had grown up with thanks to the strict, classical education that her father had imparted to her along with his beliefs in Republican idealism. When in Italy, she was able to see the works of Raphael, Titian, Domenichino, and also to discover artists she did not know before—“The Frescoes of Carracci and his scholars in the Farnese Palace have been to me a source of the purest pleasure” (Reynolds, Glorious 135) she wrote in one of her dispatches. The concept of “pleasure” is not only related to the obvious gratification through art that Fuller and her fellow Transcendentalists believed in; yet it is also part of a synaesthesia of sensations—happy sensations—that characterised her experience in Italy.

Fuller never shied away from how strongly transformative those years were to her: while in America she had laid the foundations for her most radical ideas, the
ones expressed in “The Great Lawsuit” and in, Italy acted on Fuller as the consecration of her new self—“in thought,” she wrote in 1849, “I am more radical than ever” (*MMFO* 2:314). Fuller felt at home in Italy, which, she explained, “receives me as a long-lost child, and I feel myself at home here, and if I ever tell anything about it, you will hear something real and domestic” (*MMFO* 2:220). The adjectives “real and domestic” refer to her union with Ossoli, which she liked to describe in similar terms as those she used to speak about the Italian capital—“In him, I have found a home, and one that interferes with no tie” (*FL* 5:261). In Ossoli, an impoverished nobleman from Lazio, she admired the passion and patriotism—“he is capable of the sacred love, . . . he showed it to his father, to Rome, to me, now he loves his child in the same way” (*FL* 5:292).

For a Transcendentalist like Fuller, spirit and nobility were fundamental qualities to be had. Although Ossoli did not afford her economic stability, he certainly fulfilled her emotional expectations: she loved Ossoli’s “purity and simple strength of his character” (5:291), was extremely happy with the “experience of [being] a mother and satisfied domestic wants in a most sincere and sweet companion” (*FL* 5:248). The idea of pleasure—of “satisfaction”—appears once again in Fuller’s writing for it wasn’t only contemplative gratification, but it was also a very pragmatic and intimate feeling of happiness that Italy had given her. In a letter to her sister Ellen, written in December 1849, Fuller describes in similar terms how much motherly love had changed her: “The great novelty, the immense gain to me is my relation with my child. I thought the mother’s heart lived in me before, but it did not. I knew nothing about it” (*FL* 5:292).

As the repeated use of adjectives such “real,” “simple” indicate, Fuller knew how different Ossoli was from the people she had surrounded herself with back in
America. She indeed apprehended her return to the United States and was particularly frightened by how she was going to be received once back in New England, accompanied by her foreign husband and their child—the existence of whom she had announced quite late to her friends and family. The way in which she tried to justify her love for her husband in a letter to William Henry Channing shows how afraid she was of being judged: she described Ossoli as “my gentle friend, ignorant of great ideas, ignorant of books, enlightened as to his duties by pure sentiment and an unspoiled nature, but never failing in the degree his nature has once promised” (FL 5:252). In fact, the same reasons that attracted her to her husband also led her to believe that he would not be particularly welcomed by her friends and family back in America. To her mother, she admitted that “[h]e is not in any respect such a person as people in general would expect to find with me” (FL 5:261). As Sonia Di Loreto observes, “in Fuller’s coterie, the Ossolis as a couple would be a dissonance, and Giovanni, the Italian who had been represented by Fuller’s American friends as a semi-literate, although well-meaning young man, would be an even more problematic figure” (5). In a letter to her sister Ellen in December 1849, she complained that Emerson had failed to reply after she had told him about her marriage—“My love to dear Elizh I wish she and Mr Emerson would write to me, but I suppose they dont know what to say tell them there is no need to say anything about these affairs if they dont want to. I am just the same for them I was before” (FL 5:293).

The difficulty in writing about Fuller’s marriage for the authors of Memoirs did not only arise from the uncertainty surrounding Fuller’s union with Ossoli, but it also derived from a certain difficulty to deal with the difference between what Fuller had once been in New England and what she had become in Europe. For, in Europe, she
experienced for the first time sexuality and motherhood and that had to have a
strong impact on someone whose intellectual activity had been centred on defining
“woman” and “man” for the past ten years.

While in Italy, Fuller stated: “I am in a state of unnatural divorce from what I
was most allied to” (2:222). Fuller was in total “communion,” as she wrote in many
letters, with “the spirit of Rome” to the point that, when the Romans lost against the
French, Fuller felt like “Private hopes of mine are fallen with the hopes of Italy”
(MMFO 2:265). The Rome in which Fuller lived for the last years of her life was a
place of great Republican and Democratic enthusiasm, thanks to heroic figures like
Mazzini, Garibaldi and other patriots who were trying to get rid of the various
occupying regimes. However, it was also a period of great violence, which Fuller
witnessed literally at her doorstep: in a letter to Emerson, which appears in Memoirs,
Fuller describes how from her apartment in Piazza Barberini she could not only hear
but she saw “a battle fought here from the first till the last light of day” (2:264). Not
only was Ossoli part of the Roman effort for independence, but Fuller also took a
direct role in the war effort as a volunteer nurse at the hospital Fate Bene Fratelli. In
a letter to the Marchioness Visconti Arconati, written at the conclusion of her Italian
journey, she asked “will you have patience with my democracy, -- my revolutionary
spirit?” (2:314). Acting like a sort of seal for her transformation through travel, Fuller
asked to be addressed by her new name, “Marchesa Ossoli” (MMFO 2:317).

It seems as though Fuller’s European/Italian experience also coincided with a
certain detachment from some Anglo-Saxon ways: she wrote “I suffer more than
ever from that which is peculiarly American or English” (MMFO 2:222). And yet, she
was appreciative of how much interest her dispatches had generated back in the US:
she was happy about “how cordially America sympathized. She [America] did not
hug herself in selfish content with her more prosperous fortune; she glowed at the hope of relief for the suffering nations of Europe; she deeply mourned its overthrow; she is indignant at the treachery that consummated it” (Reynolds, *Glorious* 316). In Fuller’s words, and in this particular dispatch, we hear the echo of John O’ Sullivan’s “Manifest Destiny”—the idea that the American Democracy should serve as an example, and the beginning of Imperialism. Fuller described how “America is the star of hope to the enclaved nations, bitter indeed were the night of the world if that star were hid by foul vapors” (Reynolds, *Glorious* 317). Interesting to note here how Fuller’s praise comes with a disclaimer, and yet she sees American Democracy as a symbol and role-model for other freedom-aspiring nations.

Fuller’s experience in Italy informed her vision of America and of the American democracy. Her transformation through travel, triggered by her new understanding of womanhood and also by the political events she witnessed and participated in, allowed her to cast a new look on her homeland. Although her manuscript of her history of the Italian Revolution was lost at sea, and we don’t know what her conclusions exactly were at the end of the European journey, we know that Fuller’s personal and political transformation coincided both in time and in place. While in Italy, Fuller had become interested in that specific point where the life of thought and the life of action intersect. She had drawn further away from Emerson’s pure idealism as she experienced war and womanhood.

Despite their best efforts to quote her and the people she was close to, the authors of *Memoirs* never managed to tell the complete story of Fuller’s life. Their portrayal, as we know, was partial to say the least. What emerges from my analysis of the biography, which I have conducted by focusing on Emerson’s sections in particular, is that fears related to the danger that a woman intellectual of Fuller’s
stance represented to nineteenth-century masculinity, came into play and hampered what could otherwise have been “an essential line of American history.” Instead, Emerson, who was himself disappointed of the result the biographers obtained (see his letter to William Furness, in which he defined it as a work of “questionable judgement”), remained trapped within the “woman” or “artist” dichotomy, as he painted Fuller as both a woman who was not “womanly” enough and an artist who was not “artistic” enough (her judgment being impeded by her “emotions”).

Nevertheless, as this thesis has shown, *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* has an essential part to play in our understanding of American Transcendentalism. It documents the lives and relationships of Transcendentalism’s most important proponents; it tells the story of how they related to written material and issues of privacy; it informs our reading of Emerson’s feeble support for women’s rights, on which critics are more and more laying their attention; it shows how Transcendentalists dealt with the notions of posterity and reputation, and it reveals, more particularly, how gender affected not only the way in which Transcendentalists told their stories but also how they were remembered.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Dall, Caroline Wells Healey. *Margaret and Her Friends: Or Ten Conversations with Margaret Fuller Upon the Mythology of the Greeks and Its Expression in Art, held at the House of the Rev. George Ripley Boston, Beginning March 1, 1841*. Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1895.


---. “Mr Emerson on Woman Suffrage.” Ca. 1831–1882. Ralph Waldo Emerson Lectures and Sermons, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

---

36 The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center has given me permission to include unpublished material from their collections in my thesis.


---. Günderode. Boston, Published by Elizabeth Peabody, 1842.

---. “Journal Fragments.” 1844, Margaret Fuller Papers, Transcendentalist Collection, Fruitlands Museum. The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center, Sharon, MA.


---. “Transcript.” 1840–44, Margaret Fuller Papers, Transcendentalist Collection, Fruitlands Museum. The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center, Sharon, MA.


---. *Woman and Her Wishes; An Essay: Inscribed to the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention.* Boston, R. F. Wallcut, 21 Cornhill, 1853.


---. *Margaret Fuller: Marchesa Ossoli.* Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1883.

Howe, Julia Ward. *Margaret Fuller (Marchesa Ossoli).* Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1883.


“Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli.” *German Reformed Messenger*, vol. 17, no. 32, 1852, p. 3654.


“Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli.” *The Southern Literary Messenger; Devoted to Every Department of Literature, and the Fine Arts (1848-1864)*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1854, p. 124.


Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldredge) Story Autograph Manuscript*. Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.


Secondary Sources


--- “Margaret Fuller and the American Women’s Movement.” 29 September 2020, paper sponsored by the Transcendentalism Council and the Women’s Parish Association of First Parish in Concord.37


37 Phyllis Cole has given me permission to quote her unpublished lecture in my thesis.


Crouse, Jamie S. “‘If They Have a Moral Power’: Margaret Fuller, Transcendentalism and the Question of Women’s Moral Nature.” *ATQ*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2005, pp. 259-79.

Cruea, Susan M. “Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement.” *ATQ*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2005, pp. 187-204.

Davis, Cynthia J. “Margaret Fuller, Body and Soul.” *American Literature*, vol. 71, no. 1, 1999, pp. 31-56.


---. “‘We Have Abolished Domestic Servitude’: Women and Work at Brook Farm.”

*Toward a Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism*, edited by Jana L. Argersinger and Phyllis Cole, Athens, U of Georgia P, 2014.


---. “Margaret Fuller and the Search for History: A Biographical Study.” *Women’s Studies: Rites of Passage for American Women*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1976, pp. 37-86.


Habich, Robert D. “An ‘Extempore Adventurer’ in Italy: Emerson as International Tourist, 1832–1833.” *A Power to Translate the World: New Essays on Emerson and


Healey, K. “‘The Mighty Meaning of the Scene’: Feminine Landscapes and the Future of America in Margaret Fuller’s Summer on the Lakes.” Humanities, vol. 31, no. 8, 2019, pp. 1-16.


Lee, Seung Hee. “Civilizing Mob into Men: Race, Temporality, and the West in Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*.” *South Central Review*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2019, pp. 85-104.


Malachuk, Daniel S. “Green Exaltadas Margaret Fuller, Transcendentalist Conservationism, and Antebellum Women’s Nature Writing.” *Toward a Female*


---. Two Cities: The Political Thought of American Transcendentalism. Lawrence, Kansas, UP of Kansas, 2016.


---. “Woes . . . of Which We Know Nothing’: Fuller and the Problem of Feminine Virtue.” Margaret Fuller and Her Circles, Bailey Brigitte, et al., Hanover, NH, U of New Hampshire P, 2013, pp. 32-51.


---. “Prospects for the Study of Margaret Fuller.” *Resources for American Literary Study*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2000, pp. 139-158.


Richardson, Todd H. “Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller, and Transcendentalism.” *American Literary Scholarship*, vol. 2016, no. 1, 2018, pp. 3-22.


Steele, Jeffrey. “‘A Tale of Mizraim’: A Forgotten Story by Margaret Fuller.” *New England Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 1, 1989, pp. 82-104.


Steiner, Enit Karafili, editor. *Called to Civil Existence: Mary Wollstonecraft’s a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2014.


---. “‘More Anon’: American Socialism and Margaret Fuller’s 1848.” Margaret Fuller and Her Circles, edited by Brigitte Bailey et al., Hanover, NH, U of New Hampshire P, 2013, pp. 100-27.


Verduin, Kathleen. “The Inward Life of Love”: Margaret Fuller and the “Vita Nuova”.


---. “The Work of Trauma: Fuller, Douglass, and Emerson on the Border of Ridicule.”

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: “Married perhaps in Oct, Nov, or Dec.” Margaret Fuller Ossoli, 1851. Ralph Waldo Emerson Journals and Notebooks, MS Am 1280H, (111), Volume: 96. Houghton Library.

Figure 2: “W.H.C.” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 3: “¶” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 4: “(connect)” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 5: Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 6: “though.” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 7: “The blue piece of paper (front).” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 8: “The blue piece of paper (back).” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 9: “Underneath the blue piece of paper. Story’s text.” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 10: “Channing’s justification.” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 11: “of her marriage.” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 12: “in the event of her death.” Story, Emelyn. *Mrs. Emelyn (Eldridge) Story Autograph Manuscript.* Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library, Massachusetts.

Figure 13: “Channing’s annotations on Fuller’s 1844 journal fragments.” Margaret Fuller Papers, Transcendentalist Collection, Fruitlands Museum. The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center, Sharon, MA.
Figure 14: “Fruitlands Manuscript page 24.6.” Margaret Fuller Papers, Transcendentalist Collection, Fruitlands Museum. The Trustees of Reservations, Archives & Research Center, Sharon, MA.


Figure 16: “Sistrum of the Chantress Tapenuca. 1186–600 BC.” Met Museum, New York), www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/553814

Figure 17: Address at the Woman's Rights Convention, Sept. 20 1855. Ralph Waldo Emerson Lectures and Sermons, MS Am 1280.193-1280.215, MS Am 1280.193-1280.214, MS Am 1280.202, (12). Houghton Library.

Figure 18: “Discours manqué. Woman.” Ralph Waldo Emerson Lectures and Sermons, MS Am 1280.193-1280.215, MS Am 1280.193-1280.214, MS Am 1280.202, (13). Houghton Library.

Figure 19: Address at the Woman's Rights Convention, Sept. 20 1855. Ralph Waldo Emerson Lectures and Sermons, MS Am 1280.193-1280.215, MS Am 1280.193-1280.214, MS Am 1280.202, (12). Houghton Library.

Figure 20: “Discours manqué. Woman.” Ralph Waldo Emerson Lectures and Sermons, MS Am 1280.193-1280.215, MS Am 1280.193-1280.214, MS Am 1280.202, (13). Houghton Library.

Figure 21: Address at the Woman's Rights Convention, Sept. 20 1855. Ralph Waldo Emerson Lectures and Sermons, MS Am 1280.193-1280.215, MS Am 1280.193-1280.214, MS Am 1280.202, (12). Houghton Library.