MARGARET FULLER AND THE "WOMAN'S SPHERE":

THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF THE WOMAN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

BY

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"What woman needs is not a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home."[1] So wrote Margaret Fuller in her controversial treatise Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845). This tract, which Elizabeth Cady Stanton praised as a "vindication of woman's right to think,"[2] exerted significant force on the thoughts of female reformers during the formative decade before the onset of collective agitation for women's rights in 1848. By convincing the vanguard of advocates for women's rights that the conditions of freedom were "the same for the daughters and the sons of time,"[3] it undermined the concept of the "woman's sphere" that had previously presented an almost insurmountable barrier to social and political action by women and provided female reformers a new ideology that became the basis for the Declaration of Sentiments, the platform statement ratified at the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. So great was the lasting influence of Woman in the Nineteenth Century that Ednah Dow Cheney observed, nearly forty-five years after Fuller's death, that Fuller was still "the woman of America

who is moulding the lives and characters of her country-women more than any other."[4]

Woman in the Nineteenth Century was, as Fuller acknowledged, a persuasive polemic, designed to "move minds here [and] there [and] through that [sic] others."[5] And move minds she did. Emily Collins, a suffragist leader in the 1850's, recorded in the History of Woman Suffrage that when she read Fuller's treatise and "found that other women entertained the same thoughts that had been seething in my own brain, and realized that I stood not alone, how my heart bounded with joy."[6] Lydia Maria Child, an abolitionist and a champion of equal rights for women, wrote in her Letters from New York (1847) that "woman is slowly making her way to a freer life," and she quoted Fuller on the frontispiece as the inspiration for such beliefs.[7] Ednah Dow Cheney noted in her Reminiscences (1902) that, as a student of Fuller's, she had found herself "in a new world of thought," because "she planted in my life the seeds of thought, principle, and purpose which have grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength." "I absorbed her life and thoughts," Cheney stated, "and to this day I am astonished to find how large a part of 'what I am when I am most myself' I have derived from her."[8] Elizabeth Cady Stanton claimed that because Fuller "sought to unveil the mysteries of life and enfranchise her own

sex from the bondage of the past," she "possessed more influence upon the thought of America, than any woman previous to her time."[9]

The influence of Fuller's rhetoric was also noted by others among Fuller's contemporaries who were not immediately involved with the woman's rights movement. Rufus W. Griswold wrote in an 1845 review of Woman in the Nineteenth Century that "it is not elegantly written, but every line talks."[10] According to William Henry Channing, "by the vivid intensity of [Fuller's] conceptions, she brought out in those around her their own conceptions, and, by the glowing vigor of her intellect, roused into action their torpid powers."[11] Even Horace Greeley, hardly an avid supporter of the campaign for woman's rights, deemed Fuller's work "the loftiest and most commanding assertion made of the right of woman to be regarded and treated as an independent, intelligent, rational being, entitled to an equal voice in framing and modifying the laws she is required to obey, and in controlling and disposing the property she had inherited or aided to acquire."[12] As Mary Caroline Crawford noted in 1912, Woman in the Nineteenth Century was an "epoch-making book . . . so remarkably prophetic, that hers [Fuller's] may well be regarded as the most successful womanlife of her century, with the single exception of that which gave to the world the slave-freeing

Uncle Tom's Cabin."[13]

Woman in the Nineteenth Century has been studied for its literary, autobiographical, and political qualities, but no previous study reveals the true power of Fuller's work. Studies focusing upon literary form ignore the tract's important message and therefore fail to account for either its immediate success or its enduring acclaim.[14] Autobiographical interpretations, which deal with the relationship between the written word and the author's life, often tell much about Fuller but little about the influence of her discourse upon the evolution of the woman's rights movement in America.[15] Studies devoted to the political dimensions of Fuller's philosophy compare her ideas with those of other advocates for women's rights but disregard the explosive impact her book had in its day.[16] All of these approaches are useful, but they fail to analyze Woman in the Nineteenth Century as what it was above all else--a rhetorical work, a "tract for the times."[17]

I have found only one study that attempts to deal more than cursorily with the rhetorical characteristics of Fuller's discourse. A dissertation by Marie Urbanski tries to determine the place of Woman in the Nineteenth Century in the genre of American protest literature, and in so doing takes note of its hortatory elements--sermonic form, conversational tone, and vivid imagery. Urbanski does not,

however, attempt to account for the persuasive impact of such rhetorical elements upon Fuller's contemporary audience. Nor does she explain the ideological importance or rhetorical artistry of Fuller's carefully crafted assault upon the woman's sphere concept. Urbanski's study is primarily an exercise in literary criticism and ultimately fails to confront the significance of Fuller's rhetoric to the evolution of feminist protest in the late 1840's.[18]

The aim of this thesis is to account for the impact of Fuller's treatise upon female reformers during the crucial years prior to the first Woman's Rights Convention of 1848. To do this, I shall focus primarily upon two interrelated aspects of Fuller's discourse: the audience to whom the work was principally directed and the way Fuller adapted her message to that audience. Woman in the Nineteenth Century was published at a moment in the emergence of feminist thought when female reformers were most susceptible to Fuller's argument against the woman's sphere concept. Moreover, Fuller skillfully, sensitively, and consciously adapted the form and content of her discourse to the values, attitudes, and needs of female reformers. In doing so, she acted as the ideologue of the early woman's rights movement who provided the ideas and arguments upon which female reformers could act

for their social, intellectual, and spiritual emancipation.

2

Woman in the Nineteenth Century was published in the midst of a decade of debate over the "acceptable" limits of women's thought, activity, and influence in society. From 1838 to 1848, female reformers confronted a number of frustrating experiences and a mass of traditional preachment that impelled them to acknowledge that the woman's sphere concept was widely accepted throughout American culture and presented a formidable barrier to their personal pursuits. To a great extent, it was because female reformers were susceptible to discourse redefining and reconceptualizing the woman's sphere concept that Fuller's treatise was so influential. Consequently, to understand the impact of Woman in the Nineteenth Century upon the thoughts and beliefs of female reformers, it is essential that the concept of the woman's sphere be clarified, that the exigencies that brought the concept into question by female reformers be investigated, and that female reformers' initial arguments against the concept be analysed. Knowing the problem, audience, and context for which Fuller wrote Woman in the Nineteenth Century, her attack upon the concept of the woman's sphere can be

critically examined and the influence of her rhetoric upon the woman's movement can be better understood.

The "woman's sphere" was a metaphor used to describe the proper role and ideal virtues associated with "true womanhood" in American society. "The sphere for which woman was originally intended, and to which she [was] so exactly fitted to adorn and bless," was generally accepted to be, as George Burnap claimed in his book The Sphere and Duties of Woman, that of "wife, the mistress of the home, the solace, the aid and the counselor of that ONE for whose sake the world is of any consequence to her."[19] The concept of the woman's sphere described and delimited all of the possible facets of a woman's life. As wife, mother, sister, or daughter, a woman's place was in the home. Her principal duties were to her family--her proper role was as "help-meet" to her husband, and the only acceptable social activity for her was in connection with the church. Piety, purity, and submissiveness were the cardinal virtues of "true womanhood," and the thoughts, activities, and influence of a "true woman" were limited to domestic and religious concerns.

Originally conceived as an ideal towards which women were encouraged to strive, the woman's sphere became a euphemism used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to confine women's intellect, to crush their morality, to

encourage their weakness, and to punish their strength.[20] Of course, not all women accepted the archetype, even in the eighteenth century, but not until the nineteenth century did a small cadre of female reformers begin overtly to resist the normative implications of the woman's sphere concept by becoming involved in activities outside the domestic and religious circle. By the 1830's a noticeable number of women were active in missionary work, communal experiments, labor and educational reform, and, above all, agitation for the abolition of black slavery. But even these women invariably encountered a web of beliefs, customs, and laws that hindered their reform efforts. Several factors spurred the resistance of female reformers to the woman's sphere concept from 1837 to 1845, but perhaps most important was their confrontation with the restrictive limits of the concept in the course of their work in the Abolition movement.

A small number of women were active in the Abolition movement from its inception in the early 1800's, and they assumed that they worked in "holy copartnership" with male reformers.[21] Female abolitionists believed their efforts were grounded upon a position of some influence in society, for they presumed themselves to be agents operating within an "enlarged" sphere of moral obligation.[22] This presumption, however, was not shared by most Americans. In their

efforts on behalf of enslaved Africans, female reformers met with public rebuke and censure for overstepping their "proper" bounds.[23] Before 1837, however, female reformers seemed not to have understood how deeply the woman's sphere concept was engrained in the thinking of most Americans, even those who supported abolitionism. But from 1837 to 1840 three frustrating experiences convinced female reformers that the woman's sphere concept was sorely in need of redefinition, if not eradication.

In 1837 the General Association of Orthodox Ministers of Massachusetts issued their annual Pastoral Letter, "inviting attention" of the public to the "dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury." Referring specifically to the anti-slavery lectures of Sarah and Angelina Grimke, the Letter declared that "the appropriate duties and influence of women" were clearly shown in the New Testament to be "unobtrusive and private." Therefore, "when [woman] assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer, our care and protection of her seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defense against her; she yields the power which God had given her for her protection, and her character becomes unnatural." The ministers urged women to remember the "modesty and delicacy which is the charm of domestic life and which constitutes the true influence of

woman in society."[24]

The Pastoral Letter was a direct rebuke to female abolitionists and, in fact, to all women who participated in any social causes beyond those associated explicitly with their families or churches. Female reformers were outraged. Attempting to prove that the woman's sphere concept did indeed sanction their abolitionist activities, they gave speeches, wrote poems, and published letters in defense of their efforts on behalf of emancipation. Representative of such efforts was Sarah Grimke's Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women (1838). According to Grimke, women had too long been "unaccustomed to think for ourselves, and to search the sacred volume, to see how far we are living up to the design of Jehovah in our creation." Consequently, "we have rested satisfied with the sphere marked out for us by man." But it was a fallacy in reasoning, she argued, which forbade women "to exercise some of [their] noblest faculties, and [which stamped] with reproach of indelicacy those actions by which women were formerly dignified and exalted in the church." According to Grimke, woman, like man, was subject only to God's Holy Writ, and therefore, "in the great work of public reformation [woman was] fulfilling one of the important duties laid upon her as an accountable being." Grimke attacked the Pastoral Letter as

a "perverted interpretation" of the Scriptures, as a male conspiracy "entered in league to crush the immortal mind of woman" and "to smother the irrepressible desire for mental and spiritual freedom which glows in the breast of many who hardly dare to speak their sentiments."[25] Echoing her sister's claims, Angelina Grimke maintained that "nothing which concerns the well-being of mankind is either beyond [a woman's] sphere or above her comprehension." "Jesus never rebuked [women]," she insisted; "he never told them it was unbecoming their sphere in life to mingle in the crowds which followed his footsteps."[26] Such vehement reactions to the Pastoral Letter of 1837 disclose how strongly female reformers believed in the moral imperatives of their reform efforts and adumbrate themes that would recur in their discourse across the next decade.

Only one year after the Pastoral Letter, female reformers saw further cause for alarm when William Lloyd Garrison's proposal to accord women full membership in the American Anti-Slavery Society touched off a furor that resulted in the permanent division of the Society. Although female abolitionists were permitted, even encouraged, to lend their efforts to the cause of emancipation, they had not been granted official membership in the American Anti-Slavery Society at any time since its founding

in 1833. Although women had established their own auxiliary societies, their situation in the American Anti-Slavery Society was manifestly unfair, and it became a burning issue in 1839, when the Society met to select delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention to be held in London in the summer of 1840. Female anti-slavery organizations had not been invited to send delegates to the London Convention. Garrison, however, believed that because of their contributions to the movement, female abolitionists deserved representation at London. But when he proposed granting full membership to women so they could participate as voting delegates to the London Convention, he sparked a heated controversy that disclosed how deeply the imperatives of the woman's sphere concept were engrained in the thinking of many male abolitionists. After intense debate, Garrison's plan carried the day; but it split the Society. Rather than accept women as equal partners in their crusade against slavery, a sizeable group of abolitionists (123 of the 435 members of the Society) led by Lewis Tappan left the American Anti-Slavery Society to establish a new organization, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which prohibited female members.[27]

The rift in the American Anti-Slavery Society illustrated vividly to female reformers the extent to which the

concept of the woman's sphere was accepted by even the most educated and liberal segments of society. "The unfaithful have turned to flight . . . [and] have devised a new anti-slavery organization on hypocritical and false pretenses," Maria Weston Chapman wrote in her 1838 pamphlet Right and Wrong in Massachusetts.[28] As Lucretia Mott recorded many years afterwards, although male abolitionists were courteous, she knew in her heart after 1838 that women participated in reform activities only "by suffrance."[29] Their auxiliary status in the eyes of male abolitionists was only too clear. As Lydia Maria Child stated, with considerable frustration, to Lucretia Mott in 1839, "I think there is now a large class of sincere Abolitionists, with narrow views of freedom."[30]

Child's suspicions were confirmed in 1840, when six female delegates from anti-slavery societies in the United States were barred from participating in the proceedings of the London Convention.[31] The "Goddess Delegates" were permitted to watch the proceedings of the convention from the gallery but were not permitted to take an active part in the first international convocation against the inhumanity of black slavery.[32] Recalling her frustration over this turn of events, Elizabeth Cady Stanton noted scathingly that "Deborah, Hulda, Vashti, and Esther might have questioned the propriety of calling it a World's

Convention, when only half of humanity was represented there; but what were their opinions worth compared with those of Rev. A. Harvey, the Rev. C. Stout, or the Rev. J. Burnet, who, Bible in hand, argued woman's subjection, divinely decreed when Eve was created."[33] Secular delegates also opposed the participation of women in the proceedings. They deemed women "constitutionally unfit for public and business meetings" and stated that allowing women to vote would bring ridicule on the convention.[34]

The bitter charges of hypocrisy and discrimination made at the convention by Abby Kimber and Sarah Pugh had little impact upon the delegates,[35] but it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the proceedings in London to the future of the woman's rights crusade in the United States. The exclusion of women from the London Convention demonstrated physically the finite, arbitrary, and discriminatory nature of the woman's sphere concept and, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton claimed, helped "rouse American [female] minds to the importance of some definite action toward woman's emancipation." Indeed, Stanton recorded in the History of Woman Suffrage that plans for what became the first Woman's Rights Convention were laid in London, where she and Lucretia Mott agreed that "the men to whom they had just listened had manifested their great need of some education on [the woman's] question."[36]

The cumulative impact of female reformers' frustrating experiences in the Abolition movement was leading them to the conclusion that the woman's sphere concept was a barrier to woman's social advancement that must be removed.[37]

The growing resistance of female reformers to the woman's sphere concept was further strengthened in response to a deluge of traditional discourse generated by staunch advocates of the traditional archetype. Throughout the 1830's and 1840's woman's magazines, gift annuals, religious periodicals, and even cookbooks were filled with articles, stories, and sermons emphasizing the traditional roles and ideal virtues associated with "true womanhood" in American society. Such discourse attempted to restrain female reformers' transgressions of the woman's sphere by recentering their thoughts on woman's "proper" realm of activity and influence. "A really sensible woman feels her dependence," Mrs. John Sanford wrote in 1842. "She does what she can, but she is conscious of inferiority, and therefore grateful for support."[38] Catherine E. Beecher claimed that women were inferior to men because "heaven has appointed to one sex the superior, and to the other the subordinate station." The preservation of this natural design depended upon "woman's retaining her place as dependent and defenseless and making no claims and

maintaining no rights but what are the gifts of honor, rectitude, and love."[39]

These classic conceptions of "true womanhood" attempted to remind women that their real rights and privileges lay exclusively within their "humble sphere":

> The right to love whom others scorn,
> The right to comfort and to mourn,
> The right to shed new joys on earth,
> The right to feel the soul's high worth . . .[40]

"We lament the erratic course of many of our female reformers," said one writer, "believing that they have inflicted deep injury where they intended good, by drawing woman away from her true and allotted sphere--domestic life."[41] Female reformers were repeatedly warned of the awful consequences of their activities. According to the Reverend Mr. Stearns, for example, it was the responsibility of women like the Grimke sisters, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to determine "whether the beautiful order of society shall continue as it had been or whether society shall break up and become a chaos of disjointed and unsightly elements."[42]

Rather than extinguishing the coals of protest, such exhortation actually prompted many women to reassess the imperatives of the woman's sphere and led a number of women to attempt to deal directly with the troublesome concept in discourse of their own. From 1838 to 1845, female reformers and literary ladies--"blue stockings" as they were

called by their adversaries--grappled with the woman's sphere concept in orations, essays, poems, reviews, and the like. During these years they advanced two basic arguments. The first challenged the normative restrictions of the woman's sphere concept. The Grimke sisters used this argument often in their discourse to justify the pursuit of their social concerns and reform activities. Sarah Grimke declared that "no one can desire more earnestly than I do that woman may move exactly in the sphere which her Creator has assigned her." But "whatever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do," she argued, because according to the commandments of God, "men and women were CREATED EQUAL; they are both moral and accountable beings."[43] Angelina Grimke reemphasized her sister's claims by stating that the "mere circumstance of sex" enforced no limitation on the soul. "To suppose that it [did], would be to deny the self-evident truth, that the 'physical constitution is the mere instrument of the moral nature.'" "Our duties," she held, "originate, not from the difference of sex, but from the diversity of our relations in life, the various gifts and talents committed to our care, and the different eras in which we live."[44] In essence, the Grimke sisters argued that even though men and women had separate realms of thought and activity, the sphere of moral obligation was

equal for both sexes, and therefore the realm of women's social concerns and activities should be enlarged.

The second argument sought to destroy the woman's sphere by denying the validity of the concept itself. Lydia Maria Child claimed that "discussion about relative superiority, [was] as idle as controversy to determine which is most important to the world, the light of the sun, or the warmth of the sun." Therefore, she argued, "the moral and intellectual condition of woman must be in exact correspondence with that of man, not only in its general aspect, but in its individual manifestations."[45] Sophia Ripley simply asserted that "all adjusting of the whole sex to a sphere is vain, for no two persons naturally have the same." "Character [and] intellect [create] the sphere of each," she claimed; "what is individual and peculiar to each determines it."[46]

The circulation of these arguments was limited because the majority of magazines, journals, and newspapers adhered to conventional definitions of the woman's sphere concept and refused to publish the "spurious" and "corrupting" discourse of females they considered "semi-women" and "mental hermaphrodites."[47] Even abolitionist publications were careful to avoid the woman's question" for fear it might weaken their own cause. Consequently, female rhetors were reduced to publishing independently or

in the few literary and philosophical journals that would give an airing to their cause. But although their speeches and writings were not widely circulated among the general population, they did come to reach a large number of female reformers and further fanned their growing disaffection with the woman's sphere concept. The circulation of such discourse created a body of common experience, thought, and knowledge concerning the woman's sphere concept that was shared among female reformers and made them increasingly susceptible to attacks against the concept.

However, the arguments that female rhetors offered against the woman's sphere concept prior to Woman in the Nineteenth Century were incomplete. The first argument did not attack the concept directly but only challenged certain applications of it in society. Whether women did not understand the nature of the woman's sphere concept or were merely reluctant to oppose the religious teachings and forfeit the social privileges and protections associated with their role and position in society, a number of female reformers simply challenged specific social applications of the woman's sphere concept. They claimed that the limitations placed upon the thought, activity, and influence of women were arbitrary and should be expanded to include a number of areas and interests not previously deemed "proper." But by accepting the basic premise of the

woman's sphere--that the sexes had separate and defined realms of thought, activity, and influence in society--these female rhetors were unable to refute the apparent logic of the concept.

Writers who advanced the second argument offered little backing for their claims, but simply proclaimed the equality of the sexes as a self-evident truth and asserted that the woman's sphere concept was invalid. It was important, however, that a fully developed case against the woman's sphere concept be presented. For although female reformers were susceptible to arguments against the concept, not all were prepared to accept on faith claims asserting the equality of men and women. Historical tradition, Christian dogma, scientific understanding, law--all proclaimed that women were inferior to men. Without substantive proof--whether provided by evidence or sheer logical power--most female reformers were not willing to commit themselves to belief in (or action upon) the equality of the sexes.

The key to the crystallization of such commitment can be found in the rhetoric of an ideologue--the "leader of belief,"[48] the "man of words, the "intellectual precursor of a social movement"[49]--who creates a common cause for collective action from the disaffection of individuals. The inception period of a social movement is a time of

indecision for disaffected individuals.[50] Without strong commitment to a cause, individuals are not likely to band together and risk the psychological pressures and social alienation that accompany the violation of social norms.[51] A necessary prerequisite for the emergence of a social movement is a complete and compelling argumentative case against the status quo that justifies, motivates, and unifies the discontent of individuals in their quest for social change--a case that legitimizes and socializes private discontent, that familiarizes individuals with the idea of change, that creates a receptivity for new beliefs and loyalties, and that provides new principles and goals for concerted action.[52] Such a case was necessary in the mid-1840's to forge the frustration of female reformers with the restrictive sanctions of the woman's sphere into action against the odious archetype of "true womanhood" in American society. It was Margaret Fuller's great achievement to provide just such a case in Woman in the Nineteenth Century.

3

Female reformers had no formal statement of feminist principles and objectives until the Declaration of Sentiments at the first Woman's Rights Convention in 1848. But it was Margaret Fuller who provided the premises and lines

of argument upon which the Declaration of Sentiments was based. When one examines the reasons and ways Fuller skillfully adapted her powerful message against the woman's sphere concept to her audience of female reformers, the rhetorical nature and persuasive potential of her treatise are revealed. Fuller so tailored her rhetoric to the values, beliefs, and experiences of female reformers that its impact upon their ideas and actions was almost a natural consequence.

Woman in the Nineteenth Century was written in response to the "impending transition from old conventions to greater freedom" that Fuller observed occurring among female reformers in the early 1840's.[53] While conducting a conversation series for women in Boston, Fuller was contacted by Maria Weston Chapman, treasurer of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, who asked her to devote one of her lectures to the subject of abolition. Although Fuller sympathized with the anti-slavery cause, she was more concerned with the emancipation of her own sex, and she asked Chapman whether she or any of her colleagues had a clear statement "as to religious institutions and the social position of woman" in print. "As far as I know you seem to be quite wrong as to what is to be done for woman," Fuller wrote Chapman. "She needs new helps, I think."[54] Thereafter, Fuller dedicated herself to providing those

"new helps" in the form of a powerful argument against the woman's sphere concept.

Fuller sought to compose prose with which female reformers could identify and that could force "the vital currents of thousands of human hearts into ONE current" and unite women in thought and sentiment against the concept of the woman's sphere.[55] Consequently, a primary concern for Fuller was the form that her message should assume to reach and educate her readers most effectively. The "first draft" of her work took the form of a popular essay--"The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men; Woman versus Women,"[56] published in the July 1843 issue of The Dial, a transcendentalist journal dedicated to "the love of individual freedom and the hope of social progress" that Fuller edited from 1840-1843.[57] Even though this essay "excited a good deal of sympathy" among female reformers, they criticized the title, focus, and legalistic style of the article as unnecessarily difficult and deceptive.[58] Such criticism forced Fuller to reevaluate the form of her discourse to ensure the effectual presentation of her message to her primary audience. She decided to expand the article into pamphlet form, but to do so with the "slow pen" to direct and adapt all of her arguments carefully to the needs and interests of female reformers.[59] After almost two years of work, she published Woman in the

Nineteenth Century, a prime example of her ability to "play the Mirabeau" to give a very specific audience insight, impulse, and inspiration.[60]

In Woman in the Nineteenth Century Fuller took the enlightenment of women as her primary concern. Drawing a parallel between the oppression of blacks and the oppression of women, she argued that, "as the friend of the negro assumes that one man cannot by right hold another in bondage, so should the friend of Woman assume that Man cannot by right lay even well-meant restrictions on Woman." Woman should be "nowhere restrained," Fuller claimed, and in Woman in the Nineteenth Century she launched a careful and concerted attack upon the woman's sphere concept.

Because of the nature of the woman's sphere, Fuller's primary rhetorical problem was to expose the precepts that she felt "overloaded" the minds of female reformers and impeded their "chance of fair, free proportions."[61] Significantly, she did not focus just upon conventional applications of the woman's sphere concept in society, but upon refuting its theoretical bases. Moreover, she did not just assert that the concept was absurd. Rather, she spent a great portion of her pamphlet marshalling evidence for her claims concerning the powers and potentials of women. She employed essentially four recurring, interrelated argumentative strategies. First, she denigrated the

woman's sphere concept as a perfidious creation grounded in myth and used by men to keep women in their place. Second, she exploded the concept by semantically manipulating the "sphere" metaphor. Third, she redefined the ideal life and goals for a woman in American society by drawing upon three popular philosophies of the age. Fourth, she provided female reformers with a series of practical guidelines for liberating themselves from the domination of the woman's sphere.[62]

The first step in Fuller's denigration of the woman's sphere concept was to analyze in detail the historical evolution of the concept as a device for the control of women. She devoted nearly fifty pages to showing that "man's notion" of woman had been cast in the images of Isis, Ceres, Diana, and the countless goddesses, nymphs, and fairy queens of legend and song. Woman was the Madonna, the earth mother and spiritual intermediary of mankind, envisioned in all of her virginal beauty, strength, and eternal devotion. The problem, Fuller claimed, was that the "poetical incense" of such images made woman a goddess of unreal proportions and deprived her of "what deep communion, what real intercourse is implied in sharing the joys and cares of parentage, when any degree of equality is admitted." Man had made woman an object of praise rather than a copartner in his thoughts and actions.

Rather than placing woman upon a pedestal, man had trapped her within a cage of beliefs and expectations that prevented her growth and elevation.[63]

While men revered the ideal of woman they had created, Fuller argued, they also feared the curse Eve had laid upon Adam. Consequently, they used the ideal of true womanhood to control woman's thoughts, activity, and influence. According to Fuller, the woman's sphere concept was the justification used by men to "repress [women's] impulses and make [them] doubt their instincts, thus often paralyzing their action during the best years." Fuller claimed further that men, by denying women the intellectual and moral equipment they needed to discern and combat corrupting ideas and situations, had made woman's supposed weakness a self-fulfilling prophesy. Men invariably denigrated the efforts of women to develop their intellectual powers by condescendingly praising learned women for having "surpassed their sex." Men are "vain and fond of power," Fuller concluded, and "the boy wants no woman, but only a girl to play ball with him, and mark his pocket handkerchief," or a mother who will make for him a "home in which he may lawfully repose, in so far as she is 'true to the kindred points of Heaven and home.'"[64]

From here it was an easy step for Fuller to claim

that marriage was one of the most perfectly devised means of social control. It was the "natural means of forming a sphere," because of the intimate influence of a husband over his wife. Women were prepared for wedlock from an early age, as though it were part of their essential nature. They were given in marriage to men (marriage de convenance was to Fuller the European equivalent of Turkish slave dealing). Then after marriage, women were looked upon as "adopted children" and placed in the role of governess or nurse rather than that of mother or parent. Whether or not a woman was happy in this domestic sphere was irrelevant, for it was deemed a "woman's lot" not to be perfectly happy in her affections--or at least that is what they were told by men. In fact, Fuller held, it was precisely because marriage was such a convenient arrangement for the total control of the lives of women that those "old maids" who were not subject to its domination were regarded so contemptuously. "Woman self-centered, would never be absorbed by any relation," Fuller wrote, and it is "the very fault of marriage and the present relation between the sexes that the woman does belong to the man, instead of forming a whole with him."[65]

In attacking the woman's sphere concept, Fuller pointed to a series of inconsistencies between the virtues of piety, purity, and submissiveness associated with the

ideal of "true womanhood" and woman's actual role in American society. She noted that although women were told from birth that they were the reformers and the preservers of morality in society, they were constantly sheltered from vice and hampered whenever they attempted to initiate social change. This inconsistency Fuller attributed to man's perverted interpretation of religious principles and his lust for power. She noted further that a woman was expected to remain pure all of her life, even to the point of refusing to submit to the will of her husband when his motives seemed to be unworthy. At the same time, Fuller observed, if a wife showed any coldness or withdrawal from her husband's lawful claims upon her affections, she was castigated for failing to fulfill her proper duties. Finally, Fuller contended that while woman was revered as the mistress of her home and family, she was in fact not the ultimate trustee of property, power, or privilege within the home and family. All in all, Fuller concluded, the woman's sphere concept, rather than being a coherent and unified body of ideas and maxims, was nothing but a bundle of unfulfilled dreams projected by men upon generations of unsuspecting females.

Having demonstrated the disparity between the woman's sphere concept and the reality of woman's position in society, Fuller reinforced her attack upon the concept

with a series of arguments from analogy, cause, and unlimited development. First, she drew an analogy between the ownership of slaves and the enforced domesticity of women. She pointed out that a woman was physically and legally little more than an article of property to a man: "the man who avails himself of the shelter of men's laws to steal from a mother her own children, or arrogate any superior right in them, save that of superior virtue, will bear the stigma he deserves, in common with him who steals grown men from their mother-land, their hopes, and their homes." Next, she contended that there was a powerful causal link between the weakness and apparent inferiority of the female sex and the American patriarchial system. In doing so, she gave female reformers justification for believing that the woman's sphere concept was a device created by men for the control and subjugation of women. Finally, she appealed to the emotions of her audience arguing from unlimited development that the imposed limitations placed upon women were progressively debilitating to the female sex. Every woman, she wrote, who accepted the captivity of the woman's sphere "creates a miasma, whose spread is indefinite."[66] According to Fuller, such arguments revealed clearly how inconsistent the woman's sphere concept was with the professed American democratic principles of equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness

set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

If Fuller's first strategy was to denigrate the woman's sphere concept generally as perfidious and debilitating, her second was to explode the concept altogether, to redefine it so broadly that it could not possibly be used to restrict the thoughts or activities of women. This she accomplished by semantically manipulating the "sphere" metaphor itself from a rigid, three dimensional structure to a musical notation, or sign, that represented many various and beautiful combinations. "Harmony exists in difference, less than in likeness, if only the same key-note govern both parts," she wrote. Mankind (by which Fuller meant "both man and woman") "cannot be satisfied with any one gift of life, any one department of knowledge or telescopic peep at the heavens." Mankind inhabited a "many-chorded" world, and consequently there were many "spheres"--indeed a "zodiac of beneficent labors"--that could fulfill a person. Each person should be like a note in the musical score of the universe, sounding pure and true to his or her own nature. Marriage itself should be likened to the striking of two perfect notes in harmonious combination, making the common growth of the sexes "elevating and harmonic."[67]

This reconceptualization of the "sphere" metaphor backed Fuller's principal arguments against the feminine

archetype. First, while a geometrical form is described ideally only in theory and is perceived perfectly only in the mind, a musical chord exists perfectly in nature as well as in theory and can be shared among and appreciated by a number of individuals whenever it is sounded. Second, a sphere of set dimensions has but one perfect form, whereas both single notes and chords of a given key may exist with a variety of tonal qualities in a number of different octaves. Third, spheres exist concentrically by definition, one within the other to infinity, while each musical note is pure and true unto itself, and even when struck with another note is discernable as having a unique quality. Finally, two notes struck purposefully together create a sound which transcends the sound of each individual note. By redefining the spherical metaphor in musical as opposed to geometrical terms, Fuller transformed the woman's sphere concept from a confining archetype into one of virtually unlimited possibility.

Applying her musical conception of the sphere metaphor directly to woman, Fuller argued that she must be self-sufficient, able to stand alone, and able to have a complete life. To achieve this, woman must be better educated, so that she might expand her intellectual powers. Woman also needed a greater range of occupations and interests, to expand her arbitrarily limited horizons and

to ensure her independence of man (whose affections she did not need to be a complete human being). With regard to marriage, Fuller argued that woman should not be given but must give herself with dignity into such a relationship with a man, because genuine marriage was not described by traditional household partnerships, mutual idolatries, or unions for the sake of intellectual companionship. Marriage was not a secular institution, but a "mutual choice of souls inducing permanent union." Rather than always being the harmonizer of a marriage, woman should regard herself as an integral element of a musical chord in which both notes are struck with equal force for a "persistent consonance." A woman must live first for God's sake and for her own perfection, Fuller insisted, rather than make an imperfect man her god and her superior. If man and woman were treated equally and permitted to develop in perfect harmony, "they would fulfill one another, like hemispheres, or the tenor and bass in music."[68]

Fuller did not end her argument against the woman's sphere with her denigration of traditional beliefs and her semantic manipulation of the "sphere" metaphor. She skillfully grounded her argument against the woman's sphere upon three philosophical systems--Transcendentalism, Fourierian Socialism, and German Idealism--popular among female reformers during the 1830's and 1840's. By

selecting and manipulating principles taken from each of these popular philosophies, Fuller was able to give authority to her claims while keeping her argument on the level of first principles.

In the Transcendentalist circles that flourished during the 1830's and 1840's, women were considered the intellectual equals of men. All souls were believed to be divinely inspired to their greatest personal achievements. Such belief provided women spiritual assurances commensurate to those of conventional religion while placing no limitations upon their worldly thoughts and activities. Consequently, Transcendentalism was a popular philosophy among female reformers and, as one historian has noted, "almost without exception . . . the women who came forward as the leaders of their sex were transcendentalists or inclined to that philosophy of life."[69]

Although Transcendentalism was a popular philosophy, the argument that it suggested against the woman's sphere concept was not fully developed until Fuller expounded it in Woman in the Nineteenth Century. She saw that a doctrine propounding the infinite worth of each individual refuted the idea of a defined and limited realm of existence for any one person, let alone one-half of the human race. In addition, she saw that a doctrine that affirmed the power of the will to work out one's personal destiny

was contrary to the traditional religious basis of the woman's sphere concept. Fuller castigated Christian doctrines for teaching two destructive ideas about the relationship between men and women: first, that as woman was created from man's rib, she was created for man--to be his companion and comfort; second, that as "through Woman Man was lost, so through Woman must Man be redeemed." Such ideas accorded woman no equality as a soul and no happiness on earth, but only repentance for Eve's transgressions and toil within a sphere of moral obligation to Adam. According to Fuller's interpretation of Scripture, a better life in heaven after death was a woman's only reward for her suffering and her only escape from her confined existence on earth. Fuller argued, however, that religion should be a "thirst for truth and good, not the love of sect and dogma," and therefore advocated Transcendentalism as an alternative to Christianity because it made the idea of woman "sufficiently large and noble [as] to interpose no obstacle to her progress."[70]

The language of Transcendentalism permeates Woman in the Nineteenth Century. According to Fuller, women should be regarded as souls, "each of which [has] a destiny of its own, incalculable to other minds, and whose leading it must follow, guided by the light of a private conscience." She denied that physical characteristics, emotional

attributes, and social roles were designated exclusively for any one sex. "Woman, the poem, Man the poet--such divisions are only important when they are never to be transcended," she explained. To emphasize this principle, Fuller repeatedly used images alluding to the equality of the sexes. Man and woman were "priests of one worship," "pillars of one porch," "twin exponents of a divine thought," and "two orbits in a single universe." Perhaps most striking was her claim that "male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism." "As fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid--they are perpetually passing into one another, and likewise, there is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman."[71]

In addition to stressing the equality of souls, Fuller accented Transcendentalist notions regarding the perfection of souls and growth of the individual. "Be ye perfect," was her sermonic message to women. Man and woman are both "children of one spirit, perpetual learners and doers thereof," Fuller asserted, and each must strive for his or her ultimate fulfillment in this life on earth and not in some celestial afterlife. But man, because he had developed first in the "order of time," had impeded woman's growth by promulgating perfidious notions such as the woman's sphere, and the condition of the sexes had become unequal. Fuller believed, however, that the life of

woman had reached a stage of crisis in her growth from an "overgrown child" to the "self-possessed, wise and graceful" person she was to become. "Human beings are not constituted that they can live without expansion," she claimed. "If they do not get it in one way they must in another, or perish." And when women realized that all souls were essentially equal and unlimited in their ability to achieve perfection, the concept of a sphere of thought, activity, and influence would no longer restrict their accomplishments. "Whatever the soul knows how to seek, it cannot fail to obtain," and "when the mind is once awakened to this consciousness, it will not be restrained by habits of the past, but fly to seek the seeds of a heavenly future."[72]

Such claims gave credence to Fuller's use of Fourierism, a socialist theory that promoted the temporal equality and freedom of the sexes. Based on the teachings of Charles Fourier, who believed women to be the equals of men and held that the degree to which women were emancipated was a barometer of the general emancipation that existed in a society, this philosophy projected the expansion of woman's personal possibilities. Accordingly, in cooperative communities organized upon Fourierist doctrines, women were given the same rights and opportunities as men.[73]

While opponents denounced Fourierism as "agrarian radicalism,"[74] Fuller realized that such a philosophy meshed perfectly with the changing aspirations of female reformers and strengthened her argument for the intellectual and occupational equality of women. According to Fuller, in a community of naturally equal souls there existed a myriad of vehicles for personal fulfillment. "Nature defies rule and delights in variation," she wrote, "and we must admit the same variety that she admits." "Let them be sea-captains, if you will," she declared, taking impetus from Fourierist principles. A number of women, "even without equal freedom with the other sex," had achieved great things, Fuller claimed, including leading armies, guiding nations, and influencing the direction of human thought. In fact, she demonstrated, "women have taken possession of so many provinces for which men had pronounced them unfit, that, though [men] still declare there are some [provinces] inaccessible to them, it is difficult to say just where they must stop."[75]

Fuller reinforced her claims regarding the essential equality of men and women with her plea for the principles of German Idealism. "If principles would be established particulars would adjust themselves aright," she argued. "Ascertain the true destiny of Woman; give her legitimate hopes and a standard within herself; marriage and all

other relations would by degrees be harmonized with these." Fuller cited the works of Goethe, "the great apostle of individual culture," as the source of her Idealistic principles.[76] "In all of his expressions of Woman," she wrote, Goethe "aims at a pure self-subsistence, and a free development of any powers which [women] may be gifted by nature as much for them as for men." According to Fuller, Goethe's writings revealed that "new individualities shall be developed in the actual world," an idea that lent reputable confirmation to her belief in personal perfection. Fuller argued that the woman's sphere concept opposed the ideal laws of true and principled existence. Consequently, a "great moral law" was needed in American society.[77]

Fuller employed a number of metaphors to symbolize this "great moral law" and give vividness to her claims concerning the ideal existence of man and woman in society. She used the parent-child metaphor to represent the existing relation of man to woman in her weakened social state, the head-heart metaphor to represent the true nature of the sexes (one dysfunctional without the other), and the king-queen metaphor to represent the ultimate achievement of sexual equality in society through the dissolution of the woman's sphere concept. Fuller also sought to give credibility to her Idealistic claims by citing the words of

literati such as Shakespeare, Manzoni, and St. Martin, notable female figures such as Maria Edgeworth, Mrs. Jameson, and Abby Kelly, and national figures such as John Quincy Adams. Adams was especially useful, for in 1838 he had published a speech "On the Right of People, Men and Women, to Petition . . ." and was one of the few statesmen to whom Fuller could point as favoring the woman's cause.

It should be stressed that Fuller only drew upon those principles of Transcendentalism, Fourierism, and Idealism that furthered her rhetorical purposes and avoided mention of conflicting principles that might have weakened the force of her argument. While Fuller preached Transcendentalist doctrines, for example, she never mentioned Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the most prominent Transcendentalists in New England and a profound influence upon Fuller herself. This unlikely omission was most probably due to the fact that Emerson's actions toward women had never matched his theoretical elevation of the sex.[78] Likewise, though Fuller staunchly upheld Fourierist doctrines, she denounced the superficiality of Fourier's communal methods and never mentioned her own association with Brook Farm, the communal haven of New England intellectuals during the 1840's. This was probably because she hoped to avoid the fate of Francis Wright, who undermined her feminist arguments by her open association with a free-

love community in Tennessee during the 1820's.[79] Finally, Fuller ignored classical conceptions of the sexes and accepted Idealist principles only when they supported her own beliefs. She denounced Platonic Idealism because it set the threshold of perfection for females lower than that for males and claimed that such principles were an elitist perversion of "true" Idealist principles which decreed the essential equality of all souls.[80]

On the other hand, while Fuller claimed conventional Christian doctrine to be the nemisis of woman's social, intellectual, and spiritual growth, she employed its rituals and forms to make her argument more palatable and persuasive to female reformers. This suggests that Fuller believed that a religious tone, terminology, style, and structure would facilitate the rhetorical purposes of her treatise. And, in fact, the sermonic mold in which Fuller finally cast Woman in the Nineteenth Century was an important factor in its success. Most reform movements of the early nineteenth century were based primarily upon a religious rather than political or legal impulse, and female reformers were by habit inclined to respond readily to sermonic discourse. While female reformers as members of the intellectual elite were susceptible to sound, logical argumentation against the woman's sphere concept, commitment to a cause of woman's rights on purely analytical

grounds would have been both ethically unacceptable and emotionally unsatisfying. By adopting the sermonic form and language, Fuller was permitted the intimacy of addressing her audience in the first person, the opportunity explicitly to advise and direct their actions and feelings, and the luxury of constant repetition--all of which are effective rhetorical devices and none of which were compatible with the jurisprudential mode she had used in "The Great Lawsuit." Fuller opened Woman in the Nineteenth Century with several pages of moralistic preachment concerning the frailty and fallability of men and ended her treatise with a moving prayer for the enlightenment, elevation, and equality of women. In between the sermonic introduction and conclusion, Fuller delivered an extended homily upon the equality of all souls reinforced with extensive scriptural citation reminiscent of Puritan sermons, complemented by Transcendentalist doctrines of self-worth, the importance of the will, and individual perfection, and accented with revivalistic "hell-fire" denunciations of the part played by men in the degradation of women. In one passage illustrative of Fuller's sermonic style and tone, she writes:

> O men! I speak not to you. It is true that your wickedness is its own punishment. Your forms degraded and your eyes clouded by secret sin; natural harmony broken and fineness of perception destroyed in your mental and bodily organization; God and love shut out from your hearts by the foul

> visitants you have permitted there; incapable of pure marriage; O wretched men, your sin is its own punishment! You have lost the world in losing yourselves. Who ruins another has admitted the worm to the root of his own tree, and the fuller ye fill the cup of evil, the deeper must be your own bitter draught.[81]

There were no such preachments in "The Great Lawsuit," yet they appear frequently in Woman in the Nineteenth Century.

Earlier we saw that Fuller employed arguments from analogy, cause, and unlimited development in creating her case against the woman's sphere concept. Interestingly, when reconstructing an alternative system of beliefs to the woman's sphere concept, she simply reversed her previous argumentative method. First, she associated the true nature of mankind with her Transcendentalist principles, her Fourieristic beliefs, and her Idealistic goals by drawing an analogy between the teachings of these three popular philosophies and the true potentialities of women in society. Fuller then argued that if men would remove the cause of women's inferiority--the arbitrary barrier of the woman's sphere concept--women would show themselves in their "native dignity." And finally, she claimed that if the woman's sphere concept were removed as an obstacle to women's social, intellectual, and spiritual progress, their abilities and achievements would increase from generation to generation and advance to ultimate perfection. The "thought of human destiny," she exulted, "is given to

eternity adequately to express."[82]

Fuller's aim was not only to restructure the beliefs of female reformers, but to guide their actions as well. Consequently, her fourth overriding rhetorical strategy in Woman in the Nineteenth Century was to provide explicit directions for women who sought emancipation from the woman's sphere concept. She urged her readers to take positive action against the restrictions placed upon women in American society. Women had the capability to "lift off the curse of Eve," she explained, "if they would only consider the subject and enter upon it in the true spirit."[83]

The "true spirit" Fuller urged upon female reformers was that of Mary Wollstonecraft, Madame Dudevant (George Sand), Harriet Martineau, Anna Brownell Jameson, Lydia Maria Child, Angelina Grimke, and others who had gone beyond the limits of the woman's sphere to great and noble accomplishments. Fuller urged female reformers to emulate these women, for "the stream flows on, thought urging action, and action leading to the evolution of still better thought."[84]

Fuller assauged the fears of female reformers and enhanced the immediacy of her claims by revealing the facts of her own struggle against the woman's sphere through "the thin veil" of an autobiographical character she called

Miranda.[85] Fuller's use of "Miranda" as a persona for herself served two purposes. First, through the exploits and accomplishments of Miranda, who female reformers would recognize as Fuller's persona, Fuller established her credentials to write authoritatively on her subject. Second, by personifying Miranda's thoughts and actions, Fuller could reveal the aspirations and frustrations that had accompanied her personal battle against the woman's sphere. Miranda exemplified Fuller's claim "that the restraints upon the [female] sex were insuperable only to those who think them so, or who noisily strive to break them," for Miranda "had taken a course of her own, and no man stood in her way."[86]

Although Fuller believed personal improvement to be more important than group efforts, she did not deny the power of collective agitation. Women were "the best helpers of one another," she exclaimed. Working together they had "great moral power" to subdue "the prejudices of their hearers" and to extend "the principle of liberty" to all human beings. Through united action, "the law of right, the law of growth" could become the same "golden certainty" for women that it was for men. In this context, Fuller gave her discourse additional currency and relevance by mentioning pressing political concerns such as abolition, prison reform, the Millenial movement, and the Texas

annexation question--issues tangentially associated with the dissolution of the woman's sphere concept and of immediate concern to a number of female reformers. She exhorted her readers:

> Women of my country! Exaltadas! if such there be,--women of English, old English nobleness, who understand the courage of Boadicea,--the sacrifice of Godiva, the power of Queen Emma to tread the red-hot iron unharmed,--women who share the nature of Miss Hutchinson, Lady Russell, and the mothers of our own revolution--have you nothing to do with this? You would not speak in vain, whether each in her own home, or banded together in unison.[87]

Fuller's exhortations in behalf of forceful and united action by women, though lofty in principle, were decidedly pragmatic in tone. For instance, while she pointed to Wollstonecraft and Dudevant as women who had used the platform and the pen to demand nobleness in man and to perform judicious acts, at the same time she cautioned female reformers to observe the lives of Wollstonecraft and Dudevant in a critical light. She denounced Wollstonecraft for her disreputable personal life and reproached Dudevant for her willingness to "trample on every graceful decorum, and every human law, for the sake of a sincere life" and for her tendency to violate her own high principles by allowing the heroines of her novels to lie. Fuller warned that women's lives must be "unstained by passionate error," that their thoughts must be without "the heat of wild impulse," that their actions must be

guided by "divine purpose" according to the "liberty of law and knowledge." Fuller perceptively understood that "whenever abuses are seen, the timid will suffer; the bold will protest." "But society has a right to outlaw them till she has revised her law," Fuller maintained, "and this she must be taught to do, by one who speaks with authority, not in anger or haste."[88]

By speaking and acting with authority, Fuller believed, women could liberate themselves from the concept of the woman's sphere both personally and in society at large. "We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down," she demanded. "We would have every path laid open to women as freely as to man." Reemphasizing her emancipating ideology, Fuller declared that if the woman's sphere were removed as an "arbitrary barrier" to women's social, intellectual, and spiritual advancement, "the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the history of former ages, and . . . no discordant collision, but a ravishing harmony of the spheres, would ensue.[89]

4

After the publication of Woman in the Nineteenth Century, many turned to Fuller as the future leader of the woman's rights movement.[90] Fuller, however, did not assume

the mantle of leadership. In 1846 she sailed as a correspondent for Horace Greeley's New York Tribune to Europe, where she interviewed such notable figures as Thomas Carlisle, George Sand, and Adam Mickiewicz. In Italy, she became actively involved in the movement for Italian liberation under the patriot Mazzini, and in the course of her efforts met and married Angelo Ossoli, an Italian rebel from a once aristocratic family, by whom she had a child in 1848. After the fall of the Italian republic in 1850, she and her family set sail for America. "If I live I shall have more to say of Woman," she wrote shortly before sailing, but her ship broke up on the rocks of Long Island and Fuller drowned along with her husband and son within sight of the American shore.[91]

What role Fuller, had she lived, would have played in the campaign for woman's rights cannot be determined. The aim of this thesis has been to explicate the role played by Woman in the Nineteenth Century in the emergence of that campaign in the late 1840's. Although it is always difficult to determine the impact of any given discourse upon its audience, it can safely be said that Fuller's tract was the most influential rhetorical work of the emerging movement for women's rights, and Fuller is best understood as the ideologue of that movement. It was she, more than any other person, who gave cause, stimulus,

and direction to the discontents and aspirations of female reformers. Although the artistry and influence of her book have been obscured by the passage of time, they were widely recognized in her day. The remarks of Horace Greeley are typical. Greeley, a critical admirer of Fuller's rhetoric, was "strongly impressed" by "The Great Lawsuit," but he believed the article had "afterwards matured" into Woman in the Nineteenth Century, a treatise of astute observation, profound reflection, deep feeling, and deliberate utterance. "Others have since spoken more fluently, more variously, with a greater affluence of illustration," he wrote in the introduction to the 1855 edition, but none have spoken "more earnestly or forcibly."[92]

The persuasive force of Woman in the Nineteenth Century resulted both from its timely publication and its skillful and sensitive adaptation to the needs and desires of its audience. Whether or not Fuller sensed the disaffection of female reformers with their position and influence in society before publication of "The Great Lawsuit" in 1843, their response to the essay made clear to her that they were anxious for a soundly wrought, devastating argumentative assault upon the woman's sphere concept. Female reformers were frustrated by their experiences in the Abolition movement--especially by the public rebuke of the Pastoral Letter, the bigotry of male

abolitionists in the 1839 rift in the American Anti-Slavery Society, and the exclusion of female delegates from the World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840. They were further distressed by the deluge of traditional discourse that attempted to constrict their thoughts and limit their actions to the home and church. Although some writers and speakers struck out at the woman's sphere concept in the late 1830's and early 1840's, they failed to construct a complete and convincing case against it. By 1845 female reformers were ready for such a case. Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century was the right book at the right time. It presented a sound, wholesale attack upon the concept of the woman's sphere at just the moment in the evolution of feminist sentiments when female reformers were most likely to respond powerfully to such an attack.

Opportune timing, however, does not account fully for the influence of Fuller's treatise upon the thoughts, arguments, and actions of female reformers. Woman in the Nineteenth Century presented its argument astutely and skillfully, with a steady eye toward securing the assent of its readers. Understanding the frustration of female reformers and yet able to abstract herself from traditional conceptions and social involvements, Fuller was able to view the social, intellectual, and spiritual situation of women with a great deal of insight. And being a widely

published author, she was able easily to get her thoughts and arguments into print. But most important, Fuller expertly designed and adapted the form and content of her discourse to the values, beliefs, and needs of female reformers. She gave female reformers a view of history and Scripture that undercut traditional justifications for restricting the role, position, and influence of women in society. She semantically manipulated the "sphere" metaphor, redefining the concept so broadly that it could not possibly be used to restrict the thoughts or activities of women. She provided female reformers philosophical perspectives that affirmed the temporal and spiritual equality and dignity of all individuals. And she gave them a set of explicit directions for effective action against the woman's sphere concept. By so doing, she created an emancipating system of beliefs for the women that she believed were the "harbingers and leaders of a new era."[93]

Fuller's book became the fundamental text of the early feminists. As one reviewer explained in 1860, it "stated with transcendental force the arguments that formed the basis for the first Woman's Rights Convention in 1848."[94] Its ideas, as well as some of its passages, are echoed in the Declaration of Sentiments, the platform statement adopted at Seneca Falls. By exploding the concept

of the woman's sphere, Fuller removed the most formidable psychological barrier facing female reformers and gave them a new and expansive view of themselves and their rightful claim to social and political equality. As Ednah Dow Cheney noted, Fuller's book contained "the pith and marrow of the woman movement."[95] It catalyzed a radical shift in the ideology of female reformers--from humanitarianism to feminism--and created a new world of thought and action for women in the nineteenth century.

FOOTNOTES

[1](Sarah) Margaret Fuller (marchesa d'Ossoli), Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1855; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), p. 38.

[2]Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., History of Woman Suffrage (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881), I, 801.

[3]Fuller, Woman, pp. 13-14.

[4]Ednah Dow Cheney, "Address Given at the Congress of American Advancement of Woman," New Orleans, November 1895, in Reminiscences of Ednah Dow Cheney (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1902), p. 192.

[5]Margaret Fuller to William Henry Channing, November 17, 1844, in Mason Wade, ed., The Writings of Margaret Fuller (New York: The Viking Press, 1941), p. 567.

[6]Quoted in Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, I, 88-89.

[7]Lydia Maria Child, Letters from New York (New York: C. S. Francis & Company, 1847), II, 283.

[8]Cheney, Reminiscences, pp. 205, 101.

[9]Stanton, History of Woman Suffrage, I, 801.

[10]Quoted in Wade, Writings of Fuller, p. 107.

[11]Quoted in Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, eds., Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Henry Channing, and James Freeman Clarke (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1852), II, 21.

[12]Quoted in editor's introduction to the 1855 edition of Fuller, Woman, p. 12.

[13]Mary Caroline Crawford, Romantic Days in Old Boston (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1912), p. 61.

[14]See, for example, Roland E. Burton, "Margaret Fuller's Criticism: Theory and Practice," Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1941; Perry Miller, "I Find No Intellect Comparable To My Own," American Heritage, 8 (1957).

[15]See, for example, Alice S. Rossi, The Feminist Papers, 2nd ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), pp. 144-157; Sheila Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution (1972; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 56-57; Madeline B. Stern, The Life of Margaret Fuller (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1942).

[16]See Frances E. Kearns, "Margaret Fuller's Social Criticism," Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1960.

[17]Mason Wade, Margaret Fuller, Whetstone of Genius (New York: The Viking Press, 1940), pp. 134-135.

[18]Marie Mitchell Oleson Urbanski, "Woman in the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1973.

[19]Quoted in Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," American Quarterly, 17 (1966), 170.

[20]Harriet Martineau, Society in America, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (1837; rpt., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 291.

[21]See the platform statement of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women (New York, 1837), in An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 69.

[22]See Maria Weston Chapman and M. Ammidon, "Address of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society to the Women of Massachusetts," July 17, 1836, in Louis Ruchames, The Abolitionists, A Collection of Their Writings (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), pp. 100-103; Mary Grew, "Annals of Women's Anti-Slavery Societies," in Proceedings of the American Anti-Slavery Society At Its Third Decade (1864; rpt., New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), pp. 124-130.

[23]Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle (1959; rpt., New York: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 42-43.

[24]The Pastoral Letter, of "The General Association of Massachusetts (Orthodox) to the Churches under Their Care" (1837), in Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, I, 81-82.

[25]Sarah Moore Grimke, Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and The Condition of Women (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), pp. 14-16.

[26]Angelina E. Grimke, Letters to Catherine E. Beecher (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), pp. 105, 119.

[27]See the Seventh Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1840), pp. 21, 56-88; Aileen S. Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), pp. 39-77.

[28]Maria Weston Chapman, Right and Wrong in Massachusetts (Boston: Dow & Jackson, 1839), p. 150.

[29]In Anna Davis Hallowell, ed., James and Lucretia Mott, Life and Letters (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), pp. 114-115.

[30]In Ibid., pp. 135-138.

[31]The six female delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840 included Lucretia Mott (official representative of the American Anti-Slavery Society), Abby Kimber, Sarah Pugh, Elizabeth J. Nealle, Mary Grew, and Emily Annett Winslow. Elizabeth Cady Stanton united with the female delegates during the convention, but had originally accompanied her husband, Henry B. Stanton, a member of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

[32]Frederick B. Tolles, ed., Slavery and "The Woman Question," Lucretia Mott's Diary of Her Visit to Great Britain to Attend the World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840 (Haverford, Pa.: Friends' Historical Association, and London: Friends' Historical Society, 1952), p. 29.

[33]Quoted in Samuel Sillen, Women Against Slavery (New York: Masses & Mainstream, 1955), p. 67.

[34]Tolles, Lucretia Mott's Diary, p. 29.

[35]Abby Kimber taunted the male abolitionists for their hypocrisy thusly: "If drawing a circle beyond which we must not pass, why not do so publicly?" Sarah Pugh noted ominously that "the American delegates from Pennsylvania will duly communicate to their constituents, the intimation which these resolutions convey." Ibid., pp. 43, 28.

[36]Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, I, 61-62.

[37]See Stanton, et al., History of Woman Suffrage, I, 59-60; Hallowell, James and Lucretia Mott, p. 208; Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 71; Alice S. Rossi, ed., The Feminist Papers, pp. 241-242; Francis E. Kearns, "Margaret Fuller and the Abolition Movement," Journal of the History of Ideas, 25 (1964), 120.

[38]Quoted in Welter, "True Womanhood," p. 173.

[39]Quoted in Arthus W. Calhoun, A Social History of the American Family (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1918), II, 83-84.

[40]Mrs. E. Little, "What are the Rights of Woman?" Ladies' Wreath, II (1848-49), 133, quoted in Welter, "True Womanhood," p. 173.

[41]Mrs. Graves, quoted in Calhoun, The American Family, II, 99-100.

[42]Quoted in Welter, "True Womanhood," p. 173.

[43]Sarah Moore Grimke, Letters on the Equality of the Sexes, pp. 14-16.

[44]Angelina E. Grimke, Letters to Catherine E. Beecher, pp. 105, 119.

[45]Lydia Maria Child, A Brief History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations (New York: C. S. Francis & Company, 1845, II, 211.

[46]Sophia Ripley, "Woman," The Dial, 1 (1841), 362.

[47]Welter, "True Womanhood," p. 173.

[48]Neil J. Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 297.

[49]Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), pp. 119, 129.

[50]Leland M. Griffin, "A Dramatistic Theory of the Rhetoric of Movements," in William H. Rueckert, ed., Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 461.

[51]Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 12-17.

[52]Smelser, Collective Behavior, p. 292.

[53]Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Henry Channing, and James Freeman Clarke, Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1852), II, p. 139.

[54]To Maria Weston Chapman, December 26, 1840, in Wade, Writings of Margaret Fuller, pp. 256-257.

[55]Fuller, quoted in Margaret V. Allen, "This Empassioned Yankee: Margaret Fuller's Writing Revisited," Southwest Review, 58 (1973), 165-166.

[56](Sarah) Margaret Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men; Woman versus Women," The Dial, 1 (1843), 1-47.

[57]From George Ripley's prospectus for The Dial, May 4, 1840, in Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Margaret Fuller Ossoli, (1884; rpt. Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1968), pp. 152-153.

[58]Fuller, Woman, p. 13.

[59]Emerson et al., Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, p. 138.

[60]Ibid., p. 22.

[61]Fuller, Woman, pp. 37, 31, 114, 33, 41.

[62]Fuller uses these four strategies throughout the book, but I have separated them here for purposes of analysis.

[63]Fuller, Woman, pp. 174, 71-72.

[64]Ibid., pp. 109, 120, 43, 49-50.

[65]Ibid., pp. 96, 138-139, 153, 96-97, 176.

[66]Ibid., pp. 32-33, 145.

[67]Ibid., pp. 79, 13, 16, 121, 118.

[68]Ibid., pp. 138, 170.

[69]George Willis Cooke, An Historical and Biographical Introduction to Accompany "The Dial" (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), pp. 28-30.

[70]Fuller, Woman, pp. 36-37, 171-172, 122-123.

[71]Ibid., pp. 112, 79, 172, 14, 115-116.

[72]Ibid., pp. 176, 136, 19, 114, 109.

[73]Charles Fourier, "Theories das Quatre Mouvements," Oeuvres Completes (Paris, 1841-45), 43, in Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution, pp. 50-60.

[74]William M. Heim, "The Bloomer Dress," The Ladies' Wreath, 3 (1852), 247, quoted in Welter, "True Womanhood," p. 157.

[75]Fuller, Woman, pp. 174, 124, 117, 93.

[76]See Frederick Augustus Braun, Margaret Fuller and Goethe (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1910), pp. 128-35.

[77]Fuller, Woman, pp. 33, 128, 130, 25, 177.

[78]Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860," in Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner, eds., Clio's Consciousness Raised (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 145-147.

[79]See Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution, p. 56; Rossi, The Feminist Papers, pp. 86-99; Doris G. Yoakam, "Woman's Introduction to the American Platform," in William Norwood Brigance, ed., A History and Criticism of American Public Address (New York: Russell & Russell, 1943), I, 153-192; Kathleen Edgerton Kendall and Jeanne Y. Fisher, "Francis Wright on Women's Rights: Eloquence versus Ethos," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 60 (1974), 58-68.

[80]Fuller, Woman, pp. 102-103.

[81]Ibid., pp. 132-133.

[82]Ibid., pp. 172, 25.

[83]Ibid., p. 167.

[84]Ibid., p. 173.

[85]Stern, Margaret Fuller, pp. 329-335.

[86]Fuller, Woman, pp. 39.

[87]Ibid., pp. 172, 110-111, 177, 26, 166-167.

[88]Ibid., pp. 74-77.

[89]Ibid., p. 37.

[90]Paulina Wright Davis observed at the National Woman's Rights Convention in 1850 that Margaret Fuller was the "leader of thought," the "guiding hand" to whom many eyes were turned as the future leader of the woman's movement, Quoted in Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, I, 217.

[91]See Faith Chipperfield, In Quest of Love, The Life and Death of Margaret Fuller (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1957), p. 300.

[92]Quoted in Fuller, Woman, p. 12.

[93]Ibid., p. 155.

[94]Quoted in Frank Luther Mott, History of American Magazines, 1741-1850 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 483.

[95]Cheney, Reminiscences, p. 194.

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