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"A Religious Recognition of Equality": Liberal Spirituality and the Marriage Question in America, 1835–1850

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Abstract: Studying texts by Lydia Maria Child, Sarah Grimke, and Margaret Fuller, this article seeks to recover the early phases of a dialogue that moved marriage away from an institution grounded in ideas of unification and toward a concept of marriage grounded in liberal ideas about equality. It seeks to situate the "marriage question" within both the rhetoric of American antebellum reform and of liberal religious thought. Rather than concluding that these early texts facilitated a movement toward a contractarian ideal of marriage this article concludes that Child, Grimke, and Fuller, sought to discredit unification as an organizing idea for marriage and replace it with a definition that placed a spiritual commitment to equality between the partners as the animating core of the idea of marriage.

Keywords: Transcendentalism; marriage reform; liberalism; Margaret Fuller; Lydia Maria Child; Sarah Grimke

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Questions about marriage reform began to accelerate onto reformers' agendas after Lydia Maria Child and Sarah Grimke published texts of women's history in the 1830s. Serving both religious and civil functions, the marriage tie was at the very center of adult life for the vast majority of Americans. But marriage was also profoundly anti-egalitarian, demanding sacrifices for women that contradicted basic assumptions about individual rights that by the mid-nineteenth century had transformed political, economic, and religious life. However, any effort to address this asymmetry would have to confront spiritual and physical intimacies so personal that most reformers were reluctant to address marriage as a topic for public debate.

The early moments in a discourse that would eventually liberalize both the form and idea of marriage represent tentative confrontations between the principles of liberal autonomy and equality, and the long tradition of marriage as a permanent unification in which God bonds persons into a single, indissoluble body. The problem of redefining marriage as an egalitarian spiritual union that could foster individual liberty for women as well as for men is articulated through three texts that have most often been read for their advocacy of women's claim to equality in citizenship and other venues of public life: Lydia Maria Child's *History of the Condition of Women* (Child 1835), Sarah Grimke's *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* (Grimke 1838), and Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Fuller 1992). Each of these texts treats marriage as a sacred relationship—though Child's strikingly least of the three—but each also works to reinvent the interior world of marriage in a way that would accord women within it all the standards of liberal equality that the democratization of politics had brought to white men acting on the public stage. More than any others, these three texts opened up marriage as a topic for public discussion and defined it as a site in which efforts to achieve a "religious

recognition of equality," as Margaret Fuller puts it, could become a defining ideal of marriage itself (Fuller 1992, p. 282).[1]

1. Liberalism and the Marriage Union

In both Christian and legal terms, as early nineteenth-century reformers found it, marriage revolved around the idea of unification. In the Christian New Testament marriage is explicitly defined as unification by both Mark (10.9) and Matthew (19.6). As Matthew puts it, husband and wife "are no longer two, but one flesh." He then defines the marriage tie as indissoluble. Husband and wife are merged into a single body, writing that "therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." Even though marriage was not a sacrament for Protestants as it was for Catholics, the idea of unification into one indissoluble body struck deep; and despite the fact that marriage was criticized for its similarity to chattel property relations, divorce was often unattainable and remained controversial even among equality's staunchest advocates (Hartog 2002)[2].

On the legal side, the doctrine of marital unity that erased women's right to individuality has its roots in Anglo-Norman law. "Coverture" marriage began as a contract of exchange between two men—the father of the bride and the husband. In the resulting legal relation between husband and wife, the bride's identity was subsumed into that of the husband. As William Blackstone phrased it in his *Commentaries*, under coverture:

> by marriage the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything; ... her condition during the marriage is called her *coverture*. (Blackstone 1899, pp. 387, 430)

Blackstone both recognizes the asymmetry of coverture and justifies the doctrine of marital unity as a model of respect rather than degradation. Briefly setting aside his stately cadence, he enthuses: "even the disabilities which the wife lies under are for the most part intended for her protection and benefit: so great a favorite is the female sex of the laws of England." But in practice coverture had always been domination rather than unification. John Stuart Mill sums up the economic and legal asymmetry coverture created in *On the Subjection of Women*. In the relation of husband to wife, Mill writes, "What is yours is mine, but what is mine is not yours."(Mill 2006, p. 177)[3]

In struggling with a set of issues ranging from property rights to child rearing, from spiritual obligations to divorce, reformers brave enough to address the "marriage question" began to put sustained pressure on an institution that had long evaded the kind of reform that was transforming politics and economics. Some in the reform community had concluded that women's status would always remain contingent on their position within marriage and that civil rights issues such as suffrage, education, and employment that were driving woman's rights in the 1840s and 1850s were symptoms rather than causes of inequality. Authentically to redress public rights could only be achieved by effecting a radical transformation of women's most private and intimate relationships. Equality would thus require marriage reform, especially the power to control sexual relations, time pregnancy, resist domestic violence, gain equal custody rights of children, and expand access to divorce. To achieve these ends, the ideal of marriage as a sacred merging of identities would have to be transformed so that it signified less a unification that cast man and woman in prescribed roles and more a loving partnership between two free and equal individuals. But even to begin reimagining the

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1. Extending the work of Nancy Isenberg, Teresa Anne Murphy recently addresses all three of these texts in terms of the challenge of defining citizenship for women. See (Isenberg 1998; Murphy 2013, pp. 90–98).
2. Divorce is a major issue in Hartog (2002), esp. in chapter 3, "Early Exits" pp. 62–92. Tuchinsky's article on Elizabeth Oakes Smith's opposition to divorce offers a good summary of the politics of divorce in the antebellum period. See (Cott 2002, pp. 28–30, 47–53; Tuchinsky 2016, pp. 38–42).
3. For the legal history of Coverture, see (Basch 1982, pp. 42–54).

shape of such a transformation, early marriage reform theorists would have to overcome enormous psychological hurdles.

Especially for women, marriage virtually defined the human condition. More than just a relationship between two independent persons, marriage bridged the private and personal realms, linking them together with prescriptive standards that began in public ceremony but reach deeply into the most intimate physical and spiritual settings. In addition to offering sanction for sexual relations, marriage even prescribed the psychological postures men and women were to adopt during sexual intercourse. For those who understood it as a religious relationship in which God was bonding two souls in a permanent union, marriage raised the conjugal link above all other human connections, even those between parents and children. It grounded the identity of husband and wife in a creation myth intended to prescribe gender roles and to define the meaning of a faithful life.

Despite the Transcendentalists' importance in most of the reform movements that were grounded in liberal ideals of equality, they addressed marriage relatively rarely. Emerson discusses it obliquely in "Domestic Life" and briefly in "Swedenborg." It is worth noting that in "Swedenborg" (Emerson 1850) he virtually endorses divorce. In an 1855 address to a woman's rights convention in Boston, he unambiguously approves women's property rights and suffrage. But in that address he also endorses an assumption about women's identities that several women who were sitting in his audience had already singled out as the key obstacle in the whole nascent movement for sexual equality. Emerson explains that

> When women engage in any art or trade, it is usually as a resource not as a primary object. The life of the affections is primary to them, 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, set their whole fortune on the die, lose themselves eagerly in the glory of their husbands and children. Man stands astonished at a magnanimity he cannot pretend to. (Emerson 1855)

How could he say such a thing with Lucy Stone sitting right in front of him? At the very beginning of this lecture, in an address to a room of women who had endured insult and hardship as they clawed small steps toward sexual equality out of a stony society, Emerson glibly affirms his belief that women's self-erasure in marriage was inherent in feminine nature. Presenting the transition to married life as a voluntary act through which women achieve fulfillment by a total abandonment of individuality, Emerson is dumbstruck by the scale and recklessness of the sacrifice: a woman chooses a man and then chances her "whole fortune on the die." Thinking about it from the perspective of male privilege, the sheer risk of entering into a lifelong, indissoluble relation at the sacrifice of so many individual rights represents a "magnanimity" that no man could pretend to equal. Emerson gave this address in order to perform a "benefit to the position of woman," but his obliviousness to the idea of equality within marriage gives some measure of the difference between marriage reform and civil rights reform.[4]

Redefining the interior world of marriage was a different type of reform project from advocating for civil change. Unlike other egalitarian reforms, marriage reform addressed an issue many considered too intimate for public discussion. Even in the 1850s, the issue was so fraught with rhetorical pitfalls that just to raise it required careful thought. At a convention in 1852, Elizabeth Cady Stanton gave a groundbreaking speech linking divorce to temperance. She argued that women should be able to divorce alcoholic husbands. Hotly criticized, even by peers within the nascent woman's rights movement, Stanton defended her breach of the taboo. Writing to Susan B. Anthony in early 1853, Stanton explains her conviction that

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[4] Emerson spoke on the second day of the two-day convention. Caroline Dall, Wendell Phillips, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith also spoke. The meeting mainly addressed strategies for retaining property rights of married women that had recently been gained through state legislatures. See reports on the convention in *Una* 15 October 1855 and *Liberator*, 21 and 28 September 1855. Also see (Million 2003, pp. 214–15).

> It is in vain to look for the elevation of woman, so long as she is degraded in marriage. I say it is a sin, an outrage on our holiest feelings to pretend that anything but deep, fervent love and sympathy constitutes marriage. The right idea of marriage is at the foundation of all reforms . . . Man in his lust has regulated this whole question of sexual intercourse long enough. Let the mother of mankind whose prerogative it is to set bonds on his indulgence rouse up and give this whole question a thorough fearless examination . . . I feel this whole question of woman's rights turns on the point of the marriage relation, and sooner or later it will be the question for discussion. I would not hurry it on, neither would I avoid it. (Stanton 1981, p. 55)

Lucy Stone, an important ally who would become Stanton's antagonist after the Civil War, makes similar remarks shortly after her own marriage. Writing to Antoinette Browne, a pioneering minister who had bonded with her over Emerson's essays while the two were classmates at Oberlin, Stone remarks that

> Paulina Davis has written me, that she wants the marriage question to come up at the national convention . . . It seems to me that we are not ready for it. I saw at Philadelphia, by private conversations [sic]. No two of us think alike about it. And yet it is clear to me, that question underlies, this whole movement and all our little skirmishing for better laws, and the right to vote, will yet be swallowed up, in the real question, viz, has woman, as a wife, the right to herself? It is very little to me to have the right to vote, to own property & c, if I may not keep my body and its uses, in my absolute right. Not one wife in a thousand can do that now, & so long as she suffers this bondage, all other rights will not help her to her true position—
>
> This question will *force* itself upon us some day, but it seems to me it is *un*timely now—

In some ways this letter is typical of Stone's correspondence—and that of others trying to open the topic of marriage reform to public discussion. In the midst of conducting the routine business of organizing a convention, she pauses to reveal her private thoughts. Her opinion itself is also typical. Though she intensely feels the justice of her claim, she makes a tactical choice not to press it in public even though she knows that the concrete issues at the forefront of the women's rights movement were just preliminary skirmishes while the organizers of the movement worked toward consensus on the marriage question.[5]

As Stanton's letters from the 1850s show, she speaks from the perspective of one who had limited control over her own reproductive life, repeatedly withdrawing from reform activities for births and parenting. Stone's case too, offers insight into the obstacles facing those who sought to imagine marriage in an egalitarian spirit (Ginzberg 2009, p. 51).

Stone was from Massachusetts, but had moved west to attend Oberlin College. After graduation, she decided to eschew marriage and to become a professional lecturer. A few months before writing this letter, however, Stone had married reformer and businessman Henry Browne Blackwell. Their marriage became a kind of touchstone for the problem of criticizing marriage in a public and political context. After years of patient courtship, Stone decided that with clearly defined standards of equality, she could gain the psychological intimacy she craved, explore sexuality in new ways, and even become a parent.[6]

Lucy Stone's courtship letters are a study in mediating the tensions produced by the power relationships defined by marriage in antebellum America. She was wounded by the idea that marriage entailed such a one-sided sacrifice. She was also torn between her seething anger at the idea that she

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[5] Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown, 11 July 1855. (Stone 1987, p. 144).

[6] Lucy Stone to Francis Stone, 12 May 1845. Blackwell Family Papers, Library of Congress. Andrea Moore Kerr and Joelle Million have significantly different readings of the Stone-Blackwell correspondence. See (Million 2003, pp. 153–57) and (Kerr 2005, pp. 33–34).

would be *a wife* and her desire to trust her beloved friend. Even if Henry Blackwell was a better man than the institution assumed, marriage was still defined by coverture. If she entered it, she would be a wife in fact and a wife in the eyes of the law. Legally, there were even questions about her ability to keep her own name. She was ambivalent about sex, and expresses herself clearly enough that Blackwell felt compelled to assure her he would never abuse the power over her body that was granted to him in the law.[7]

Their letters of 1854 and 1855 show them carving the contours of an egalitarian marriage that might just be able to function within patriarchal marriage. Finally, in a ceremony of commitment every bit as important as the actual wedding performed by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Stone and Blackwell published a protest outlining their revision of marriage standards. Though Stone and Blackwell were willing to assume the "relationship of husband and wife," they rejected the "present laws of marriage" that "refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority, investing him with legal powers which no honorable man would exercise, and which no man should possess." They argue especially against the husband's "custody of the wife's person" and his exclusive "guardianship of their children." They close with an affirmation of universal rights, but one that also ironically underscores how deeply the unification principle was embedded in the culture:

> We believe that personal independence and equal human rights can never be forfeited, except for crime; that marriage should be an equal and permanent partnership, and so recognized by law; that until it is so recognized, married partners should provide against the radical injustice of present laws, by every means in their power. (Stone and Blackwell 1855)[8]

In their public letter, Stone and Blackwell stay by-and-large within a secular, liberal egalitarian rhetoric that emphasizes equality, liberty, partnership and law. However, even in their radicalism, they also situate marriage within the context of unification by arguing that marriage should be a "permanent partnership." Trying to square a circle, they advocate a model of marriage as an indissoluble unifying ritual even as they claim "that personal independence ... can never be forfeited." In this implicit contradiction—what if one partner wants to exert independence by ending the marriage?—the Stone and Blackwell marriage protest marks the depth of tension between the doctrine of marital unity and the demands of liberal equality that, when they married, were just beginning to put pressure on the institution.

The fact is, the idea of marital unity has always been a problem in liberal philosophy. From its origins, liberalism has promoted the idea that each individual is a free actor in the world, independent of predestinary power and personally responsible for the good and evil of his, her, or their actions. However, a wide variety of forces—the ingrained sexist assumptions of classical liberal theorists not least among them—worked either to ignore or to suppress analysis of family issues in the rise of liberal identity. Early social contract liberalism, as Hobbes puts it in *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*, tended to "consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other." Family, marriage, child rearing, and almost all forms of local connection pass almost totally below the radar of early theories of liberal personhood. (Hobbes 1966, 2:109)

[7] These letters are in the Blackwell Family Papers in the Library of Congress, but many are quoted in Wheeler's edition of the Stone Blackwell correspondence (Stone 1981). In regard to anxiety about Blackwell's sexual expectations, Stone sent Blackwell a copy of Henry C. Wright's *Marriage and Parentage* (1855) in which Wright advocates for women's control of sexual activity in marriage. Blackwell's response is lost, but the issue abated and the courtship proceeded.

[8] Higginson was an admirer of Fuller. He explained in a biography of Fuller published late in his life that except for Emerson and Parker, Fuller "had upon me, through her writings, a more immediate intellectual influence than anyone" (Higginson 2012, p. 2).

In the seventeenth-century debate between social contract theorists and patriarchalists that shaped liberalism, for example, the key issue was the relationship between fathers and sons, not that between husbands and wives. The question John Locke debated with Sir Robert Filmore was a family question, but it was confined to the patriarchy: If sons had natural liberty and were the moral equals of their fathers, then what were the legitimate political rights of fathers? In this debate, the implications of marriage for either men or women was a minor issue and was often elided altogether.[9]

Nonetheless, as the principles of natural liberty and equality developed from the patriarchalist debate toward anti-slavery and woman's rights a century and a half later, the foundational elements of this theory extended to include all people in its equalizing grasp. Any inherent hierarchy that put one above another, whether of supernatural or natural origin, would replace the original and universal conditions of liberty and equality with a predetermined obligation of submission.

As difficult as rigorous application would make it to exclude women from equality on liberal grounds, as Moira Gatens explains, the social contract philosophers

> were able to treat man's political possibilities without (explicit) reference to sexuality, reproduction, the family, and the domestic sphere because these matters were assumed to fall outside the public realm of politics. Certainly, the political body assumes the private sphere, which underpins public life, but this sphere is taken to be the natural base of political life. Any consideration of women's access to or place in the public sphere necessarily raises the question of their role in the private sphere. (Gatens 1991, p. 113)

Taking up the private sphere within classical liberalism, Hobbes, as Carole Pateman argues, is unique in the attention he gives to marriage. Hobbes explicitly positions men and women as moral and intellectual equals in the state of nature, but he also argues that once a woman becomes a mother, she finds herself at a serious enough disadvantage that she has to accept domination. Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, focusing on what would become men's right of participation in the public realms of economic exchange on markets and in ideological debate in politics, address sexual difference not through the lens of liberal egalitarianism but by thinking about physical sexuality and the norms of family life. Rousseau implies that families originally emerge as economic alliances to foster the division of labor. But, like Hobbes, Rousseau also sees women accepting a condition of subordination and dependence once the private realm has been constituted (Larrère 2011). In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant articulates a deeply conflicted understanding of marriage as a sexual and property-sharing relationship. As one critic concludes, although the *Metaphysics of Morals* is "an especially callous expression of Kant's hostility to women . . . the main thrust of the argument was that, in their capacities as sexual beings and owners of marital property, husband and wife had 'equality of rights'" (La Vopa 2005; Larrère 2011; Lasser and Robertson 2013).[10]

Despite these gestures toward marital equality, for the most part classical liberal philosophers accepted medieval marital norms, allowing them to extend fundamentally unchanged into the nineteenth century. "All liberal theory has to offer on the question of sexual equality," Moira Gatens finally concludes, "is that women are entitled to be treated like men," or "as if they were men." This philosophical entitlement to equality, of course, had gained traction neither in public nor in private. The first practical steps toward redefining marriage as an egalitarian spiritual partnership would be to present it in an anthropological context and then to rethink the nature of the connection that could link married partners together.[11]

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[9] See (Pateman 1991, pp. 7–12) and (Schochet 1988) on Patriarchalism. Melissa Butler develops the antipatriarchal issue in "Early Liberal Roots of Feminism: John Locke and the Attack on Patriarchy," in Shanley and Patemen, 74–95.

[10] (Hobbes 1966, pp. 149–50). For Rousseau on Marriage, see (Saccarelli 2009, pp. 496–99). LaVolpa, 2.

[11] Following this tension into the present, while most liberal theory continues to assume that marriage will be part of people's lives, both the unification aspect and the indissolubility aspect have been almost universally jettisoned, in legal if not religious contexts. Marriage has moved away from a sacramental status and toward a contractual relation from which a partner can *always* withdraw. The terms of separation are still brutally contestable, but all marriages, without exception,

2. "Bound with Her in Equal Worship": From Child's *History* to Fuller's *Woman*

In the three texts I analyze on the following pages, the issue of marriage moves from an anthropological to a theological to a secular-spiritual context. Grimke and then Fuller did not sequentially rewrite Lydia Maria Child's *History of the Condition of Women*, but each grapples with the problem of reconciling marriage as a uniquely intimate human connection with the principles of liberal autonomy and equality to provide a foundation of history, rhetoric and argument, that would influence the trajectory of marital reform from the married woman's property acts of the antebellum period through Obergefell v. Hodges which legalized same-sex marriage in 2015. All three write from an acute sense of the injustice of coverture, but for each, reimagining marriage means much more than transforming it into a reversible legal contract.

Child's 1835 *History of the Condition of Women*, a two-volume encyclopedia of women's lives in various places and times, demonstrates that courtship, marriage, parenthood, and divorce have taken innumerable forms historically and then existed in equally innumerable forms. As Teresa Anne Murphy argues, Child's text allows a movement away from a "stage theory" of sexual identity that marks increments of civil advancement by highlighting the increasing domesticity of women. This theory, Murphy writes, promoted a "differentiated citizenship" that linked strongly demarcated gender roles to the progress of civilization. As Carolyn Karcher notes, Child pays particular attention to women performing strenuous physical labor without social stigma as a contrast against histories that judge the virtue of a society by emphasizing the delicacy of women in it. But Lydia Maria Child's position on equality is subtle; she does not overtly reject sexual essentialism, rather, she rejects a construction of womanhood that makes particular women's roles—notably Christian piety and domesticity—exclusionary symbols of advanced civilization (Karcher 1994, p. 99).

The sequence of societies that Child describes moves from the ancient Holy Lands westward toward Europe, America, and the Caribbean. As she works her way around the globe, the topics that would become central to advocates of marriage reform become a sort of checklist that Child uses to structure the descriptions she presents. She introduces marriage in Old Testament societies at the very outset of her study, literally on page two, and in the first ten pages Child discusses sexual relations inside and outside of marriage, divorce, and married women's power to sign contracts and inherit property. In her description of non-Christian societies, the prevalence of divorce, and often the extreme ease with which divorce could be accomplished, becomes an unremarked upon rhythmic repetition. In Cochin, China, for example, "If married parties choose to separate, they break one of their copper coins, or a pair of chop sticks, in the presence of witnesses, and the union is dissolved; but the husband must restore all the property his wife possessed before marriage" (Child 1835, 1:137).

While the *History* is not polemical in its advocacy for women's equality within marriage, at both the granular and the larger structural levels its intensive focus on married life opens up the institution as it exists in one society after another. From beginning to end, Child presents women in roles that her contemporaries would see as taboo, but that in the context of discrete societies were normal and often admirable. The rise of Chivalry in particular, she holds as a vital turning point in the history of woman's condition:

> The ardor with which chivalry was embraced by all the principal nations of Europe, and the powerful hold it still retains on the imagination, not withstanding the detestable pride and tyranny of those gallant nobles, is to be attributed to the sacred principle on which the

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can be legally dissolved. In the debate over Elizabeth Brake's idea of "Minimal Marriage," the dialogue is focused on questions related to the state's interest in supporting relationships of mutual care-giving (Brake 2010). Minimal Marriage and other similar proposals which allow for polygamy among hetero or same sex partners as well as free love are present analogues to the proposals of Mary Gove and John Humphrey Noyes at the very beginning of the dialogue. Also see (Hartley and Watson 2012) for strict application of liberal principles to marriage (Gatens 1991, pp. 126–27).

> institution was founded; viz. the chaste union of the sexes, and the forgetfulness of self in the effort to do good to others. (Child 1835, 2:118)

Combined with Christianity, chivalry "raised woman to a moral rank in society, unknown to the most refined nations of antiquity—a rank she can never entirely lose, and from which her present comparative freedom is derived" (Child 1835, 2:119). In Chivalric love Child found a model of attraction that amplified spirituality as it was guided by codes of renunciation and faithfulness that raised love above either the production of heirs or sexual desire. In her reading, the emergence of a model of intense love that would be violated rather than satisfied by the fulfilment of passion represented a way of understanding relationships between men and women that had immeasurable value in changing the condition of women.

She sharpens this conclusion by contrasting her sense of the roles Christianity and Islam played in shaping conditions for womanhood: "The Mohammedan religion, which debases woman into a machine, and regards love as a merely sensual passion, was introduced into the East about the same time that chivalry arose in the West, to exalt woman into deities and chasten passion with the purity of sentiment" (Child 1835, 2:120). Though non-Christian societies often allowed Child to describe women in positions of political, commercial, and military power, she associates most non-Christian contexts with degradation, singling out polygamous societies and the sale of women as wives as the hallmark of non-Christian and pre-Christian societies.

To bring her description of the condition of European women to a close midway through volume two, Child sums up her thinking on the vast array of research she has presented. In doing so she implicitly recognizes her commitment to the liberal principles of the Enlightenment, but she puts a hard boundary on that commitment, anticipating a resolution of gender roles grounded in an ideal of natural equilibrium. On one pole, many societies—not just Islamic ones—demand blind obedience from both men and women:

> Where the Mohammedan religion prevails, man's reason is taught to bow blindly to faith, and his affections have little freedom to seek their corresponding truth: in all such countries women are slaves. (Child 1835, 2:210)

These societies, in Child's view, suppress rational "affections," rendering persons unable to "seek their corresponding truth" in another person. In this irrational environment men and women must both submit "blindly" to doctrine. But on the other pole, a society defined by pure rationalization is likely to produce equally frightening results:

> At those periods when reason has run wild, and men have maintained that there was no such thing as unchangeable truth, but that everyone made it, according to the state of his own will—at such times, there has always been a tendency to have men and women change places, that the latter might command armies and harangue senates while men attended to domestic concerns. These doctrines were maintained by infidels of the French revolution, and by their modern disciple, Fanny Wright. (Child 1835, 2:211)

She concludes her summary by extolling a deferred ideal that retains the intent to neutralize asymmetries of respect and power, even as it retains the basic spatial metaphor of gender sphere ideology:

> Many silly things have been written, and are now written, concerning the equality of the sexes; but that true and perfect companionship, which gives both man and woman complete freedom *in* their places, without a restless desire to go out of them, is as yet imperfectly understood. The time will come, when it will be seen that the moral and intellectual condition of woman must be, and ought to be, in exact correspondence with that of man, not only in its general aspect, but in its individual manifestation; and then it will be perceived that all this discussion about relative superiority, is as idle as a controversy

> to determine which is more important to the world, the light of the sun, or the warmth of the sun. (Child 1835, 2:211)

The path forward, Child intimates, lies neither in a radical faithfulness to religious doctrine nor in a radical reliance on Enlightenment egalitarianism. Rather, the problem of the "equality of the sexes" will be resolved by a transformed frame of mind that somehow resolves contradictions between the idea of freedom and the idea of staying in one's "place." While this deferred resolution is of course deeply problematic, pointing backwards toward the very differentiated identities Child is opening to scrutiny, for the purpose of thinking about the emergence of an egalitarian rhetoric that reimagines the interior world of marriage, Child seems to be arguing that once a model of intimacy emerges that situates "the moral and intellectual condition of woman" in intimate and equal "correspondence" with men, questions regarding relative superiority will become moot.

In the long span of human history and in the world of her experience, though, correspondence is strongest not between the conditions of men and women, but between women and slaves. The most salient qualities that have defined marriage world-wide are the long series of links that have connected womanhood and slavery. As Child presents the condition of women around the world, young women are sold into marriages where their status is comparable to chattel and slaves. Even in professedly Christian nations such as the United States, legal slavery and its association with sexual exploitation creates strong similarities between the condition of women in Christian America and the condition of women in the most debased societies in the world. Piece by piece, increment by increment, Child builds a global picture not of successive advances in civilization, but of all conditions existing simultaneously. This is surely her message to American women: despite our comparative freedom and high status in society, the worst conditions women can possibly experience exist in our country, perhaps in our own household.

Women, nonetheless, in the *History* are not in a posture of abjection. In addition to detailing strategies of subversion, Child describes many women in positions of religious, political, military, and commercial power. The very complexity of the contradictions she raises but does not resolve or even address make Child's *History* a frustrating book to study. But for my purpose of recovering the early discourse of marriage reform, what is most important is that Child's *History* provided a world atlas focused intensively on women's lives as potential or actual wives. As such, it collected reams of relatively reliable data that could move analysis of women's opportunities and experiences away from ideologically-driven tracts, religious guidebooks, and paeans to domesticity. Mary Beth Elshtain breaks down the discursive bind faced by writers intent on addressing women's conditions,

> The options left open to women were to speak the public language of liberalism and to conceive of their entry into politics on those terms; to speak, in private, the language of sentiment, a language increasingly cloying as it lost part of the force of the Christian ethic of caring and responsibility and was shorn of its power to beard power; or, alternatively, to seek remedies to social ills and to define their entrance into the public world along the lines of a frequently censorious moralism. (Elshtain 1981, p. 127)

> Child's *History*, for both Grimke and Fuller, reset the clock on women's history, allowing them a rich resource from which to draw material as they rethought the idea of marriage in liberal terms.

Grimke's *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* published three years after Child's *History*, is openly polemical and moves the discourse of marriage reform toward a specific focus on equality. Where Child had described a variety of gender norms so diverse as to create a virtual magazine of challenges to arguments that gender roles are rigidly defined by nature, Grimke aims to formulate an argument for the equality of the sexes grounded in Biblical interpretation. Rereading the relationship between Adam and Eve and injunctions demanding wives' subordination to husbands, Grimke argues for a general right to equality on the ground that God created marriage as an egalitarian institution. Human history

has long deviated from divine expectations, but nonetheless, Grimke holds, in contrast to an original ideal of union, "which was designed by God to increase the happiness of woman as well as man," marriage, for women;

> often proves the means of lessening her comfort and degrading her into the mere machine of another's convenience and pleasure. Woman, instead of being elevated by her union with man, which might be expected from an alliance with another superior being, is in reality lowered. She generally loses her individuality, her independent character, her moral being. She becomes absorbed into him, and henceforth is looked at, and acts through the medium of her husband." (Grimke 1838, p. 86)

With the absorption of a wife's individuality made conventional, "man has exercised the most unlimited and brutal power over woman, in the peculiar character of husband,—a word in most countries synonymous with tyrant" (Grimke 1838, p. 85). Grimke's remedy is an important counterpart to Child's and Fuller's because she seeks to revise Christian doctrine, claiming that sacred writ demands equality rather than obedience and role-playing within marriage. Thus Grimke is unable simply to brush aside clerical objections to claims for women's equality. For example, she interrupts her agenda to write a detailed rebuttal to the hostile letter published by ministers opposed to her and her sister Angelina's antislavery activities.

Grimke aims to advance woman's equality by treating the rights themselves not as self-evident truths, but as effects of a correct reading of the marriage of Adam and Eve. Her intervention into Bible criticism is to reinterpret the Old Testament creation narrative so that Eve is defined as Adam's equal in creation and so that Adam and Eve are held equally accountable for the Fall. The first letter of the series is titled "The Original Equality of Women": the concluding letter is titled, "Man Equally Guilty with Woman in the Fall." In defining her critique of Biblical criticism she adopts the language of liberal equality, arguing that "the real cause of woman's degradation and suffering in married life is to be found in the erroneous notion of her inferiority to man; and never will she be rightly regarded by herself, or others, until this opinion ... is exploded, and woman arises on all the majesty of her womanhood, to claim those rights which are inseparable from her existence as an immortal, intelligent, and responsible being" (Grimke 1838, p. 89).

To begin the process of transforming woman's status, Grimke holds, "we must first view womanhood at the period of her creation." Incorrect translations, especially the King James Bible, had promoted "a misconception of the simple truths revealed in the Scriptures." On Grimke's research, a proper reading of the original biblical texts would acknowledge that "there is not one particle of difference intimated as existing between them [man and woman]. They were both made in the image of God; dominion was given to both over every other creature, but not over each other. Created in perfect equality, they were expected to exercise the vice-regency entrusted to them by their maker, in harmony and love" (Grimke 1838, p. 4). Insisting on woman's inherent equality, Grimke applies the principles of philosophical liberalism to the first marriage. Eve was created, like Adam; "in all respects his equal; one who was like himself a free agent, gifted with intellect and endowed with immortality ... able to enter into all his feelings as a moral and responsible being." The status of equality between man and woman, as it was between Adam and Eve, is a universal mandate, a part of the natural human condition, regardless of one's position as a married or single person: "I understand this," Grimke clarifies, "as applying not only to the parties entering into the marriage contract, but to all men and women" (Grimke 1838, p. 5). At the beginning of the penultimate letter, "Ministry of Women," Grimke even echoes the language and syntax of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence:

> My Dear Sister,—According to the principle which I have laid down, that man and woman were created equal, and endowed by their beneficent Creator with the same intellectual powers and the same moral responsibilities, and that consequently whatever is *morally* right for a man to do, is *morally* right for a woman to do, it follows as a necessary corollary,

> that if it is the duty of man to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, it is the duty also of woman. (Grimke 1838, p. 98)

This mandate, authorizing woman to preach the Word, in Grimke's argument, is of a piece with the mandate for equality in marriage.

Grimke treats marriage as an institution fully contained within a religious context. Although her understanding of justice is defined by the principles of philosophical liberalism, she strenuously rejects the idea that marriage should be understood as a secular institution. In her reading, marriage was the first social institution God created, it was "a part of paradisiacal happiness: it was a *divine ordination*, not a civil contract. God established it, and man, except by special permission, has no right to annul it." But within it, perfect equality prevailed in Eden. Between Adam and Eve, since "there was perfect equality, and the same ability to receive and comprehend divine truth, and to obey divine injunctions, there could be no superiority" (Grimke 1838, p. 85). This standard of equality in the original marriage, Grimke holds, must become the model that will guide a transformation of marriage and, as a consequence, the transformation of women's social status more generally.

Grimke also rejects woman's inequality based on her sin. In the Fall that led to expulsion from Eden, the Adam of Genesis showed even less moral strength than Eve. Thus, to connect woman's subordination to a tendency toward sin misinterprets the expulsion narrative. Adam, unlike Eve, sinned "not through the instrumentality of a supernatural agent, but through that of his equal ... Had Adam tenderly reproved his wife, and endeavored to lead her to repentance instead of sharing her guilt," Grimke adds, "I should be much more ready to accord him that superiority which he claims." But, as a consequence of their mutual "weakness," "they both fell from innocence, and consequently from happiness, but not from equality."

Grimke's effort speaks the language of American Protestant Christianity and argues that devout Christianity requires radical egalitarian feminism. With Sarah Grimke's *Letters* the early woman's rights movement not only had a text that rebutted the claim that woman's submission to male authority was part of the divine order, it also had a text that situated egalitarian marriage in a rigorously Christian frame of reference. For Grimke, the attempt to recreate Edenic equality within marriage marked the highest human endeavor, one that fulfilled the divine will and represented the best earthly approximation of the prelapsarian condition.

Neither Child nor Grimke compare marriage to a religious pilgrimage, as Margaret Fuller does in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. In fact, in relation to Child's *History*, it may be useful to think of *Woman* in terms of generic movement from atlas to pilgrimage. Unlike Child, Fuller is emphatically interested in projecting ideal conditions for human beings and in imagining a path toward those conditions. At the very beginning Fuller discusses Orpheus's venture into a punitive underworld in an effort to rescue his wife Eurydice. At the other end of the journey—in the closing appendix—Fuller concludes with a poem titled "The Sacred Marriage" that describes married partners reaching "A Home in Heaven,—the Union in the Soul" (Fuller 1992, p. 378). Fuller follows Child in that *Woman* is deeply interested in historical conditions and global representations of marriage. But Fuller is always measuring her historical and literary criticism against the unrealized ideal that will "make the earth a part of heaven" (Fuller 1992, p. 245). Achieving this ideal is complicated in terms of spirituality and the equality of the sexes. But Fuller sees history in developmental terms that emphasize this relationship. In regard to men and women, Fuller writes: "I believe that the development of the one cannot be effected without that of the other. My highest wish if that this truth should be distinctly and rationally apprehended, and the conditions of life and freedom recognized as the same for the daughters and the sons of time; twin exponents of a divine thought" (Fuller 1992, p. 245).

In *Woman* an ideal of "sacred marriage" is at the very center of a vision that connects self-culture to social change. With Fuller, the very purpose of marriage and spirituality become the achievement of equality and freedom. As James Freeman Clarke put it: "Margaret's life *had an aim* ... a high, noble one, wholly religious, almost Christian. It gave dignity to her whole career, and made it heroic.

This aim, from first to last, was SELF-CULTURE." But by Fuller's reasoning in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, self-culture could best be achieved in the context of marriage. (Fuller 1852, 1:132)

Where Grimke's *Letters* combine her own deep reflection on the New Testament with Child's cultural and ethnographic study of the circumstances of women around the world, Fuller addresses more intensively than either of the others, actual norms of courtship and marriage in America. Also, she repeatedly attempts to imagine the prospects for egalitarian marriage in the future. In this respect, Fuller's critique builds on both Child and Grimke but is quite different from those of Lucy Stone and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Rather than working toward a civil equality that would prepare the ground for marital reform, Fuller projects an aspirational ideal that is deeply invested in a transformed, egalitarian model wherein public equality is a by-product of a "religious recognition of equality" within marriage.

After framing her text in terms of unrealized potential for humankind, Fuller situates her voice as an extension of the Revolutionary spirit

> Though the national independence be blurred by the servility of individuals; though freedom and equality have been proclaimed only to leave room for a monstrous display of slave-dealing and slave-keeping; 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." There it stands, a golden certainty wherewith to encourage the good, to shame the bad ... It is inevitable that an external freedom, an independence of the encroachments of other men, such as has been achieved for the nation, should be so also for every member of it. (Fuller 1992, pp. 253–54)

But Fuller also weaves the rhetoric of liberal egalitarianism into the rhetoric of Christianity and into a more ambiguous rhetoric of Transcendentalist spirituality. For example, Fuller argues that:

> When inward and outward freedom for woman as much as for man shall be acknowledged as a right, not yielded as a concession. 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. If the negro be a soul, if the woman be a soul, appareled in one flesh, to one Master only are they accountable. There is but one law for souls, and if there is to be an interpreter of it, he must come not as man, or son of man, but as son of God.

She begins this passage with rhetoric typical of liberalism, invoking liberty, rights, and equality for all. But she then, like Grimke, defines both freedom and equality in a rhetoric deeply influenced by the messianic terms of Christian salvation. Just as the "negro" is accountable to no white person, the "woman" is accountable to no man, but only to a divine "Master" who will come as a "son of God." She begins with the rhetoric of universal human rights, but finds her metaphor for equality not in the language of rights, but in a traditional trope of Christian church community. As she proceeds, Fuller struggles to integrate the two strains, not as Grimke had done, by reading the Creation story through the principles of liberalism, but by treating liberal ideas as foundational spiritual commitments in and of themselves:

> Were thought and feeling so far elevated that man should esteem himself a brother and friend, but nowise the lord and tutor of woman, were he really bound with her in equal worship, arrangements as to function and employment would be of no consequence. What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect

> to discern, as soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home. (Fuller 1992, p. 261)[12]

Here, Fuller echoes Lydia Maria Child, who had also argued that issues of "relative superiority" were the effects of arbitrary inequalities and that the contemporary parsing of gender roles was a distraction from the natural equality that would eventually make men and women perfect companions. The masculine/public vs. feminine/private distinction would shrink to a triviality if men were "really bound" with women "in equal worship." The phrase "equal worship" is perhaps Fuller's most condensed effort to treat liberal principles as spiritual commitments. It combines an ideal of perfect sharing with the act of recognizing the sacred. Bound together in this standard of companionship, all woman's exploratory growth would be fostered and encouraged by men for its possible value in advancing the idea of woman.

But as much as *Woman* is a visionary and optimistic text, Fuller never turns for long from the hard fact that most women live as the wives of men and that this position marks profound physical, institutional, and psychological suppression. Fuller discusses marriage in some form or another on almost every page of the essay. In the course of *Woman* she addresses almost the full range of issues on the radar of women's rights advocates. She criticizes separate spheres through the dialogue with the "irritated trader" (Fuller 1992, pp. 255–56), the overdetermined femininity of the "model woman" promoted by magazines (Fuller 1992, p. 257), unfair property laws, husbands' power to steal wives' wages, unequal custody rights of children, attacks on women's intelligence, domestic drudgery, oppressions faced by women of different economic classes, wives viewed as property, the hopelessness of loveless marriages, marriages where wives are smart but have to play dumb, wives who have given up on individuality and become "puppets" (Fuller 1992, p. 305), sexual double-standards, seduction, self-serving myths about masculine sexuality, the expectation of sexual submissiveness, the suffering of women who find their husbands sexually repugnant, the male/virtue-female/purity double-standard, corsets, and infantilization.[13] All of these issues reflect her critique of marriage in the United States.

But despite her unremitting criticism, Fuller sees monogamous marriage as a model for the kind of social change that might raise the entire society toward a higher standard of equality. Equally important, Fuller presents her entire typology of marriage in the context of describing progress toward equality. In fact, the typology comes out of a discussion of the equalizing possibilities of parenthood. Rather than subordinating parents to the growth of the child, Fuller treats parenthood as a metaphor for an ideal partnership. Bluntly put, what is most interesting to her is not the children, but the shared relationship raising children offers to the parents: "What deep communion, what real intercourse is implied by sharing the joys and cares of parentage, when any degree of equality is admitted between the parties!" Instead of realizing this possibility, norms have infantilized mothers to "the relation of nurse or governess, rather than that of parent." Raising children should compel father and mother to assume a new seriousness in their dialogue with each other:

> It is the order of nature that children should complete the education, moral and mental, of parents, by making them think what is needed for the best culture of human beings, and conquer all faults and impulses that interfere with their giving this to these dear objects, who represent the world to them. Father and Mother should assist one another to learn

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[12] Charles Capper and Phyllis Cole both address Fuller's rhetoric in relation to Romanticism and Transcendental idealism. Both underscore her deep investment in the ideas of romantic self-empowerment and her almost mystical spirituality. For Capper, this runs strong enough to shape his entire reading of Fuller's life, sub-titling his biography of Fuller *An American Romantic Life*. Cole sees Fuller's romanticism functioning powerfully enough to influence Elizabeth Cady Stanton long after Fuller had died. Cole makes a connection that is especially important because it argues for the outward power of Fuller's spiritual thought into a reform milieu much more focused on public tactics than on issues of soul or spirit. See (Capper 2007, pp. 50–54; Cole 2000).

[13] Charles Capper, more than either recent biographies by Megan Marshall and John Matteson, addresses the depth of Fuller's thought about sexuality and power as it relates to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Capper's reading of *Woman* does much to bring focus it on issues of sexual exploitation and potential responses to it. See (Capper 2007, pp. 176–94).

what is required for this sublime priesthood of nature. But, for this, a religious recognition of equality is required. (Fuller 1992, p. 282)

She then immediately transitions into her descriptions of four marriage relationships: the household partnership, mutual idolatry, intellectual companionship, and religious marriage relationships. As she puts it: "Where this thought of equality begins to diffuse itself, it is shown in four ways" (Fuller 1992, p. 282). The four types of marriage that follow do not comprise a comprehensive survey encompassing *all* marriages. They mark forms in which Fuller saw equality actually working its way into the structure of marriage. In terms of thinking about marriage and spirituality, the four marriages make up two pairs. The first pair is focused on materialistic concerns. The household partnership addresses basic needs—food, housing, clothing. But it is paired with the sexually intense marriage of "mutual idolatry," which ranks higher. In this second model the intensity of desire is both exclusive and goes equally in both directions. But even in it sensuality it advances equality and stands above the contractual partnership because husband and wife are equally physically idols to each other. In its idolatry, material though it is, the lovers are at least making an attempt at being "bound together in equal worship."

The second pair in the typology is focused on idealistic goals. "Intellectual companionship" comprises marriages by "men engaged in public life, literary men, and artists" who have "found in their wives companions and confidants in thought no less than in feeling." Working side-by-side, these couples have shared idealistic goals. They aim to improve the world by advocating a political or cultural ideal to which both partners are devoted. But even this high and egalitarian standard falls short of the religious marriage that Fuller defines as a "pilgrimage toward a common shrine." More than being oriented toward a particular external goal, the partners in a religious marriage embody perfect reciprocal love.

Taking a story from Xenophon's *Cyrus the Great* that Child also includes in her *History*, Fuller describes a relationship of devotion between husband and wife that she believed should stand for the ages. Captured by Cyrus, Abradatus's wife, Panthea, vouchsafes her husband's fealty to her conqueror as repayment of Cyrus respectful treatment of her. Cyrus, she reports to her husband, "kept me for you as if I were his brother's wife" (Fuller 1992, p. 292). Shortly thereafter, Abradatus is killed in battle. Panthea commits suicide after asking her servant to "wrap her and her husband in a single mantle together" (Fuller 1992, p. 294). Cyrus rushes to witness the scene and builds a monument to commemorate it. This obscure story represents Fuller's ideal of religious marriage in two ways. First, Panthea and Abradatus are remembered exclusively for the purity of their devotion to one another. Second, their love sets a social example of pure, self-sacrificing love. Panthea pledges her husband's loyalty to Cyrus, and Abradatus honors the pledge. Cyrus pledges comfort and honor to Panthea. She replies: "'Be confident Cyrus, ... I will not conceal from you to whom it is that I desire to go'" (Fuller 1992, p. 294). For Fuller, this connection between two admirable people "spiritually fitted to one another, as Abradatus and Panthea were" defined a combination of autonomy and equality that had the potential to transform the society from within a marriage relationship (Fuller 1992, p. 294).

As she brings the essay to a close Fuller hones in on the issue of purity. She cites a "profound thinker" who said that "no married woman can represent the female world, for she belongs to her husband. The idea of woman must be represented by a virgin" (Fuller 1992, p. 347). Her reply goes to the heart of her critique of marriage and to her a new, egalitarian ideal of marriage. She holds that the assumption that woman is somehow diminished not so much by sexual relations as by the ambiguous human rights status of the wife marks a critical obstacle. Fuller rebuts this idea by arguing that it is a product of conventional ideas about marriage. In "the present relation between the sexes, ... the woman does belong to the man, instead of forming a whole with him." This degrading status is the crux of the problem that would cause Lucy Stone such anxiety in her courtship with Henry Blackwell. In making the transition from "virgin" maiden to wife, Fuller perceived the human idea being degraded as the bride loses so many of the individual rights liberalism had written into the idea of the human being. "Were it otherwise" though, by Fuller's thinking, the idea of purity could

be effectively redefined so that it was compatible with the concept of a married woman. In this case, "Mary would not be the only virgin mother" because every woman—every person—could be reborn into the purity signified by the way Fuller uses the idea of virginity. In her view, since "the soul is ever young, ever virgin," there is no reason why any human relationship should undermine it. Indeed, if woman could be "self-centered" her husband could "celebrate in his wife the virgin mind with the maternal wisdom and conjugal affections" all at once (Fuller 1992, p. 347).

In a world less structured around marriage as a relationship of degrading sexuality, courtship and marriage would play very different roles in defining womanhood. Lydia Maria Child makes similar allusions to degrading sexuality in her discussion of chivalry. Fuller repeats the idea that marriage could be both sexual and chaste. In discussing polygamy, Fuller argues that the practitioner may be incapable of understanding "the chastity and equality of genuine marriage;" "this man did not wrong according to his light. What he did, he might publish to God and Man: it was not a wicked secret that hid in vile lurking-places and dens" (Fuller 1992, p. 320). But the morally innocent licentiousness of polygamous society has its evil twin in the perverse secrecy of the modern romance. The "man of the world," as Fuller puts it, knows his acts are degrading, and thus keeps his habits secret. But living in a society that accepts his crime as natural masculinity he doesn't even aspire to the kind of relationship—a "genuine marriage (the mutual choice of souls inducing a permanent union)—that can stand the light of day. Rather than inhabiting a society in which marriage could be genuine, equal, and thus chaste and pure, sexual double standards had corrupted the entire society by creating a context of secrecy and hypocrisy. Fathers and mother hide the realities from their daughters. Men of poor morals are allowed into households where they court and marry innocent girls. Once married, the new bride feels "something in the mind of the spouse seems strange to her, but she supposes it is 'woman's lot' not to be perfectly happy in her affections." Not wanting to disturb the husband for whom she has sacrificed so much, "she weeps alone, or takes to dress and the duties of the house. The husband, of course, makes no avowal, and dreams of no redemption" (Fuller 1992, p. 333). Fuller quotes an advice manual that aims to explain wives' suffering to men and advises husbands to lie in order to protect their bride's purity of mind. The "female writer," Fuller points out, tells the straying husband that he should act in ways that help his wife "retain that flower of purity, which should distinguish her in your eyes from every other woman." To this advice Fuller replies: "Such a man must esteem purity an exotic that could only be preserved by the greatest care. Of the degree of mental intimacy possible, in such a marriage, let every one judge for himself" (Fuller 1992, p. 333).

Addressing an issue so ripe in humiliation or shame, and so profoundly personal as the defenselessness of one's own body behind closed doors, marks both the visceral anger of Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony. Despite her idealism and optimism, Fuller does not gloss over the issue of mandatory sexual submissiveness in marriage. "It has been inculcated on women for centuries," Fuller writes, "that men have not only stronger passions than they, but of a sort that it would be shameful for them to share or even understand ... That the least appearance of coldness or withdrawal, from whatever cause, in the wife is wicked, because liable to turn the husband's thought to illicit indulgences; for a man is so constituted that he must indulge his passions or die!" (Fuller 1992, p. 331). In a hundred ways, mostly by allusion, but unmistakably making the same point, Child, Grimke, and Fuller place this expectation as the poison at the root of a relationship that violates the most basic standards of equality. To remake marriage with equality at its center would redefine the nature of gender, sex, and sexuality. As such, it would transform the underlying meaning of womanhood.

But the final note that Margaret Fuller strikes in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* avoids any clear reference to gender. "The Sacred Marriage," the poem with which Fuller concludes *Woman*, tells the story of a lover's butterflies-in-the-stomach, unrestrained love, equality in autonomy, and parenthood. Partners in the sacred marriage are simply defined as twins:

Twin stars that mutual circle in the heaven,

Two parts for spiritual concord given,

Twin Sabbaths that inlock the Sacred Seven.

Even in describing parenthood, Fuller makes no allusion to sex identities:

The parent love the wedded love includes,

The one permits the two their mutual moods,

The two each other know mid myriad multitudes

With child-like intellect, discerning love,

And mutual action energizing love,

In myriad forms affiliating love. (Fuller 1992, p. 378)

The poem begins by framing a movement toward affection as a solitary individual finds "another." It moves to two bound together in various ties of love. Finally, it becomes three; and it ends in a literal apotheosis as the family make themselves "A Home in Heaven,—The Union in the Soul."

More important than the rhetorical obstacles to moving marriage reform toward the center of public discourse, or even the effort to undermine the idea of marital unity, the focus on equality within marriage that animates these three texts marks the beginning of powerful transformations in the idea of marriage. Each identifies the instantiation of an egalitarian love relationship as the crucial, indispensable quality of marriage. Fuller is even able to project an image of marriage so deeply invested in egalitarian love that gender identity becomes meaningless. Already by 1844, the theoretical foundation had been laid for marriage reform that would make the sex-terms of coverture irrelevant. But as Child, Grimke, and Fuller were tentatively trying to push the basic standards of liberal society past the marriage bar, they were working just as hard to sustain the idea that marriage should be a unique and spiritual institution, an institution that would make the world a better place if its defining value were a religious recognition of equality.

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