REDEFINING WOMEN’S LIVES:
THE TRANSCENDENTAL CAREGIVERS

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I. Redefining Women’s Lives: The Transcendental Caregivers

In 19th century America, the chief career open to upper and middle-class women was marriage. Remaining single over the age of thirty meant spinsterhood with its lowered social status and, unless a woman could rely on family support, a struggle to survive: “Birth into a prosperous family and marriage to an income producing husband were a woman’s path to economic security. . . for an independent woman to earn enough for even subsistence level food, clothing and shelter was practically impossible.”¹ In a society where there was no established system of hospitals or nursing homes and the domestic burdens of maintaining a home were considerable, an unmarried daughter was expected to serve as caregiver of her parents and other family members in need. Girls’ training in domestic and nursing skills prepared them for this role. However, as women became more educated, spinsters began to push against rigid role restrictions and the discrepancies that existed between women’s abilities and opportunities. Margaret Fuller, Ellen Tucker Emerson, and Louisa May Alcott, single women in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Transcendental circle, combined the traditional caregiver role with other roles which reflected not only a sense of self, but financial necessity and the significant changes which were occurring in women’s lives.

In the nineteenth century, caregiving was a role “so all consuming that it set the parameters of all women’s lives, whether the women were married, single, or widowed”² When people became disabled, ill or impoverished, family were expected to help. That often meant that single women--sisters, widowed mothers, aunts, cousins, friends--were the ones to travel to the homes of those in need. Medical care remained primitive; diseases and disabilities, incorrectly understood and treated, were often lingering and chronic. Cholera, scarlet fever, malaria, diphtheria, influenza and pneumonia were common. Tuberculosis, so prevalent in the nineteenth century, could ravage an individual for years or decades, necessitating care for the afflicted person and also for the family’s children. In case of death, family members were expected to raise children, attending to their physical and spiritual welfare. If extended family proved insufficient, the community often stepped
in. Religious or government-funded institutions were the last resort for those who lacked connections; for the majority, “it was family, first, last and always.”

The “True Woman,” keeper of the home and family, became the dominant prescriptive ideal for women toward the end of the eighteenth century. For a brief period after the Revolution, liberals had advocated formal education and more freedom for women, competing with conservatives who would confine women to the home. At the time, sentimental novels were very popular. They officially promoted conservative values, but actually showed young readers the attractiveness of passionate love. As Conservatives worried about the effects of such novels on female minds, there appeared the 1799 Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, Author of “A Vindication of the Rights of Women”; radical William Godwin thought his biography would create sympathy for his wife, but instead it exposed her as the artist Imlay’s mistress, an unwed mother who was abandoned by her lover, attempted suicide, then became pregnant by Godwin before they married and died in childbirth. The conservative press, seeing divine retribution in her fate, vigorously attacked Mary Wollstonecraft and the liberal position: “Fearful that female freedom would indeed destroy marriage and thus the social order, they overwhelmingly sacrificed it. Women were again to be submissive, domestic, pious, and thereby re-establish their delicacy, spiritual superiority, and --most important-- their restraining power over men.”

True Womanhood defined woman’s nature, as “pious, pure, domestic and submissive,” making her ideally suited to serve in a caregiver role, while at the same time suggesting that she was in need of care herself. American society had adopted this model from the lifestyle of the European upper classes, picturing the True Woman as fragile, almost childlike, and utterly dependent upon her husband. To her was given the province of the home, while the husband went into the tumultuous world to earn a living. Woman’s natural purity and pious nature made her well suited to upholding the family’s moral and religious standards in the protected enclave of the home. The prevailing belief voiced in Dr. William Acton’s Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organ, a book widely read in the mid-19th century was that “A majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind”; indeed, woman’s very nature suited her
to her task of moral stewardship. In *Early Religious Education Considered* (1855), William G. Eliot exalts, “The nursery and fireside are the schools of religion. . . [A Christian mother] alone on one side, and all the world upon the other, and she is the most likely to prevail.”

Women were expected to be submissive to their husbands. The Bible provided explicit statements about the wife’s subjugation in the story of Genesis and in the teachings of Saint Paul: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of his wife.” Legally, the husband had full control of his wife’s person, property, income, and children. Caroline Gilman’s advice to the bride in *Recollections of a Housekeeper* (1834) warns: “Oh, young and lovely bride, watch well the first moments when your will conflicts with his to whom God and society have given the control. Reverence his wishes even when you do not his opinions.”

The prescriptive role was reflected in reality. In diaries of nineteenth century women, “the image of ‘mother’ . . . was that of a woman submerged in family, providing the emotional glue of the household while submitting herself to her husband’s authority”; Elizabeth Buffum Chase, educator and abolitionist, wrote, “In families the husband and father was the person not only to be held in the highest regard, but to be regarded with awe and a kind of fear by all women.” Both Barbara Welter and Ernest Earnest see True Womanhood’s “primary characteristic. . . [as] one of endless, sweetly smiling passivity.”

Another aspect of submissiveness was that a woman was subject to the consequences of her reproductive role—the possibility of death or chronic invalidism for herself and of the death of her children. In the early part of the century, on average, a woman gave birth to seven live babies in her life, but one-third to one-half would not survive to age five. A study of 450 nineteenth century women done by Catharine Beecher, feminist and educator, concluded that twenty-four percent could be classified as strong, forty-two percent as weak or diseased, and thirty-four per-cent as habitual invalids.

The final attribute of True Womanhood was domesticity, a role supported by scientific findings of the century. Females were thought to be passive, nurturing, emotional, uncreative and domestic, making them well suited to keeping house and raising
children. In *Woman in America* (1841), Mrs. A.J. Graves warns: “Domestic duties have a paramount claim over everything else upon her attention. . . . Whenever she neglects these duties, or goes out of this sphere of action to mingle in any of the great public movements of the day, she is deserting the station which God and nature have assigned to her.”

Indeed, running the nineteenth-century home was a daunting and demanding undertaking: “The sheer number of exhausting, repetitive, mind-numbing chores for which women were responsible was indeed formidable. When Catherine Beecher claimed that American women became old before their time because of the demands of housework, she was not speaking only of pioneer women, but also of urban, middle-class housewives who could afford to hire a servant.”

Nursing, too, was an important component of domesticity. Girls were raised to be self-sacrificing and put others’ needs ahead of their own. Theriot writes, “According to Lydia Sigourney and Sarah Joseph Hale, mastering the art of physical and emotional caretaking was essential for young women. . . . They, and others, also strongly recommended that mothers teach their daughters how to nurse the sick, so as to practice being of service to others.”

Learning how to dress wounds, prepare herbal medicines and plasters and soothe the patient were part of girls’ education.

Although the ideal of True Womanhood continued to exert a dominant influence throughout the nineteenth century, Gerda Lerner and Frances B. Cogan, among others, suggest another prescriptive role began to emerge after 1840, which Cogan calls the Ideal of the Real Woman or Real Womanhood. It stressed, in Lerner’s words, “a more positive and essential way’ for women to cope with the world around them. She suggests that this popular ideal advocated intelligence, physical fitness and health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage: it was, in other words, a survival ethic.”

Where True Womanhood had discouraged academic excellence for women, Real Womanhood saw formal education “as providing necessary knowledge [to cope] with the duties and knowledge of a different kind of womanhood”--not to provide a career, but to help women fulfill the duties of their sphere, to maintain the balance ‘between demands of home, family, intellect, heart and soul.’

Women were encouraged to be physically fit—to horseback ride and walk, replacing the ideal of the pale, fragile, sedentary True Woman with that of the active Real Woman. They also were encouraged to be cautious and responsible in choosing a husband, the key decision of their lives. It was important to
select a man who was hardworking, moral and responsible. But even when a woman made the best choice, the male protector might fail because of death, illness, or unemployment caused by the instability of the American economy. Then, education enabled women, both married and single, to extend the traditional caregiver role to include philanthropic and salaried employment as governesses, teachers, nurses and social workers for the disadvantaged. Although their salaries were much lower than men’s and they were excluded from many areas of employment, by the 1840’s, Reverend George Burnap, author of a popular book of advice, “urged all young women—even those with wealthy fathers—’to be prepared for the crisis’ by learning job skills before marriage.”

Margaret Fuller, Ellen Emerson and Louisa May Alcott were three individuals who redefined the role of the spinster caregiver by living the dynamic ideal of the Real Woman and extending women’s career opportunities and personal options.

I. Margaret Fuller: Caregiver Daughter
Margaret Fuller [Ossoli], born in 1810, was brilliant, brash and ambitious, hardly a fit for the traditional role of family caregiver into which she was thrust in her early twenties. As she sought to provide for her family and find her own place in the world, she moved beyond the limits society set for spinsters. Admired today as a member of Emerson’s Transcendentalist circle and a staunch advocate of women’s rights, she was considered by many in her own time “a dreadful example of the Presumptuous Woman... a legendary bogeywoman, symbolizing a threat not only to the male ego, but to the family, and thus to the social order”

Born on May 23, 1810, Margaret Fuller was led in two different directions by her attentive upper middle-class parents. Under the supervision of her demanding father, she was trained with all the rigor of a boy being prepared for Harvard, but when, as an early teen, she deviated from the traits of True Womanhood, her parents took alarm. Timothy Fuller, a Harvard educated lawyer and aspiring politician, had taught briefly at the co-ed Leicester Academy at the beginning of his career, and believed in formal education for women, but he had “never questioned the universal belief that a woman’s education prepared her to be only a wife and mother.” His wife, Margarett Crane Fuller, ten years her husband’s junior, epitomized the traits of True Womanhood; she was a pretty, gentle, kind woman who loved her flower garden and despite working for a short period as a teacher, embraced her domestic role. Although Timothy was domineering, their marriage was a loving relationship and both parents doted on their intelligent, outgoing eldest child, Sarah Margaret.

Looking back at her childhood in 1840, Margaret expressed ambivalence about her father’s effect on her development: she suggested that his dictatorial methods did not suit her imaginative and emotional nature and “my own world sank deep within, away from the surface of my life”; however, in “The Great Lawsuit ” written two years later, Margaret’s fictional Miranda is blessed to have a enlightened father who provided her with an education and self-image that proved the equality of the sexes. Early on, Margaret’s intellectual achievement became the basis of her relationship with her father. He began
his little daughter’s education in 1813, shortly after the death of her younger sister, Julia, an event traumatic for the entire family. Her mother’s depression after the loss of Julia, the birth of seven additional siblings—Eugene (1815), William Henry (1817), Ellen Kilshaw (1820), Arthur (1823), Richard (1824), James Lloyd (1826) and Edward (1828), and her mother’s health problems distanced Margaret from her mother and made her more dependent upon her father, who tutored her when he was home and supervised her studies from Washington where he spent half the year. Before Margaret was four, Timothy Fuller expressed the conditional nature of his love when he wrote in a letter to his wife “My love to the little Sarah Margaret. I love her if she is a good girl and learns to read.”

By the time she was six, Margaret was memorizing Virgil; at nine, reading histories and biographies. Such rigorous instruction was not unusual for boys being groomed for Harvard and not unheard of in the education of daughters at the time. Matteson suggests that Timothy Fuller may have been following the example of his hero, Thomas Jefferson, whose daughters were given a demanding education.

An extraordinarily intelligent child, sensitive and eager to please her critical father, Margaret sought to perfect herself. Timothy Fuller’s isolation as a Congressman sharpened his focus on his precocious daughter and he poured considerable energy into developing her skills in reasoning and discourse. Capper writes that he was a taskmaster who insisted on clarity and “rhetorical definiteness” and “inculcate[d] rational and competitive talents.”

Late night recitations necessitated by her father’s legal work overstimulated young Margaret and led to “hallucinations, nightmares, fits of somnambulism and ‘attacks of delirium.’” She had nightmares about her mother’s death. From an early age, headaches accompanied Margaret’s extreme intellectual effort.

Much as Timothy Fuller was devoted to developing Margaret’s intellect, he also wanted to raise a marriageable daughter according to the ideal of True Womanhood. Something of a ladies’ man, he had admired and romanced pretty female students, then married the beautiful, charming Margarett Crane. When in Washington, he wrote letters to his wife bragging about his flirtations with Washington ladies.

At home in Cambridgeport in 1818, he was quite attracted to a charming young British woman named Ellen Kilshaw, who became a family friend to the Fullers during a visit to her sister and
provided a model of True Womanhood for eight year-old Margaret. Ellen’s family had fallen upon hard times which were reflected in her diminished marital prospects. When she returned to England, the Fullers followed her fortunes through letters as she worked as a governess and finally triumphed by making a socially advantageous marriage. Ellen recognized Margaret’s intellectual ability, but told her “the acquirements of a female are not for this world” but “for the private domestic circle.”

It is easy to see that a young woman encouraged by her father to be a brilliant and competitive scholar would have difficulty fitting into her peer group. Margaret attended various schools and the pattern was always the same: she was an outstanding scholar who won top academic prizes, but was socially awkward. At the “Port School,” a private co-ed grammar school where she was enrolled at the age of nine, classmate Oliver Wendell Holmes recalled that she was an excellent student, but acted superior. When Margaret was twelve, her mother wanted to send her to a school in Jamaica Plains that focused on manners, but deferred to Margaret and her father, who both favored Dr. Park’s more academically rigorous school in Boston. Dr. Park told her mother that “he had never had a pupil with half her attainments at her age,” but William Henry Channing, brother of a female schoolmate with whom Margaret competed fiercely to win top honors, recalled “{Margaret was] a prodigy of talent and accomplishment . . . [But] there was too ‘a sad feeling. . .that she had been over tasked by her father who wished to train her as a boy, and that she was paying the penalty for undue application, in nearsightedness, awkward manners, extravagant tendencies of thought, and a pedantic style of talk, that made her a butt for the ridicule of frivolous companions.” Schoolmate Frederic Henry Hodge reported that city girls made “giggling criticisms not inaudible” of her dress and manners to which she responded with sarcasm: “she made herself formidable by her wit, and of course, unpopular.”

Withdrawn from Dr. Park’s School at thirteen, Margaret took some classes at the Port School and pursued her education at home while tutoring her brother Eugene and helping her mother with childcare and sewing. That winter, Margaret began to attend a number of local social events which included Harvard undergraduates and faculty. According to her friend Hedge’s description, Margaret appeared years older than her age, for she was tall
and “‘robust,’” although not physically attractive: she squinted because she was nearsighted and had acne. Years later, Margaret wrote that she was aware that her parents were concerned about her skin and comments: “‘My own vanity was for a time severely wounded but I made up my mind to be bright and ugly.’”13 As she would do throughout her life, Margaret hid a wounded, sensitive person behind a witty, confident persona.

More worrisome to the Fuller parents were the reports of Margaret’s outspokenness and sarcasm, which made them worry about their daughter’s social future. Timothy gave increasing emphasis to the importance of domesticity and good manners and her mother spoke out strongly in a letter to her husband: “Her thoughts are sufficiently engrossed with company, beaux & c for a lady of 25 & I think now she should learn something of real and varied life or she will never have any liberal enlarged practical views of anything useful in this world.”14 She wanted her daughter away from the high-spirited Harvard boys. The next school her parents chose for Margaret was Miss Susan Prescott’s Young Ladies Seminary at Groton. Her father’s message was clear, “‘With [strangers], you have a fair opportunity to begin the world anew, to avoid the mistakes and faults, which have deprived you of some esteem, among your present acquaintances.’”15 Timothy’s criticisms did not abate once Margaret settled in at Groton and his letters to her were so unpleasant, that in February, 1825, after attempting to address his accusations, she did not write him another surviving letter for five years.

Once again, there may have been sort of a peer disaster at the school that is hinted at in the autobiographical story “Mariana” in Summer on the Lakes, in 1843, or perhaps Margaret simply used the school as the story’s setting. The bright, beautiful, charismatic Spanish heroine Mariana, who loves to wear rouge, is mocked by all the other girls who paint round red spots on their cheeks. She gets revenge by spreading rumors. Confronted by the head mistress, Mariana injures herself by running wildly and striking her head against the hearth, but is finally helped by a kind teacher who shares an experience about living down an embarrassment. If Margaret did experience peer problems at the school, there were also some positive experiences. She did organize a theater group and made a few life-long friends among her schoolmates.16
The Cambridge that Margaret returned to from Groton in 1825 was a prosperous social and intellectual center. Although many died from diseases that might have been prevented with better sanitary conditions, manufacturing was thriving and increased trade brought a variety of goods. New ideas were taking hold: Anti-slavery sentiment was growing. Unitarianism was becoming mainstream: Reverend William Ellery Channing, eloquent pastor of the North Federal Church had replaced the idea of a stern, Calvinist God and the innate depravity of man with that of a benevolent, paternalistic deity and the individual who could find and perfect the divine within himself.\(^{17}\)

Young men who were Margaret’s age were getting ready to enter the Harvard class of 1829 to prepare for careers, but her options were less clear. Most young women were marking time until they received an acceptable marriage proposal. The first summer she was home, her father played matchmaker by inviting his unmarried Congressman friend Albert Tracy for a long visit. Margaret later wrote that she was not “‘inclined to idealize lawyers and members of Congress” or, most especially “‘father’s friends.’”\(^{18}\) She was attracted to George Davis, a distant cousin who came to Cambridge that summer to join Harvard’s class of 1829, but Margaret remained primarily focused on her intellectual pursuits. In a letter to Miss Prescott written shortly after leaving Groton, she described a rigorous schedule of study including piano, French, Italian, metaphysics, and Greek. She outlined her goals as the desire for “grace, intellectual distinction, the power of pleasurable excitement.”\(^{19}\)

As a young woman living at home, Margaret was not, “a domestic rebel;”\(^{20}\) she fulfilled the usual duties of the single, older daughter, socializing with her parents’ friends, helping with domestic chores, overseeing the servants, doing the family sewing, tutoring her brothers Eugene and William, who were nine and eleven, and helping with the younger children, including Lloyd, who from birth had suffered mild retardation and a mental disability that made him difficult to handle. She was also given charge of Baby Edward who was born on her eighteenth birthday. On one occasion, she created the following glowing scenario for her absent parents: “I have...finished nearly all my own sewing... Arthur reads ‘Sanford and Merton’ to me evenings while I work... I think we are quite a nice little domestick groupe [sic]. Lloyd says often that I am ‘a nice good girl as ever
was.”21 Her friend Higginson noted “[Such] was her conceded ability that she was supposed equal to doing everything at once. It was currently reported that she could rock a cradle, read a book, eat an apple, and knit a stocking all at the same time.”22

Socially and intellectually, Margaret came into her own in her late teens and early twenties. In 1826, her social life was facilitated by the family’s move from Cambridgeport to the Dana House, a lovely mansion, near Harvard. Shortly after the move, Timothy Fuller, hoping to secure an ambassadorship, held a dinner and ball there in honor of President Adams. The event was disastrous for both father and daughter. The President did not stay for the ball and Margaret became the butt of gossip when “overweight and squinting, she descended to the party tightly corseted into a poor cut, pink gown. . . [with] her hair ‘curled all over her head’ and was mocked for her “ungainly” dancing.23 While Margaret remained the object of dislike and derision for some, she began to develop a group of friends. Some girls, drawn to her intellect, started to imitate her slouch, squinty eyes and the way she made her long cape a book bag to carry library books.24 In a group of young people, she was a leader of conversation and games. William Henry Channing described himself as at first repelled by “‘her vivacity, decisive tone, downrightness and contempt of conventional standards,” but he was soon impressed by her “‘passion, sarcastic wit and skill at conversation’” and “‘above all, her truthfulness.’”25

At eighteen, Margaret was mentored by Eliza Farrar, wife of a Harvard professor, who advised her on her clothes, hair and behavior, took her on social calls and introduced her to Anna Barker, a New York society girl who sometimes stayed with her Farrar cousins. Margaret became a regular at the childless Farrar home, a magnet for Harvard students. It is worth noting that ten years later, Farrar published The Young Lady’s Friend, a meticulous guide to the rules of behavior and deportment which encouraged women to develop skills in the art of conversation and leadership of other women, but firmly stated, “Domestic responsibilities have unquestioned priority in the life of any woman, married or single.” 26

How gladly Margaret must escaped to gatherings of intellectual friends with whom she shared readings in political history, modern literature, and the German Romantic Movement. There were avid discussions of Lamb, Brown, Wordsworth, Coleridge and
Carlyle and other current ideas with Elizabeth Randall, Lydia Marie Francis (later Child), Frederick Henry Hedge, George Davis, James Freeman Clark, William Henry Channing, and Elizabeth Peabody. 

By 1829, marriage was on Margaret’s mind. She was smitten with “George Davis—bright-eyed, with regular features and a soft complexion . . . her nearest equal in a room full of fervent talkers.” His rejection of “polite forms and outward shows of goodness” resonated with her own love of truth and she felt he was her soulmate:

Long after their initial intimacy, Margaret would remember that the two of them could ‘communicate more closely with one another than either could with the herd.’ . . . The connection was ‘so open’ and the ‘intimacy,’ through several seasons of Cambridge evenings, ‘so long and constant,’ that she felt the mingling of souls to be ‘conjugal.’

Marshall suggests that Davis’ request for a statement of her religious beliefs, a common practice when a young man was considering marriage, may have been taken as such by Margaret who frankly told him her doubts about Christian Revelation and her belief in only “Eternal Progression” and “a God” of “Beauty and Perfection.” It is not clear if her religious views chilled George Davis or if he had never intended his request as more than an ongoing conversation. However, he soon left Cambridge to prepare for a law career and his letters gradually ceased, leaving Margaret in silence until she heard rumors that he was courting a younger schoolgirl. In a letter to James Clarke written two years later, “three times. . .she used the same emphatic noun to describe his conduct: ‘evil.’”

In the fall of 1829, not only was Margaret cruelly disappointed by George Davis, but her beloved baby Edward died from an unidentified illness. Margaret shared his nightly nursing care, and suffered the aching grief of watching him die. She wrote in 1840, “Still in lonely woods the upturned violets show me the pleading softness of his large blue eyes, in those hours when I would have given worlds to prevent his suffering and could not.”

By 1831, Margaret was already feeling the powerlessness of being an unmarried daughter, living under her father’s roof, subject to his authority, when Timothy Fuller announced his decision to retire and move the family to a farm where he would write a
history of the United States. His plans reflected his bitter disappointment at the decline in his political fortunes and law practice following the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828. Margaret began to suffer increasingly from severe headaches and depression, which long walks could only partially relieve. On Thanksgiving Day, feeling despondent after attending church only to satisfy her father, she went for a long and solitary walk through the gray November landscape. She finally came to dark, quiet pool where she experienced a sudden epiphany when the sun appeared and she felt a sense of transcendental oneness with the universe: “I saw that there was no self; that selfishness was all folly. . .I had only to live in the idea of the all, and all was mine.” At her moment of revelation Margaret recalled the four questions concerning her identity that had first occurred to her when she was a small child on the staircase of her family home, “How came I here? How is it that I seem to be this Margaret Fuller? What does it mean? What Shall I do about it?”

Although this experience gave Margaret lasting spiritual solace, she still had no answer to her questions.

Timothy Fuller settled his affairs and bought a farm in Groton to which the family moved in 1833. Margaret found consolation in her studies and in the intellectual companionship of James Freeman Clarke, who had been introduced to her by George Davis in Cambridge. She and Clarke had become confidantes and enthusiastic study partners, progressing from Carlyle to Goethe and continuing their friendship though letters when he accepted a position as minister in Louisville in 1834. Although she had rejected the idea of romantic love and thought of Clarke as only a friend, Margaret still must have winced at James’ confidence that his ideal wife would be a “loved and loving one, twinning her arms around me and gazing in my face with eyes full of passion and dependence.”

More than anyone, Clarke understood and sympathized with Margaret’s frustrated ambition. When she snapped at him in 1832 for suggesting she become a writer (she thought he meant a sentimental writer), he understood that it was her gender alone that prevented her from using her intellect and oratorical skills to become a professor, lawyer or politician. He wrote in his journal, “She has nothing to do--no place in the world and fears she never will have.” The only solution he could imagine for her was a good marriage that would provide a man to realize her ambition; however, Margaret had the feeling “from a
very early age. . . .that I was not born to the common womanly lot. I knew I should never find a being who could keep the key to my character; that there would be none on whom I could always lean, from whom I could always learn.” 37

During this time Margaret turned to Anna Barker for a passionate attachment. Such “romantic friendships” between women were not considered unusual in nineteenth century society; while there were strong, quasi-erotic feelings involved, they seemed to exist without overt physical translation, providing a safe outlet for repressed sexuality. In her 1842 Journal, Margaret wrote,

   It is true that a woman may be in love with a woman and a man with a man. . . .it is regulated by the same law as that of love between persons of different sexes, only it is purely intellectual and spiritual, unprofaned by any mixture of the lower instincts. . . . I loved Anna for a time I think with as much passion as I was then strong enough to feel--. . . . She loved me, too, though not so much, because her nature was “less high, less grave, less large, less deep but she loved more tenderly, less passionately.” 38

Margaret also formed such a passionate attachment with Caroline Sturgis, nine years her junior, daughter of a wealthy, but emotionally damaged family, who was her student and became a life-long friend.

Once the Fullers moved to the Groton farm, the reduction in the family’s income meant that Margaret’s role of caregiver daughter became more demanding. Almost immediately after the family’s arrival, an accident blinded eleven year-old Arthur in one eye, so Margaret’s first days were a blur of anxiety and fatigue as she nursed him through the infection.

Her father expected twenty-three year old Margaret to home school the younger Fuller siblings. Both older boys had quarreled with their father and left the farm. Eugene, a mediocre student at Harvard, taught briefly at Stowe and then got a tutoring job in Virginia. William Henry bolted to Boston to clerk for his uncle. He came back to the farm briefly, joining Margaret’s home school, and then set off to the West Indies to seek his fortune. After he left, three neighborhood children joined her lessons, giving her a small income,
which made her think of professional possibilities or at least of putting away some money for a European trip.\textsuperscript{39} In a letter to a friend dated March, 1834, Margaret described her life at Groton:

Four pupils are a serious and fatiguing charge for my somewhat ardent and impatient disposition. Five days a week I have given daily lessons in 3 languages, geography, and History, besides many other exercises on alternate days. This has consumed often eight, always five, hours of my day. There has been also, a great deal of needlework to do. . . . We have had very poor servants, and for some time, only one. My mother has often been ill. My grandmother, who passed the winter with us, has been ill. Thus you may imagine, as I am the only grown up daughter, that my time has been considerably taxed.\textsuperscript{40}

Margaret found relief in her studies, immersing herself in Goethe. Von Mehren writes, “[It] was Goethe who inspired her to adopt the doctrine of self-culture consciously as her own. His ideal emphasized the importance of experiencing everything that life offered in order to reach human maturity.”\textsuperscript{41} Feeling trapped by her family role as caregiver daughter, Margaret worked on a translation of his Torquato Tasso, a play that sympathetically depicted women in a society that limited their options, and reminded herself of Goethe’s belief that “life was a changing, organic thing in which no experience was wasted.”\textsuperscript{42} She and her father enjoyed reading Jefferson’s letters together in preparation for his history. Her first publication came as the result of her father’s encouragement to write an essay defending Brutus in answer to an attack by George Bancroft in the North American Review. He sent it to the newspaper the Advertiser and it was printed on November 27, 1834.\textsuperscript{43} Margaret had also been invited by Hedge and Clark to write for The Western Messenger.

Margaret’s friendships, so vital to her sense of self, were maintained through letters and visits. She went to New York with James Clarke’s mother and his sister Sarah, touring art museums and getting better acquainted with Anna Barker. She often saw Anna in Cambridge when she stayed with the Farrars and in the summer of 1834, she and Anna enjoyed a trip to Newport, Rhode Island with “long horseback rides along the beach” and “quiet moonlit walks.”\textsuperscript{44} The following summer, Margaret persuaded her father to
pay the fifty-seven dollars for her excursion with the Farrars up the Hudson to Trenton Falls. They were accompanied by Samuel Gray Ward, a handsome, seventeen year-old Harvard student, son of a prominent banker, who attracted Margaret’s romantic interest. She was thrilled when the group discussed plans for a trip to Europe the following summer with the Farrars, Margaret, Sam and Anna; they would cross on the same boat as Harriet Martineau, a famous British writer, with whom had Margaret become acquainted in Cambridge.45

In the fall of 1835, Margaret had scarcely recovered from a near fatal case of Typhoid Fever, when the sudden death of her father from Asiatic Cholera thrust her into the role of primary family caregiver. During Margaret’s illness, she and her father had become closer. He tended her devotedly and perhaps fearing she would die, bent over her bed one morning to tell her, “I have been thinking of you in the night, and I cannot remember that you have any faults. You have defects of course, as all mortals have, but I do not know that you have a single fault: Margaret, who had rarely heard her father’s praise, was greatly moved. Less than two weeks after her own recovery, Timothy Fuller fell ill after being exposed to contaminated water on the farm; there was no known cure and death came rapidly. The next morning Margaret closed her father’s eyes and according to mother, gathered her siblings around his body and “pledged herself to God that if she had ever been ungrateful or unfilial to her father, she would atone for it by fidelity to her brothers [and sister].”46

For the next decade, Margaret would be the anchor for the Fuller family, providing stability and support. Had she been male, she could have become the guardian of her brothers and managed the family finances, but as spinster daughter, her initial role became the frustrating one of managing the immediate issues of daily living and mediating between stingy executor Uncle Abraham and her mother. Timothy Fuller had left no will and the value of his estate, estimated by his son Richard as twenty to twenty-five thousand dollars, consisted of at least half unproductive real estate.47 At the time of their father’s death, none of her six siblings were settled. The affable twenty-one year Eugene had returned from Virginia and was planning to read law in a local attorney’s office; William Henry, who found a temporary job in a business near home, soon earned Uncle Abraham’s
criticism for extravagant spending, which was, it seems, justified. Ellen (fifteen), Arthur (thirteen), Richard (eleven) and Lloyd (nine) were all too young to contribute to the family support.48

Richard Fuller recalls that after his father’s death, Margaret was “a tower of strength. . . . She. . . was as ignorant as mother. . . but she had an unconquerable resolution, and a faith in God which could not be shaken.”49 Margaret, who had never been interested in business, suddenly had to focus on the family’s economic survival and make a realistic assessment of what the family could afford. Richard recalls that during this period, he developed a life-long fear of poverty. “I for years saw starvation or the poor house”;

Margaret convened family councils where ”helplessness and fear sat there with us.”50 The family worked together with their mother overseeing the dairy and Margaret continuing to instruct the children. Both she and her mother felt education was critical in preparing the younger children to make their way in the world. Richard Fuller describes Arthur as “bright,” Ellen as “diligent” and himself as “rather slow of apprehension”. . . on the whole, we were by no means superior scholars.” He writes of their teasing Margaret by twitching when reciting their lessons and moving their hands as if clutching for help “when we were drowning in the deep places of Virgil.”51 Margaret persevered, and stood firm against the offer of a childless relative to adopt Richard, making him heir of “considerable property and a farmer.”52

Until the spring following her father’s death, Margaret held onto the dream of going to on the European trip. Finally, the harsh reality that her inheritance would not come close to covering the trip’s cost combined with her sense of duty, and she realized that her foreseeable future would be taking care of her mother and siblings.

Two events which occurred the fall of her father’s death are significant in shaping Margaret’s views of her caregiver role. One night she took over the nursing care of a young woman about her own age who she learned was dying, not from tuberculosis as she had been told, but from an abortion. Deeply affected by this woman’s death because of a sexual transgression, Margaret went home to lie on her father’s bed and commit herself fully to asceticism and the family.53 A second experience also affected her deeply. Visiting impoverished neighbors—a senile ninety year old mother and her caregiver daughter,
whose self-sacrificing existence left her starved for companionship and mental stimulation made Margaret resolve to take care of her family AND advance her own career by seeking paid employment.

For the educated middle-class woman, teaching, a paid extension of the caregiver role, was one of the few ways of earning money. In the fall of 1836, realizing that she could not support her family though her writing, Margaret established a literature school in Boston where she taught about twenty students Italian, French and German, earning three hundred dollars a quarter. (At the time, fifteen hundred dollars a year was considered adequate to support a family of four.) Elizabeth Peabody had recently left Boston and Margaret was fortunate to inherit some of her students. She took on additional tutoring and although she did not like the idea of being anyone’s subordinate, accepted the job of being Bronson Alcott’s teaching assistant at the Temple School, where she started in December. Although Alcott praised Margaret as a teacher, he never paid for her her work, nor, she later learned, had he paid her predecessor Elizabeth Peabody. Fortunately, Margaret had continued her language school, but her workload was exhausting.

One of her duties at the Temple School was to transcribe Alcott’s Socratic Conversations with Children on the Gospels, discussions on philosophical topics that Alcott used to draw out the natural wisdom of his young students. As she listened, Margaret became uneasy with his theory and methods, but she could not quite identify what bothered her. Then, scandal erupted. In his recently published volume of Conversations Alcott had discussed sexual matters relating to the birth of Jesus. The press sounded loud alarm. James Clarke, Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller came to Alcott’s defense, and Margaret managed to persuade Henry Hedge not to publish an attack on him, but The Temple School collapsed. Margaret gave her notice and retreated to Groton.

Although her teaching efforts yielded insufficient funds to adequately support the family, Margaret’s intellectual life had flourished during her time in Boston and she became part of the Transcendental circle. She befriended Reverend William Ellery Channing, who had made Unitarianism mainstream, sharing oral translations of German writers with him while he read to her from Coleridge and Wordsworth. Meghan Marshall suggests that she might have been “seeking the blessing” of this elder statesman of the
Transcendental movement and, too, there was the comfort of working on intellectual pursuits with a fatherly mentor. 56 Provided with an introduction by Elizabeth Peabody and recommended by other mutual friends, Margaret visited Waldo and Lidian Emerson in the summer of 1836, spending three weeks at “Bush,” their home in Concord. At first put off by her aggressive manner, Emerson ultimately voiced his approval to Elizabeth Peabody, “She has the quickest apprehension & immediately learned all we knew & had us at her mercy when she pleased to make us laugh.” He shared the manuscript of his book Nature with her. Lidian wrote “We like her--she likes us.” 57 Margaret joined Emerson, Hedge, the Ripleys, Channing, Alcott, and Elizabeth Peabody and others in meetings of the “Hedge” or Transcendental Club, a group of young intellectuals who were framing and sharing important new ideas about religion and society. Margaret made a place for herself in this group; Marshall notes “When the men and women of Transcendentalism began to speak of her as simply ‘Margaret,’ dropping her surname, she was pleased.” 58

While she was still an assistant at the Temple School, an Alcott disciple, Hiram Fuller had offered her a teaching position at his new, progressive Greene Street School in Providence. Having learned from her experience with Alcott., she negotiated a $1,000 per year salary (which was what a Harvard professor received) and the freedom to teach as she pleased. She began there in June, 1837, just as a severe economic crisis seized the country. Waldo Emerson gave the inaugural address for the school, suggesting that the dire financial climate proved the need for a new approach to education. 59

Settled in a boarding house in Providence, Margaret rose before five to find time to work on a biography of Goethe that George Ripley had committed to publish, write articles for The Western Messenger and complete her class preparations. Madeline Stern suggests that Margaret saw many parallels between her life and Goethe’s. His father was a task master overseeing his studies; he had organized a theater group of friends as Margaret had at Miss Prescott’s; he liked to dress fashionably; he believed in demonology and secret forces in the universe; his love for Frederika was, she thought, like hers for Sam Ward, and rather than being immoral, as some said–hadn’t Goethe lived with Christiane Vulpius because he truly revered marriage? She, too, would only marry someone worthy. She read Goethe’s First Journey to Italy and dreamed of travel. 60
A large portion of her day was spent on her teaching. Her course offerings included “Latin, composition, elocution, history, natural philosophy, and, eventually a course on the New Testament.” The Greene Street students were not as well prepared as those she had taught in Boston. Finding her Latin students were not ready to read Virgil, she gave them an intensive thirty week grammar course. A demanding teacher, Margaret was admired by her students, but they feared her sarcasm and harsh criticism. When she reduced one shy, older girl to tears for a poorly prepared assignment, the other students protested in writing. Margaret apologized for being too “rough”: “I often regret that you have not a teacher who has more heart, more health, more energy to spend upon you than I have.” On the last day of her English poetry class, her inspiring words about her own struggles, her hopes and affection for them reduced every girl to tears.

As a result of her caregiver experiences with family and her students, Margaret was developing her beliefs about women’s education. The paper on Progress she gave to The Coliseum Club, Providence’s leading literary society, differed from those that discussed inventions and the improvement of communications; Margaret focused on Progress as the betterment of individuals, especially women. Education for women may have improved, she said, but women were still judged on beauty and limited to three professions--marriage, needlework and teaching. What she wanted to achieve herself--personal integrity and progress toward intellectual perfection--she wanted for all of her female students as well as expanded opportunities for putting their education to use.

While she was in Providence, Margaret worked too hard, suffered crippling headaches and back pain, and coped with family problems. Numerous letters show her concern about her mother and siblings. On August 26, 1836, she wrote to the sensitive, quick tempered Ellen, soothing hurt feelings which had resulted from Margaret’s criticism of her spelling and defending herself against her sister’s accusation that she had made an unkind remark, “You must not be hasty to suspect unkindness, least of all should you from me who have shown you so sincere affection.” She urges Ellen not to be concerned with her “faded frocks” . . .”Now that every one knows our circumstances, it is no disgrace for us not to wear fine clothes, but a credit.” On a visit home, she had tried to talk to Richard about his religious beliefs after hearing he had gone to some Baptist meetings, but he had
withheld his confidences. He notes in his memoir that he was surprised when his mother
told him Margaret had cried at his uncommunicativeness. He had thought she was so
learned and different from him that she would be critical and unsympathetic. 65

In September, 1837, in keeping with the gloomy economic outlook, Uncle Abraham
was keeping a stranglehold on the Fullers’ purse strings, suggesting that the younger boys
could earn their board through farm work and that seventeen year old Ellen might run a
neighborhood school. From Providence, Margaret encouraged her mother to take a strong
stand against Uncle Abraham:

You must not let his vulgar insults make you waver as to giving the children
advantages to which they would be well entitled if the property were only a third
of what it is now. . . . Fit out the children for school and let Lloyd not be
forgotten. You incur an awful responsibility by letting him go so neglected
any longer. I shall get Ellen a place at Mrs.Urquhart’s, if possible;
if not, I may take her to Providence, for I hear of no better place. She shall not be
treated in this shameful way, bereft of proper advantages and plagued and
cramped in the May of life. . . .God be with you, my dear Mother, be sure he will
prosper the doings of so excellent a woman if you will only keep your mind calm,
and be firm. Trust your daughter, too--I feel increasing trust in mine own good
mind; we will take good care of the children and, one another.” 66

Margaret Crane did stand firm against her brother-in-law and the children continued
their schooling. Margaret and her mother set their sights on Harvard for Arthur and
Richard. Later Margaret wrote to Mary Rotch about her difficult struggle to see her siblings
to adulthood: “[H]e [Uncle Abraham] far from aiding, wished to see me fall, because I
acted against his opinion in giving my family advantages he thought with his narrow views,
useless, and defended my mother against his cruel tyranny” 67

To fifteen year-old Arthur, away at school, Margaret wrote on December 31, 1837:

You express gratitude for what I have taught you. It is in your power to repay me
a hundred fold by making every exertion now to improve. . . . Three precious
years at the best period of life I gave all my best hours to you children--let me
not see you idle away time which I have always valued so, let me not find you
unworthy of the love I felt for you. . . . I hope you are fully aware of the great
importance of your conduct this year. It will decide your fate. . . . If, at the end
of the year, we have not reason to be satisfied that you have a decided taste for
study and ambition to make a figure in one of the professions, you will be
consigned to some other walk in life.”

Fuller left her job at the Greene Street School at the end of the fall term. She had
managed to earn enough money to pay Arthur’s Harvard tuition, but teaching had taken a
steep toll on her health. She had scant time for her own work and being a school mistress
did not fit her self-image. In a futile effort to schedule a New York meeting with British
author Anna Jameson, a friend of Goethe’s daughter-in-law, Margaret had written that her
schedule allowed her to meet only on weekends: “‘You must not get an ugly picture of me
because I am a school mistress. I am only teaching for a little while.”

She was also probably discomforted to observe Elizabeth Peabody, a brilliant woman, who, with her
sister Mary was the financial mainstay of the Peabody family, struggling to earn a barely
adequate income by teaching and writing. Elizabeth had been generous in helping
Margaret, but Margaret preferred not to be too closely associated with her; perhaps the
image of the disheveled, assertive, “old maid” school teacher that Margaret saw in
Elizabeth Peabody, six years her senior, repelled and frightened her. One bright spot for
Margaret in 1838 had been the acceptance of her translations of two Goethe poems to be
published under the name S.M. Fuller along with work of Clarke, Hedge and William
Henry Channing, in Dwight’s Select Minor Poems, Translated from the German of Goethe
and Sciller (1839). She wanted the world to see her as a woman of literature.

Margaret’s income was not sufficient to prevent her mother’s having to sell the farm.
From Providence, she wrote to thirteen year-old Richard in October of 1838 urging him to
stay on the farm until it was sold; after that time “you will be able to pursue your education
uninterruptedly as our dear Mother will no longer need that aid, which you have been so
fortunate as to render, and I believe so far with truly dutiful good will.” At the end of
the term, Margaret went to Boston for two months, then to Groton to spend time with her
mother; Eugene, Ellen and Richard. Arthur was away at school, William Henry in New
Orleans and Lloyd, by Margaret’s arrangement, living with a tutor in Stoughton. She rested and sorted her father’s papers, developing a deeper appreciation of him as a person while at the same time resenting the self-centered choices he had made, bringing poverty and hardship on his family. She tutored Ellen and Richard twice a week and struggled to finish her translation of Johann Peter Eckermann’s *Conversations with Goethe*, sometimes having to dictate pages to Richard because of the severity of her headaches (MM 130). Ellen and Richard helped pack up the household for the family’s move to “Willard House,” a home Eugene helped them rent in Jamaica Plains, an hour’s walk south of Boston.72

In summer, 1839, reenergized after resting and visiting friends, Margaret once again addressed the chronic problem of supporting the family. Although *Conversations with Goethe* was published to good reviews and praised by Emerson, Hedge and Clarke, the book did not generate any income. Margaret began to plan a Conversation Series for women which would start in November. After the failure of the Temple School, Bronson Alcott had turned to leading Conversations to earn money and Margaret decided to follow his model. The time seemed ripe. Boston was alive with intellectual fervor; lectures, women’s reading groups and art exhibits had become the “rage.”73

The Conversation genre was ideal for Margaret: it was interactive and spontaneous, requiring a minimum of preparation and paperwork. The leader introduced a topic, provided a commentary, and, then, ideally, the group would participate in a discussion. A Conversation series would provide income while allowing Margaret to do the kind of teaching she preferred and at which she excelled—using her exceptional skills as a conversationalist to lead educated women in intellectual discussion with the goal of improving their lives and society. She drew participants from her wide circle of friends and students and asked for help soliciting additional enrollment from Sophia Ripley and Elizabeth Peabody. The group would meet on Wednesday, the day Waldo Emerson had scheduled his evening lectures, enabling women to come to Boston to attend both intellectual events. Meanwhile, Margaret was negotiating with the parents of three former Greene Street students to have them board with her while she tutored them to finish their education.74
In September, Margaret attended two meetings of the Transcendental Club that addressed the urgency of establishing a journal to articulate their views. In October she was offered the editorship and “a substantial portion of the proceeds” which would be, between $200-$300 dollars, depending on the circulation. Both through her Conversations and as The Dial’s editor, Margaret “served transcendentalism as a versatile and powerful publicist.” Close association with the Transcendentalists was not without risk. Alcott had horrified the public both with his “Conversation” on the birth of Jesus and his admission of a black child to the Temple School. When Margaret had hoped to have Cary Sturgis live with her in Providence in 1837, her father refused to risk his reputation by having his daughter associated with someone who was part of the Transcendentalist group. In July, 1838, Emerson had scandalized the public with his Divinity School Address, a speech that would banish him from Harvard for thirty years. But financial necessity and literary ambition made Margaret eager to move forward.

On November 6, 1839 Margaret launched her Conversation series for women. Marshall states that she charged $10 for thirteen sessions, “about two-thirds of Waldo Emerson’s take for a similar set of lectures.”(Stern reports that she charged $20. Per person for the series.) She led the initial group of twenty-five well educated women in the study of Greek mythology, introducing them to a subject previously available only to boys. Over the course of the Conversations, topics included education, ethics, the intellectual potential of women, fine arts, and education. Participants included were Mrs. George Bancroft, wife of the historian, Mary Channing, daughter of W.E. Channing, Lydia Marie Child, Lidian Emerson, Mrs. Elizabeth Farrar, Mrs. Horace Mann (Mary Peabody), Sophia Peabody, Elizabeth Peabody, Emerson’s aunt, Caroline Sturgis, Mrs. Anna Barker Ward and others. At first the women were reluctant to speak in front of others, but Margaret soon encouraged them to voice their views. She often had them write their thoughts on the subject and read their essays to spark the conversation. Her goal was to promote critical thinking, speaking, even action.

Accounts suggest that for the participants and for Margaret herself, the Conversations were transformative. They succeeded in awakening women to think new ideas and raised expectations of what women could achieve. Through them, Margaret was
developing material that would inform “The Great Lawsuit,” an essay printed in _the Dial_ in 1843 that was expanded to become the feminist best seller _Woman in the Nineteenth Century_. Sarah Clarke praised the Conversations as “the most powerful stimulus, intellectual and moral. It was like the sun shining on plants and causing buds to open into flowers.” 78 Caroline Healey, the nineteen year-old well-educated and opinionated daughter of a Boston banker who attended the Conversations, was critical of Margaret, yet took her as a role model and went on to a life of distinguished scholarship. 79 At the age of seventy-three, Dall delivered a lecture at the prestigious Society for Philosophical Inquiry in Washington, D.C., providing a revisionist view of Transcendentalism, claiming it began with Anne Hutchinson and ended with Margaret Fuller. Dall credited Fuller for changing women’s lives, seeing her as ”both priestess and oracle” of feminism. 80

Margaret would have preferred to postpone the first issue of _The Dial_ until fall of 1840 as she was busy with her Conversation series and tutoring, but Waldo urged her to target July. Getting the magazine ready to publish entailed soliciting contributions, selecting the pieces and editing the copy. Many would-be contributors held back, fearful to be associated with the new publication and waiting to see how it would be received; Henry Hedge begged off, claiming that between his low-paid pastoral duties and raising four children, he didn’t have time; Margaret replied, “I know you are plagued and it is hard to write, just so it is with me, for I am also a father.” 81 She considered her position as caregiver for her younger siblings no different from his.

_The Dial_’s inaugural issue was published to mixed reviews. Waldo had written the Introduction since Margaret’s version had satisfied neither him or Ripley. He sounded Margaret’s “theme of a second American ‘revolution’ with ‘no badge, no creed, no name,’ . . . yet in every form a protest. . . and a search for principles.” 82 Margaret wrote nearly a third of the first issue’s selections herself: the lead article, “A Short Essay on Criticism,” calling for establishment of critical standards and establishing the journal as a magazine devoted to the arts; a substantial review of Washington Allston’s paintings, written in the first person at Emerson’s suggestion, as well as a sonnet, written in response to an Allston painting called _The Bride_, which she paired with one of Sam Ward’s on the same subject. A third of the poetry in the issue was written by women including James
Clarke’s sister Sarah and Waldo’s first wife, Ellen Tucker. Waldo contributed a poem describing his abandonment of the ministry, which Marshall calls “the strongest statement of ‘Transcendental Revolution’” contained in the issue.\textsuperscript{83} All of the pieces were simply identified by initial except Bronson Alcott’s “Orphic Sayings,” which Waldo had suggested be credited with his full name, a mistake because this identified the new journal too closely with Alcott. His work was pilloried in the press as the worst of Transcendental ravings. However, Horace Greeley called \textit{The Dial} “a really new magazine”\textsuperscript{84} in \textit{New-Yorker} and “private voices expressed approval.”\textit{The Dial} had succeeded in announcing new ideas and presenting original writing.

As Margaret approached thirty, pouring her energies into her Conversation series and \textit{The Dial}, her personal life experienced a series of emotional upheavals. She had long ago rejected the possibility of marrying her friend and study-partner James Clarke, but was shocked to learn from a stranger about his engagement to Anna Huidekoper, the daughter of a wealthy Dutch philanthropist, just two months before his August 15, 1839 wedding. It seems possible that James, remembering Margaret’s interference in his youthful relationship with her friend Elizabeth Randall, had decided not to tell her, but certainly she felt hurt. In 1839, her relationship with Caroline Sturgis became troubled. She alienated Cary by being possessive and domineering; in June, during a trip to Nahant, the culmination occurred when Cary hesitated in answering Margaret’s question “Do you love me”? Margaret had recoiled in hurt anger, beginning a period of estrangement.\textsuperscript{85}

Since the trip to Trenton Falls, Margaret had been seeing and corresponding with Sam Ward, whom she called “Raffaello.” In May, 1839, they toured Boston art galleries and exhibits and Margaret believed he was signaling serious romantic intentions. She was devastated when he suddenly began to avoid her, and in September, made it clear by letter that he did not love her, suggesting her dominance made him feel uncomfortable, that “rather than be her ‘woman,’ he chose to be his own man.” It seems that Margaret had misunderstood his feelings. In fact, Sam Ward and Anna Barker had fallen in love on the 1837 European trip that Margaret had missed and Sam had returned determined to succeed in a business career and win the approval of Anna’s family. In early 1839, they had committed to one another, but both kept their love secret until the fall and then married on
October 3, 1840. Pride made Margaret respond as a gracious friend to both and she even postponed her brother Arthur’s eye surgery to attend the wedding. Much as she suffered the loss of Sam, the inevitable distancing from Anna may have been even more painful.

Her friendship with Waldo also deteriorated in the summer of 1840. The relationship had always had an element of tension and was complicated by the addition of the young people whom Margaret had brought into their circle. Emerson was drawn to Cary Sturgis, who wrote poetry and probably reminded him of his first wife and also to Sam Ward and Anna Barker. In August, Waldo and Margaret were returning from a visit to Anna Barker, when Margaret accused him of being incapable of true friendship and told him that Cary Sturgis agreed with her. Emerson felt he could not provide the depth of relationship that Margaret wanted. She was looking for an intimate friendship and a spiritual father figure. It was impossible for Emerson, naturally reserved and scarred by the deaths of his father, his beloved first wife, and his two brothers, to provide the warmth of affection that Margaret craved. Then he made matters worse by attempting to address his coldness through letters to Caroline Sturgis, which he then mentioned to Margaret.

Too, during the summer of 1840, Margaret’s mother made plans to visit her brother Eugene and his new wife in New Orleans. Although she would only be gone from October to December, Margaret felt bereft: When her mother left, she wrote to William Channing, “As a family we are broken apart now.”

There is reason to believe that Margaret suffered from bi-polar disorder. She had often suffered periods of depression. Now, the traits of the hypomanic individual -- charisma, emotional intensity, gregariousness, overconfidence and manipulativeness--that attracted people to Margaret intensified in her 1839 relationships with both Cary Sturgis and Sam Ward. In Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Waldo notes a remark Margaret had said “in the coolest way” to her friends: “I now know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable to my own.” Matteson believes this megalomaniac comment may have been said to Sam Ward in May 1839, which would be consistent with an escalating manic episode.
In the summer and fall of 1840, Margaret’s depression alternated with periods of ecstatic mystical experiences. In September Caroline Sturgis received disturbing letters from Margaret describing these visions: “All has been revealed, all foreshown, yet I know it not. . . .” “I am not more below.” She expected her friends to rejoice in her spiritual experiences, but they were worried about her.

By November, 1840, Margaret was back at work supporting the family. In a letter to Richard dated November 17, 1840 Margaret tells him she is working hard, giving “eight or nine lessons a week (this has increased to ten by December 2), beside The Dial and class[the Conversation].” That year’s Conversation series which admitted men, including Emerson, Alcott, Clarke and Hedge proved less satisfying to Margaret and probably to the other women participants. There was an unspoken rivalry between Waldo and Margaret which caused a strain. The men dominated discussion, deviating from the topic and dwelling on their own interests while the women remained silent. There was no payment from The Dial.

The responsibilities and worries of Margaret’s caregiver role were intense at this time as the Fuller siblings were maturing and seeking their places in the world; she was doing her best to support them financially and offer them sound advice while managing her own career, personal life and health problems. She waited in vain for payment from The Dial.

In April 1841, the lease was up on the Jamaica Plains house and Margaret could not afford to renew it. This began a year and a half period when Margaret had no home and had stayed with various friends—the Farrars, the Emersons, Caroline Sturgis and the Sturgis family, the Rotches, and the residents of Brook Farm. Her mother was living in New Orleans during the winter of 1840-41 to be with her older sons who had gone there to seek their fortunes. The Depression of 1837 was winding down, but the economic environment was fiercely competitive. William Henry had married and was trying to establish himself in business; the following August, Margaret wrote warning her mother not to become financially involved with him, although she herself sent him money. He and his wife Frances had a baby girl on October 23, 1841; then in December, William went bankrupt. A letter in January from William to his mother shows him planning to transfer his property to her before trying to bargain down his debt.
Eugene and his wife were barely hanging on financially. In July 1841 Margarett Crane was worried enough to consider working as a maid, a plan Margaret discouraged, telling her anxious mother not to be so troubled about family finances. Margaret arranged to help Eugene by having Richard, who had money coming from his father’s estate, mortgage Eugene’s property for $297. Arthur had entered Harvard in 1839 and was teaching between terms. Richard worked briefly as a wholesale drygoods clerk in Boston and, hating it, went to Concord and lived on a Spartan budget as he prepared for Harvard, hoping to enter as an advanced sophomore in 1841. Margaret appealed to her Concord friends to help him prepare. Thoreau befriended Richard, tutoring him for a small fee and taking him on nature walks; Elizabeth Hoar heard him recite Homer and Virgil; Waldo treated him cordially and issued a permanent invitation to come to tea; Lidian cooked him meat pies. In a letter dated Dec 2, 1841 Margaret tells Richard that he is owed between $1000 and 1200 from his father’s estate, which should see him through Harvard.

Lloyd was a constant worry for Margaret. He was hard to handle at home, requiring nearly constant supervision, yet he was unhappy when he was away. Margaret stayed alone with Lloyd during the last winter (1841) that she leased the Jamaica Plains home, making an effort to tutor him toward achieving independence, but she failed. That spring he went to stay at Brook Farm, where the Ripleys, knowing her circumstances, did not charge board. Lloyd’s roommate was her poet friend Charles Newcomb. In June he wrote her that Lloyd had the measles and wanted Margaret to come and take care of him. On Dec 1, 1841, Margaret wrote to Richard that Lloyd had visited her and seemed depressed. The following summer, Margaret apprenticed Lloyd to a printer, but the match was not a good one and he returned to Brook farm. In January 1842 Margaret mentioned to Richard that Lloyd visited and she was worried about his grasp on reality. Her frequent visits to Brook Farm in 1841-42—she visited often enough to have one of the buildings dubbed “Margaret’s Cottage”—may have been in part to visit Lloyd.

In the fall of 1840, Ellen Fuller, age twenty, had gone to Cincinnati with William Channing to teach or find a job as a governess. She was hired by a former pupil of Margaret’s in Louisville where she met the poet Ellery Channing, who became one of her most frequent visitors when she contracted rheumatic fever and the two became engaged.
Margaret knew of Channing’s reputation as a ladies’ man—in fact, she knew that Cary Sturgis, with whom Ellery had been involved, was having trouble accepting his engagement to Ellen. Margaret wrote worriedly to Emerson about the impending marriage, concerned that Channing had no income and Ellen had a bad temper. Before she had time to decide whether she could afford to travel west to talk Ellen out of the match, the two were already married. The comment, recounted by Matteson, that Ellery made when Margaret sent him a volume of Shakespeare’s sonnets tells much about his character: “I do not read. I am chiefly engaged with doing nothing. I own I have a large penchant for this species of occupation.”

In May 1841, shortly after a visit to Bush, Margaret sank into a deep depression, which finally receded at the end of July during a visit to the Sturgis home in Newport. On the night of August 2, she had an acute crisis which finally ended the mystical visions and thoughts of suicide. Matteson writes, “She still believed in the necessity of radical self-improvement and the seeking of transcendence. However, this belief was now tempered by her having seen the dangers of pursuing it to excess”

Margaret’s writings during this difficult period provide insight into her mental state. She wrote autobiographical pieces about her childhood critical of her father’s upbringing, describing blood-filled dreams after reading of Roman battles and nightmares about her mother’s death. She also wrote several short stories which portray the conflict she felt between the demands placed on her as caregiver daughter and the freedom from that role which seemed vital to the realization of her deeper sense of self.

Published in the January 1841 issue, “The Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain.” had been inspired by a story Margaret overheard from a biologist named Dr Eustis, who was visiting her mother and telling about having a conversation with a Magnolia tree. Her story’s narrator, a lover of flowers, searches for the source of a delicious fragrance and traces it to the Magnolia, “Queen of the South,” singing to herself. The tree tells him, “I have no sister of the heart, and though my root is the same as that of other virgins of our royal house, I bear not the same blossom, nor can I unite my voice with theirs. . .therefore I dwell here alone.” It seems the tree and the narrator have met before in another land when the Magnolia was an orange tree, always engaged in serving others: “On me the merchant
counted, the bride looked to me for her garland, the nobleman for the chief ornament of his princely hall and the poor man for his wealth.” All praised the tree and her heart swelled “with pride and pleasure.” But as years passed, the orange tree was exhausted: “I had no mine or thine; I belonged to all, I could never rest. . . .O how cruel they seemed at last, as they visited and despoiled me, yet never sought to aid me, or even paused to think that I might need their aid; yet I would not hate them. . . .[I] turned my eyes to the distant stars.”

Margaret’s orange tree was feeling what she must have been feeling, used up by her family and friends with no consideration of her own needs. One night a cold breeze brought a killing frost and the orange tree dies and is called before the Queen and Guardian of Flowers, who cautions her not to wish for the end of life, “the full pause must not follow such a burst of melody”; the orange tree must transition through reincarnation as a Magnolia until she gradually becomes pure spirit. The Magnolia tells the stranger, “I still speak with somewhat of my former exuberance, and over-ready tenderness to the dwellers on this shore, but each star sees me. . . .more capable of retirement into my own heart.” Then the Magnolia withdraws from the speaker. Margaret’s story suggests that she considered or anticipated death, perhaps by suicide, but then realized she must escape the life of sacrificial caregiving and draw inward to achieve inner peace and perfection. This realization provides not only a personal solution for Margaret, but a model for all women caregivers.

Another story, “Leila,” which appeared in the April, 1841 issue of The Dial is a metaphoric description of Margaret’s Transcendental experience. The mysterious figure of Leila grew up with the narrator, sharing “name and home and parentage.” She is a spirit who represents an infinite feminine force, who is misunderstood by men: “as they gazed on Leila [most] were pained; they left her at last baffled and well-nigh angry”. Leila represents the narrator’s spiritual self which is manifested in “the clear blue sky” “the mild sunset,” and “the mighty sea” which call forth a range of feelings. The narrator, reminiscent of the Thanksgiving-Day Margaret, conjures Leila by looking into the “a little lake, oval, deep and still.” While Leila lives with men by day, by night

she wander forth from her human investment. . . . Breathless is my
ecstasy as I pursue her in this region. . .the condition of this ecstasy is, that it seems to die every moment and even Leila has not the force to die often; the electricity accumulates many days before the wild one comes. . . .Then glows through her. . .the blood red, heart’s blood-red of the carbuncle. She is, like it, her own light, and beats with the universal heart.”

The narrator shares the ecstatic mystical experience with Leila undergoing a series of powerful transformations. She is a Demon with “wild hair scattered to the wind, bare and often bleeding feet” visiting the consciences of men; she is a being at whose touch “prison walls grew into Edens” and beings struggle into divinity.”

At the end of the story the powerful Leila transforms to a figure kneeling in the dust, a Jesus figure, humanized. The narrator becomes her “fellow pilgrim,” no longer seeking the lake (mystic experience), but returning to the world of forms--“Let us pass out into nature” with both “God,” the infinite, and the human form which contains Leila, the-God in-the-self. The story clearly signals Margaret’s return to the real world as an integrated being.100

In 1840, Margaret Fuller had crossed the unofficial line into spinsterhood. Of course, there were women who married after the age of thirty. Lidian Emerson was nearly thirty-three when she married Waldo; Mary Peabody was thirty-six when she married Horace Mann, but, as Margaret had insisted to Elizabeth Peabody during the first Conversation series, there comes a time when “every one must give up” and plan for a single life.”101 Margaret Fuller’s plans took her far beyond a future as the spinster caregiver daughter.
Notes: Chapter I: Redefining Women’s Lives: The Transcendental Caregivers

1 Reisen 121-22.

2 Rothman.

3 Rothman.

4 McAlexander 261; 262-3.

5 Welter

6 Degler 79.

7 qtd. in Bunkle 19.

8 qtd. in Welter 160.

9 qtd. in Theriot 68.

10 Cogan 92.

11 Hartman.

12 Riegal 41.
35

13 qtd. In Cott 144.

14 [In the first half of the nineteenth century] a woman’s daily or weekly work included planning menus; ordering food; cooking on an open range or (if she were lucky and Prosperous) on the wood ranges which were just coming into use; heating water and washing dishes. . .; baking breads pies, cakes and puddings; keeping the kitchen fireplace and those in other rooms stoked; dusting; sweeping and scrubbing floors; beating or shaking carpets; scouring iron utensils (which, of course, rusted) with sand; rubbing brass ones with flannel and rum; cleaning, filling, and trimming oil lamps; salting and/or smoking meat, or storing it in brine; storing other perishables, such as butter, vegetables, fruits and eggs, each after its kind. . .; sewing clothes, bedding, and table linen without machines ready-made patterns; making feather beds (they had to be shaken); mending, laundry (an entire day); ironing (most of a day); and keeping the children from falling in the well.

Chores performed seasonally or infrequently included: washing windows; blacking boots and shoes; scrubbing hearths and marble mantelpieces; polishing silver; dyeing clothes (colors were not fixed); removing stains; making soap. . .; tending the garden; nursing the sick; making preserves; knitting and embroidery. [There were] cleaning agents, medicines, and insect poisons [to be made or processed] and if the family was very poor or lived far from an urban center, women also made candles, starch, and yeast, churned butter, and dried their own herbs. (Blanchard 77-78)

15 Ibid. 80.

16 Theriot 4.
Chapter II: Margaret Fuller: Caregiver Daughter

1 Blanchard, Introduction 2.

2 Blanchard 11.

3 Cappper 36.

4 qtd. In Matteson 16.

5 Matteson 19.

6 Capper 34-35.

7 Ibid. 31.

8 Marshall 15.

9 Capper 42.

10 qtd. In Capper 62.

11 Ibid. 61.

12 Ibid. 61.

13 qtd. In Capper 65.

14 Ibid. 72.

15 qtd. In Blanchard 42.

16 von Mehren 24,

17 Blanchard 49-53.

18 Marshall 51.

19 qtd. In Capper 88.

21 Ibid. 88-89.

22 qtd. In Blanchard 66.

23 Matteson 70-71.

24 Marshall 43.


26 Ibid. 63.

27 Blanchard 65.

28 Marshall 52.

29 Matteson 77.

30 Marshall 52-54.

31 Ibid. 53-54.

32 Matteson 77-78.

33 qtd. In Emerson, Clarke and Channing, ed. Memoirs of Margaret Fuller II, 53.

34 Ibid., I 40-41.


36 Ibid. 63.

37 Ibid. 64.

38 Habich 287.


40 Emerson, Clarke and Channing, ed. Memoirs of Margaret Fuller, I, 50.

41 von Mehren 31.

42 Blanchard 81.

43 Marshall 72; 80-81.

44 Matteson 96.
Ibid. 99.

Ibid. 100-102.

Fuller, Richard. 28.

Matteson 103-105.

Fuller, Richard 25.

Ibid. 27.


Ibid 33.

SMF to Cary Sturgis. October 22, 1840. *Heart*. 128

Matteson 120.

Matteson 118-124.


Ibid. 98.

Ibid. 101.

Ibid 104; 107-108.

Stern 142-44.

Marshall 111.

Matteson 137-38.


SMF to Ellen Fuller. Oct 26, 1836. *Heart*

Fuller, Richard 40-41.

SMF to Margarett Crane September 1837. *Heart* 69-70.


SMF to Arthur Fuller. Dec 31, 1857 *Heart*, 77.

Marshall 97-100.

SMF letter to Richard Fuller. October 1838. *Heart*. 82.

Blanchard 138-39.

Myerson 189.

von Mehren 33.

(67 Emerson notes about $200. Memoir I 323 300/ Matteson179)

Marshall 135; Stern 182.

Emerson, Clarke, Channing, ed. Memoirs of MFO 326-331; 346-351.


Myerson, “Miss Dall”

qtd. In Deese 539.

Marshall 152.

Ibid. 150.

Ibid. 151; 154.

Ibid. 156.

Matteson 141; 148.

Ibid. 151; 179.

Ibid. 181-85.


Fawcett 128.

E,C,Ch ed. *Memoirs* vol II, 234; Matteson 149.

Matteson 180.

SMF Letter to Richard Fullers. Nov 17 and Dec 2, 1840. *FTL.*
93 SMF letter to MCF, August 5, 1841 *FLT; Blanchard* 179; SMF letter to Richard, Dec. 1, 1841 *FTL; William Fuller Letter to MCF, January 8, 1842. *FTL*. 

94 SMF Letter to Richard, December 2, 1841. *FTL*

95 Capper, *The Public Years* 65; Richard Fuller Letter to SMF Sept. 16, 1841 *FTL*; SMF Letter to RF. December 2, 1841. *FTL*

96 SMF Letter to RF. December 1, 1841. *FTL*

97 SMF Letter to Emerson, September 16, 1841 *FTL*; Blanchard 177-78; Matteson 193.

98 Matteson 193.

99 Fuller, Margaret. “Magnolia”

100 Fuller, Margaret, “Leila”
