

"BY NATURE'S LAW DESIGNED"
THE DEFINITION OF WOMANHOOD IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how 'womanhood' was defined by a group of sixteen women publicists in mid-nineteenth century America, through their books, newspapers and journals published over a twenty-five year span leading up to the Civil War. Of the publicists, nine attended woman's rights conventions and were active in the movement, seven were adamantly opposed to the call for woman's rights. The sixteen publicists fall into three categories, conservative, liberal and radical; however, these do not correspond with membership, or non-membership, of the woman's rights movement.

The conservative publicists believed that woman's nature rested upon the natural laws of her anatomy and physiology, which had been designed at the Creation to fulfil a specific function in God's ordered universe. Drawing upon the Bible, and popular scientific methods and concepts, the conservatives emphasised the structure and function of woman's body, and drew by analogy conclusions about the structure and function of her mind. The liberal publicists shared the belief in a fundamental sexual dualism permeating the natural world, and employed the same matter-mind analogies. However, pre-occupied with the cause of the exceptional woman, the liberals argued that the sexual dualism was not rigid, that women were born with exceptional creative talents that should be accepted as part of their womanhood and not repressed. The radical publicists denied the application of any such physiological determinism to the

definition of womanhood, and argued that nurture, not nature, moulded women to fulfil cultural expectations. Womanhood, they declared, was subject to the same natural laws as manhood, with the same needs, abilities, and capacities.

Upon these three definitions the publicists rested various injunctions and prescriptions that were intended to show American women what their true function was, and how best to fulfil it. However, these prescriptions do not correspond with the public/private sphere dichotomy that historians have identified as the fundamental difference between members and non-members of the woman's rights movement. Rather the distinction to be made between the publicists is one of 'moral influence' versus 'self-realisation'. The conservative publicists argued that woman's function was to exercise her 'moral influence', and this could be extended into clearly defined public activity, including that of suffrage. The liberals fluctuated between this approach and that of the radicals, who argued that woman needed to achieve 'self-realisation' through the medium of labour and participation in public affairs.

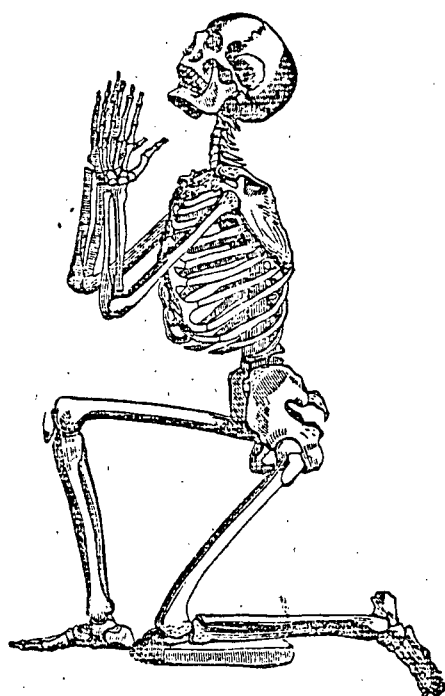
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From Mrs Mary S. Gove, Lectures to Ladies on Anatomy and Physiology
(Boston: Saxton and Pierce, 1842).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Mid-nineteenth century America became the scene of an intense debate over the nature and role of woman that emerged from the controversy surrounding the public participation of women in the Abolition movement during the late eighteen-thirties. This so provoked the clergy that a group in Massachusetts combined to publish their famous Pastoral Appeal in 1837, that was intended to remind women of the sphere of activity most suited to them:

The power of woman is in her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection, and which keeps her in those departments of life that form the character of individuals of the nation.¹

Although the woman's rights movement was not to be formed for another ten years, the debate over what became known as the "Woman Question" rapidly spread into a full scale dispute over the very nature of woman, and the part she should play in American society. So much so, that a new journal commencing publication in 1851 could advertise the pressing topics of the moment that it would be covering as follows:

Science, criticism, Reviews, Literature, Morals, Theories of Government and Law, History, Taste, Wit, Anecdote, Romance, and the condition, needs, duties and destiny of Woman²

Participating in this debate were a group of women publicists, with diverse backgrounds and equally diverse opinions, who produced, between

1838 and 1864, a substantial body of descriptive, prescriptive and didactic literature on the topic of womanhood.³ The fundamental question they addressed, however, was the same: did the Creator when arranging the physical and mental laws of woman's nature, design woman to fulfil a different function from that of man? If so, they further asked, what was this function, and did it make woman different, inferior, or superior to man? If not, was woman then the subject of the same physical and mental needs and desires as man, and equally capable of the same intellectual achievements?

Historians writing of this period have tended to characterize the debate over the "Woman Question" on the part of women writers and reformers as one of two competing ideologies, that of domesticity versus feminism.⁴ It has been largely accepted that those espousing the cause of domesticity wished to elevate woman's status within the private sphere, that of the home and family, while those supporting feminism were endeavouring to break into the public sphere, broadly defined as that of labour and suffrage. Further, there has been a tendency to accept an assumption that those women involved in the woman's rights movement, founded in 1848, subscribed to the view that woman's nature did not differ substantially from that of man, upon which belief they based their demands for civil, legal and social reforms:

But as the century approached its middle years, women recognised that they possessed the same human nature as man. They ultimately concluded that woman had the same abilities, duties, and responsibilities and, therefore, merited identical rights.⁵

Yet a cursory glance at the writings of the publicists, including both those inside and out of the woman's rights movement, indicates that divisions in their thought were far more complex than this interpretation has allowed. Several publicists, for example, supported the calls for suffrage, equal pay, and legal reform on the grounds of woman's difference from, and often superiority to, man. The implication of such an underlying philosophy is important for a proper understanding of the strategy and reforms called for by the woman's rights movement, especially since suffrage has been described as the most 'radical' demand made by mid-nineteenth feminists in a very recent study of the movement by Ellen DuBois.⁶

In the attempts by the publicists to resolve the debate over the nature of womanhood, they drew consistently upon two forms of evidence: first, Biblical and historical precedent, and second, scientific principles and findings in anatomy, physiology, phrenology and astronomy. The significance of these two sources is explored in the next two chapters, but it should be noted that the search for a definitive basis for woman's nature involved virtually no attention to the current legal definition of woman. Rather the publicists were debating the very basis of the law itself, for, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton - one of the founders of the woman's rights movement - pointed out, "the nature of a being decides its rights", not the law.⁷ But before examining the writings of the publicists, who were they, both from the perspective of shared, and individual, identity?

Collectively the women publicists share a number of interesting characteristics that tend to challenge some central tenets of the established historiography. Women writers and reformers of the mid-nineteenth century are often presented as a relatively affluent, educated and newly leisured elite,⁸ but the experience of the women publicists rather illustrates the opposite. At least three lost their financial security in the Crash of 1837, and directly as a consequence began to write to make a living. Married to a newspaper editor bankrupted by the Crash, Elizabeth Oakes Smith was forced to begin writing to help support her five sons, and went on to make a successful career as a novelist. Caroline Dall had been born into a wealthy family, her father being an India merchant, but he lost nearly everything in 1837 and she began teaching to support herself. And the last of the three, Maria McIntosh, one of the two publicists to have been born in the South, was living in New York by the time of the financial crisis that took what money she had. Forced to make a living for herself for the first time, she began by writing the popular Aunt Kitty's stories for children, eventually moving on to full scale novels.⁹

Other women publicists, whose families were not wealthy in the first place, never married. Catharine Beecher made a career for herself both as a teacher, educational reformer and popular writer on domestic economy. Anne McDowell, about whom little appears to be known, was apparently paralysed in one leg from an adult illness, but nonetheless became proprietor and editor of her own paper, and then later the

employee of another. Still other publicists were widowed early in their lives and left with children to support : Sarah Hale, editor of the influential Godey's Ladies Book, was one, and she explained to her readers that "it was in the hope of gaining the means for their support and education that she engaged in the literary profession."¹⁰

Or marriage could be less successful in more ways than simply the financial: Jane Swisshelm's rather harrowing autobiography relates the emotional sterility as well as the financial insecurity of her unhappy marriage. Despite the birth of a long awaited child, she finally decided to leave her husband in 1857, having been for many years the only source of stable income in the family, both through sewing and later editing her own newspaper.¹¹ Eliza Farnham's life ran the entire breadth of experiences: boarded out as a child, receiving virtually no education, she married twice. First widowed in 1848 with children, she became the first woman matron of Sing Sing prison. Her second marriage, in 1852, lasted only four years, and so for most of her life she was self-supporting and she told her readers, "the press of circumstance has crowded me, during those years, into prospective affluence, and again reduced me to poverty."¹²

In fact, only a few of the women publicists were sufficiently financially secure to devote their attention to writing entirely out of choice, and even then those with several children, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, hardly qualify for the epithet of leisured, and were hard pressed to find the time.¹³ Understanding of the economic position of

women during this period has largely been based upon Gerda Lerner's thesis that after the 1830's women separated into two classes, "the lady and the mill girl".¹⁴ Certainly Lerner's contention that the recognition of class stratification at this time is essential to the understanding of the history of women is important. However, the evidence of this small group of women publicists would seem to indicate that the economic circumstances of women were more complex than that suggested by the two classes of the lady, and the mill girl.

The effect of working for a living upon the individual consciousness of the women publicists is harder to gauge, especially since they rarely discussed their own work. Certainly several of those who worked to support their families became the leading exponents of the view that woman was by nature unsuited for wage labour. At the same time, others, such as Jane Swisshelm, became more indifferent to public opinion as a result of their labours. In her autobiography Swisshelm pointed out that she wished:

to illustrate the force of education and the mutability of human character, by a personal narrative of one who, in 1836, would have broken an engagement rather than permit her name to appear in print, even in the announcement of marriage; and who, in 1850, had as much newspaper notoriety as any man of that time, and was singularly indifferent to the praise or blame of the press.¹⁵

Although eleven of the sixteen publicists considered here were forced to earn their own living, for at least part of their lives, few had in fact deliberately prepared themselves for a vocation, and most felt their education to have been quite inadequate, which undoubtedly

contributed to the almost unanimous stress laid upon improving the quality of education available to women. Many of the publicists were educated at home by their mothers, and spent at most a year or two at the district school.

However, a home education was not necessarily a poor one: Sarah Grimke was educated with her brothers (although her father put his foot down on the question of Latin), as was Elizabeth Cady Stanton.¹⁶ After having gone as far as she could at Johnstown Academy, and being unable to follow the boys to college (Oberlin did not open its doors until three years later, in 1833), Stanton was sent to Emma Willard's Seminary at Troy to complete her education with French, Music and Dancing. Later in her life, she swore, "if there is any one thing on earth from which I pray to God to save my daughters ... it is a girl's seminary."¹⁷ Margaret Fuller, who was destined to become one of New England's most eminent Transcendental intellectuals, was subjected to an intense rigorous classical education by her father; Caroline Dall received the same attention from her father, being taught the alphabet by the time she was eighteen months old.¹⁸ So the publicists experienced the extremes of educational opportunities, from virtually none at all, to the equivalent of a good masculine education up to college entrance.

Just as their educational background varied a good deal, so did their religious affiliation. Many of the women publicists changed their denomination at least once during their lives, a few leaving the fold of organised religion altogether. Eliza Farnham came to the conclusion that

"there is not in existence, nor has there ever been, a Church which has had its origin in any intelligent understanding of the human being." It was not woman, but man, "who declared that a lake, burning forever with liquid sulphur, was kept open for all the race of man, except half a score elected from a million."¹⁹ Such revulsion from the tenets of orthodox Calvinism was shared by nearly every publicist, regardless of which sect they chose to join, but such 'liberation' was usually accompanied by a good deal of spiritual pain. Paulina Wright Davis spoke for many of her fellow publicists when she wrote:

I was not a happy child, nor a happy woman, until in mature life, I outgrew my early religious faith, and felt free to think and act from my own convictions.²⁰

The conversion experience expected in most evangelical sects proved to be another requirement with which some publicists could not comply. Jane Swisshelm, asked at sixteen years of age if she was ready to join the Church, found that, "I could not submit to God's will ... then oh! the total depravity which could question 'the ways of God to man'."²¹ And the struggle between Lyman Beecher, the noted evangelical minister, and his daughter Catharine over her conversion has been well documented by Katherine Kish Sklar; Catharine never did undergo conversion, and eventually she moved to the Episcopalian Church, a move echoed by several other publicists.²²

The relative popularity of the Episcopalian Church at this time has been attributed, by Ann Douglas, to its edge in prestige over other denominations. Further, for anyone torn by doctrinal doubts, the emphasis

of the Episcopalians upon the institutional and social aspects of faith was less demanding.²³ Other publicists never found a religious 'home' at all. Sarah Grimke relinquished her childhood faith of Presbyterianism in favour of the Quakers - a drastic move for the daughter of a wealthy Southern family - and moved to Philadelphia. But the authoritarianism of the Friends, and their refusal to oppose slavery categorically, gradually alienated her and towards the end of her life she became fascinated by spiritualism.²⁴

Whatever their denomination, or absence thereof, the intricacies of theological debate do not appear to play a significant role in the writings of the publicists. They drew both upon revealed religion - the Bible - and natural theology as sources of divine authority, and despite their almost universal disenchantment with Calvinism, it continued to exercise a potent effect upon their thinking. An example of this can be seen in the way that the idea of a chosen elect among mankind was transferred in the thoughts and writings of many of the publicists to the collective mission of womanhood, to woman's role in purifying American society and leading it closer to God.

Participation in the reform movements of the day was to be very influential in catapulting some of the women publicists into their careers. This is especially so of those women whose economic status was more secure: Sarah Grimke, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amelia Bloomer and Paulina Wright Davis. The first three women, Grimke, Mott and Stanton, were all involved in the anti-slavery movement through which they became

aware of the restrictions upon women's participation, brought home sharply by the refusal of the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London, England, to admit women as delegates in 1840. These were the publicists likely to be found writing and lecturing on behalf of several reforms, and lecturing on the popular lyceum circuit could be lucrative, as Amelia Bloomer was to discover. Once, when lecturing on temperance, she was asked what her fee would be; she decided to ask the same amount as that paid to Horace Mann, the noted New England education reformer, the previous week and despite the surprise of her hosts that a woman should request the same fee as a man, she received it.²⁵

Amelia Bloomer had begun her career as a publicist in the temperance movement, and in fact her paper, The Lily, was conceived initially as an exclusively temperance publication. But it very quickly succumbed to Bloomer's own burgeoning interest in the "Woman Question", on which it remained a steadfast advocate of woman's rights and so provoked the ire of the local gazette in Ohio that, when commenting upon the Lily's move there in 1853, the editor remarked, "Lily! thou shouldst have been called crow-bar, sledge-hammer, quartz-crusher, or by some other name..."²⁶

Of the seventeen women publicists, seven published through a newspaper or journal, monthly and weekly, and were in some cases both proprietor and editor. Bloomer's The Lily was a more or less local affair until the notoriety of her espousal of a new form of dress, known as the Bloomer costume although it did not originate with her, pushed her subscription list over 6,000 in 1853.²⁷ Within the second year of her Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter [sic], Jane Swisshelm achieved much the same circulation,

although her paper never endorsed any reform movement, and was in fact rather hostile to the woman's rights conventions in particular.²⁸ But the debate on the "Woman Question" was ineluctable, and the paper gradually became the vehicle for Jane Swisshelm's views on the subject.

Neither The Una, owned and edited by Paulina Wright Davis, nor The Woman's Advocate, owned and edited by Anne McDowell, appear to have had such large subscription lists, although many of the publicists subscribed to both.²⁹ The Una was published in Rhode Island, and carried as its motto, "Devoted to the interests of Woman"; after a year or so of publication, Davis found the editorial and writing commitments too onerous on her own, and Caroline Dall became co-editor of the paper. The Woman's Advocate was published from Philadelphia and had the distinction of being the first paper to have all its typesetting and printing work done by women, "who are paid the standard prices of the men's typographical union."³⁰ Anne McDowell came under fire from the woman's rights movement for her failure to emphasize the importance of suffrage in her paper, but although she was not opposed to the vote, she felt that the question of woman's labour and fair recompense were far more fundamental to woman's well-being, and consequently her paper focussed on these issues. Despite her interest in, and sympathy for, the "industrial classes" of women however, McDowell's paper was largely directed towards the employer class and middle-class philanthropic women.

Although often these papers were short-lived, from two to five years, these publicists had usually begun the paper themselves, running into

debt to do so, and carrying on despite considerable odds. They closely identified with their papers, never willingly relinquishing them; Amelia Bloomer only gave up the Lily when her husband decided to move as far west as Council Bluff, Iowa, in 1856, beyond the reach of the railroad. Sadly she told her readers that her husband, "on his return home last month ... made known to us his purpose of making western Iowa our future home, and that he had made arrangements to remove thither early in the spring"³¹

However, the doyen of the newspaper editors among the women publicists is undoubtedly Sarah Hale, who was invited to take over the editorship of Godey's Ladies Book in 1837. When she arrived at the journal, the circulation was 10,000; by 1860 she had raised it to 150,000.³² Aimed solely at a feminine audience, Godey's concentrated upon fashion and fiction, much of the latter being written by American women authors. But through the medium of the Editor's Table in every issue, Sarah Hale expounded her views on the nature and place of woman. She was also author of a popular two volume history of women, entitled, Woman's Record, which purported to contain "the picture of Woman's Life, as it has been developed to the world from the Creation to the present date." But the intention of the book was less historical description, and more prescriptive as Hale openly confessed in the introduction; she was "hoping the examples shown and characters portrayed, might have an inspiration and power in advancing the moral progress of society."³³

A similar prescriptive intent was behind most of the books published by these women on the nature of woman, although the changes advocated were far from unanimous. But the reading public remained less interested in their prescriptive works than in their other writings - being a successful novelist, as was Elizabeth Oakes Smith, did not ensure that her non-fictional work sold well. Any fiction, travel writings, or discussion of domestic economy could run through several editions, whereas didactic literature on the nature of woman would be lucky to make two. One of the most prolific writers among the publicists, Catharine Beecher, did a great deal better with her works on domestic economy; her Domestic Receipt Book ran through some ten editions between 1846 and 1872, but The Duty of American Women to their Country was limited to one edition, in 1845. Again, Eliza Farnham's travel books from the West, especially her Life in Prairie Land ran through five editions between 1848 and 1868, but her life work, the two volume Woman and Her Era made only two editions. Nonetheless, achieving more than one printing with this type of book was rare, and Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century qualifies as a bestseller in this limited contest, with five editions between 1845 and 1860, and many more later in the century.³⁴ When Fuller finally published Woman in the Nineteenth Century in 1845, "the whole edition was sold off in a week to the booksellers and \$85 handed to me as my share", a fact she couldn't help but feel indicated a measure of success.³⁵

In whatever form they chose to publish their views, either through newspapers, journals or full-length books, the publicists shared certain intellectual preoccupations, especially that of science, that are also found more widely among many of their contemporaries. Yet while their definitions of womanhood drew upon that espoused by doctors, ministers and reformers, the publicists also enlarged upon or differed from these views in important ways. What is, however, of most significance are the distinctions that emerge in the work of the women publicists themselves. Certainly they were aware of the differences among themselves since most were aware of, and familiar with, the writings of the others.

Between Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Sarah Hale there was no love lost; both knew that their ideas were diametrically opposed. Stanton called Hale a, "thoroughly politic and time-serving woman",³⁶ and Hale responded by excluding Stanton completely from her supposedly comprehensive Woman's Record. Sarah Hale did not stop at that; she had only harsh words for those whose ideas were not in accordance with her own. Margaret Fuller's work would not last, according to Hale, and nature was stronger than Lucretia Mott's reasoning. But those with whom she was in agreement drew eulogies: Catharine Beecher had several pages devoted to her, and both Maria McIntosh and Margaret Coxe drew favourable commendations.³⁷ Of course, personal dislikes could prevail over shared philosophies, and the other way around. Stanton in particular tended to be suspicious of all her fellow reformers; writing to Susan B. Anthony, the incomparable organiser of the woman's rights movement, she commented,

"you must take Mrs Bloomer's suggestions with great caution, for she has not the spirit of a true reformer."³⁸ Yet Bloomer's own writings share very closely Stanton's ideas on the definition of womanhood. And despite great differences in opinion, Stanton could not help liking Jane G. Swisshelm, "although she is forever saying something we wish unsaid."³⁹

The only historian to have paid attention to the definition of womanhood at this time is Barbara Welter, in her seminal article, "The Cult of True Womanhood". Drawing upon "women's magazines, gift annuals and religious literature", Welter found four characteristics commonly used to define the concept of "true womanhood", and these were: "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity".⁴⁰ While these themes occur also in the writings of the publicists, they were frequently modified by the publicists' own experience, particularly the themes of submissiveness and domesticity. Further, placing women writers in their nineteenth century intellectual context has only just begun, with a pioneering study by Susan P. Conrad exploring the impact of Romanticism upon mid-century women intellectuals and how it enabled them to reconcile their active literary lives with the concept of "true womanhood".⁴¹

By Conrad's own definition, two particular features of Romanticism are important: the first, that Romanticism "relocated the source of value and order from the external world to the perceiving self, investing it with an almost divine authority", and the second, that "diversity, not uniformity, characterised the universe." Conrad then proceeds to argue that these two ideas encouraged women to enter the fields of literature,

art and education for they could do so without compromising their womanhood. But a close reading of the writings of some of her women intellectuals, those who are also included in this study, illustrates that frequently neither of the two ideas that Conrad posits as crucial Romantic tenets are exhibited in their work. For example, Sarah Hale specifically repudiated German romantic thought:

Yet why is all this enthusiasm for German? This peculiar reverence for its unpronounceable vocabularies, and unfathomable philosophy? Where all is mysticism, nothing can be clear.⁴²

Her writings reveal a clear commitment to the idea of a divinely-sanctioned order in the universe, from which she drew authority for her beliefs, and a pluralist universe was outside her comprehension. On the other hand, Margaret Fuller was directly influenced by the German romantics, especially Goethe, as a young woman, and it led to terrible conflict between her belief in the supremacy of the individual consciousness, and her acceptance of certain innate feminine characteristics. Unfortunately Conrad fails to show how the central tenets of Romanticism really touched the thinking of a woman writer such as Sarah Hale, while tending to ignore the distinct differences of thought among her group of women intellectuals.

However, in a perceptive article entitled, "Victorian Science and the 'Genius' of Woman", Flavia Alaya suggests that the impact of scientific ideas in the nineteenth century was the most potent intellectual influence upon the debate over the nature and place of woman. She refers to:

the impact of nineteenth century science, which gave such vigorous and persuasive reinforcement to the traditional dogmatic view of sexual character that it not only strengthened the opposition to feminism but disengaged the ideals of feminists themselves from their philosophic roots.⁴³

Alaya suggests that the philosophical tenets of feminism are traceable from Wollstonecraft (1792), through Mill (1869), to de Beauvoir (1953), and that these tenets are integral with "the existential ideal of human freedom synonymous with power over self, and thus [opposes] those theories that would prescribe any limits allegedly imposed by 'nature' on human personality or human potential."⁴⁴ The effect of scientific ideas, according to Alaya, was to create a "discontinuity" in feminist thought, that emerged during Mill's lifetime. The writings of the American publicists suggest, however, that the impact of science was felt early in the 1840's, and that it had the immediate effect of clarifying the terms of the debate over the "Woman Question".

The definitions of womanhood employed by the sixteen publicists fall into three categories; the conservative, liberal and radical. The conservatives formed the largest single group, eight of the publicists: Catharine Beecher, Margaret Coxe, Hannah Tracy Cutler, Paulina Wright Davis, Eliza Farnham, Sarah Hale, Maria McIntosh and Jane G. Swisshelm. Of these publicists, Cutler, Davis and Farnham participated in the woman's rights movement, and Swisshelm endorsed some of its aims. The theory of womanhood subscribed to by the conservative publicists can best be described as functionalist and physiologically determinist; that is,

woman's nature, both physical and mental, rested upon natural laws different from those governing the nature of man. It was essentially an argument from design and began with the question of what purpose woman was designed to fulfill.

The liberal publicists number only three: Caroline Dall, Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Oakes Smith.⁴⁵ Fuller was in Italy when the woman's rights movement began, and died only two years later on her way back to America, but both Dall and Smith were active in the cause of woman's rights. These women shared very much the same philosophical basis for their definition of womanhood as that of the conservative publicists, but tempered with a flexibility that would permit the rare, exceptionally talented woman to escape the strictures imposed on the female sex as a result of that definition.

Disputing the manner in which the conservatives and liberals employed both the Bible and science are the group of five radical publicists, Amelia Bloomer, Sarah Grimke, Anne McDowell, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, of whom only Anne McDowell stood apart from the woman's rights movement. The radicals argued that it was the environment, family and society, that moulded woman's nature and they denied the existence of a fundamental sexual dualism in the natural world.

The two sources towards which they all looked for authoritative evidence were woman's past, both Biblical and secular, and the findings of contemporary science. But since both were the work of an omnipotent God, it is to His revelation and the subsequent history of woman that the publicists turned to first of all.

NOTES

1

The Liberator, vol. 7, no. 33 (August 11, 1837), p. 129. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, American Periodical Series 1800-1850, reel 392.

2

The Saturday Visiter, vol. 4, no. 54 (November 22, 1851), p. 202. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Company, reel 1.

3

The criteria for selecting the women publicists chosen for inclusion in this study are as follows:

- a) the publicists must be verifiably American.
- b) they must have published, either through a series of newspaper articles, editorials, or a book, an analysis of the nature and role of woman, between the years 1838-1864. Fiction, histories, travelogues did not qualify the author for inclusion, although the publicist may well have also written these. The intent was to isolate a body of work devoted specifically to both an empirical and a philosophical analysis of woman's nature that may yield a better comprehension of the determinants of women's thinking at the time of the inception of the woman's rights movement. See Appendix 'A' for a detailed breakdown of the sixteen women publicists chosen for inclusion in this study.

4

Nancy Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 5; Ellen DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America 1848-1869 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 5; Keith E. Melder, Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman's Rights Movement, 1800-1850 (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), pp. 1, 8-10, 129.

5

Barbara J. Berg, The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 244; see also, Glenda Gates Riley, "The Subtle Subversion: Changes in the Traditionalist Image of the American Woman", The Historian, 32 (1969): 227; this idea has continued despite the warning by Rosalind Rosenberg, "In Search of Woman's Nature, 1850-1920", Feminist Studies, 3 (1975): 142, "in focusing on feminists' demands for equal rights, historians have generally assumed that women were fighting to be like men and have overlooked their shared preoccupation with female uniqueness."

6

DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, pp. 16-17.

7

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., History of Woman Suffrage, 6 vols. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1881-1922), 1:679.

8

See Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson", American Studies Journal, 10 (1969): 11; and Susan J. Kleinberg's introduction to D.C. Bloomer, Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. viii.

9

For all subsequent biographical information, except where otherwise noted, see Edward T. James, ed., Notable American Women, 1607-1950, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Balknap Press, 1971).

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Mrs Sarah J. Hale, Woman's Record; or, Sketches of all Distinguished Women from the Creation to A.D. 1868 Arranged in Four Eras, 3rd Ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1870), p. 686.

11

Jane Grey Swisshelm, Half a Century (Chicago: Jansen, McClung and Co., 1880).

12

Eliza W. Farnham, Woman and Her Era, 2 vols. (New York: A.J. Davis and Co., 1864; New Haven, Conn.: Research Publications Inc., History of Women, reel 326), 1:vi.

13

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Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Avon Books, 1977), p. 111; also, Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 30. The Episcopalian Church grew in membership by 46% between 1855 and 1865.

24

Lerner, The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina, p. 68.

25

Bloomer, Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer, p. 172.

26

Quoted in The Lily, vol. 6, no. 3 (February 1854), p. 22. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, reel 1.

27

Bloomer, Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer, p. 68.

28

Swisshelm, Half A Century, p. 162.

29

For example, Sarah Grimké subscribed to both The Una and The Lily, see Lerner, The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina, p. 335.

30

The Woman's Advocate, vol. 1, no. 40 (October 13, 1855). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, reel 1.

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Information on numbers of editions drawn from The National Union Catalogue (London: Mansell Information/Publishing Company, 1978).

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Mason Wade, The Writings of Margaret Fuller (New York: The Viking Press, 1941), p. 575.

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Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860", American Quarterly, 18 (1966): 152.

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43

Flavia Alaya, "Victorian Science and the 'Genius' of Woman", Journal of the History of Ideas, 38 (1977): 261-262. See also Elizabeth Fee, "The Sexual Politics of Victorian Social Anthropology", in Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women, Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner, eds., (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), pp. 86-102.

44

Alaya, "Victorian Science and the 'Genius' of Woman", p. 261.

45

The use of the term "liberals" for those women publicists who espoused aspects of both conservative and radical thought in this context does not imply that these women subscribed to the entire political philosophy traditionally associated with liberalism, although their commitment to the cause of individual freedom does make the term appropriate.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GREATEST SUFFERER

Writing in 1849, Hannah Tracy Cutler declared that woman, "being the first to transgress, and mar the moral harmony of God's works ... justly became the greatest sufferer."¹ That woman was indeed "the greatest sufferer" all the publicists could agree; but the nature of her suffering, and whether it was just, were matters of considerable disagreement. In the search for the cause of woman's unhappy condition, the conservative publicists turned first of all to the Bible: had God created woman the inferior sex; was her unhappy history the just punishment for her role in mankind's fall from grace, as Hannah Tracy Cutler believed? Or had the Bible been misinterpreted by man, when he argued that God had made woman the weaker vessel? The publicists combed Genesis for evidence of God's intentions for woman at both the Creation and the Fall. Ultimately the re-interpretation of Biblical events led a few publicists to deny the divine origin of the Bible, describing it as a creation of man himself, and consequently reflecting his own prejudices.

The idea of masculine prejudice was also applied by the publicists to the study of secular history. However diverse their findings might eventually turn out to be, about the causes and nature of woman's suffering, the publicists were agreed upon two things: the importance of insight into the history of humanity for the understanding of woman's

true nature, for as Caroline Dall, the self-appointed historian of The Una wrote in 1855, "without reading the past clearly it is impossible to go to the root of present evils",² and secondly, for this insight to be achieved by the work of women themselves, for nearly all the publicists profoundly distrusted masculine objectivity. A striking example of this distrust is apparent when the conservative and radical publicists could unite in a general abhorrence of Milton's literary interpretation of Biblical events. "This much admired sentimental nonsense is fraught with absurdity and wickedness", wrote Sarah Grimké of Paradise Lost,³ and Sarah Hale reiterated, "go not to Milton, or the Fathers, but to the word of God."⁴

Sarah Hale took her own advice, and devoted a great deal of her attention towards re-interpreting biblical events and injunctions, as did many of her fellow-conservative publicists. Calling the Bible "Woman's Magna Charter",⁵ Hale turned her attention initially to the events of Genesis, for if the divine intentions were to be found anywhere, she argued, it would be at the Creation and the Fall:

It is only when we analyse the record of the particular process of Creation, and the history of the fall, and its punishment, that we can learn what were the peculiar characteristics of man and woman as each came from the hand of God.⁶

This interest in the creation of Eve was not merely an academic curiosity on the part of Hale, for she believed that these events were of crucial importance to women of her own time. Eve's history, she wrote, "in the sacred book, is told in few words; but the mighty consequences of her life will be felt through time, and through eternity."⁷

Hale returns time and time again to two specific problems in connection with the story of the Creation. The first was the manner in which woman had been created; while man was made from dust, woman had been formed from man. For Hale this difference represented the key to the crucial distinguishing traits of male and female character. Formed from the materials of the earth, man was inextricably tied to the material plane of life, whereas woman, being formed from man, was one step nearer the spiritual. In an interesting passage mixing scientific and religious metaphors, Hale uses the story of the Creation to prove woman's greater refinement, even her superiority to man. "When created", she wrote, "man and woman were unlike in three important respects":⁸

- 1st. The mode of their creation was different.
- 2nd. The materials* from which each was formed were unlike.
- 3rd. The functions for which each were designed were dissimilar,
*Chemically tested, their bodily elements were similar;
like diamond from carbon, woman had been formed from man⁹

From this process, Hale concluded, "the man seems to have represented strength, the woman beauty; he reason, she feeling; he knowledge, she wisdom; he the material or earthly, she the spiritual or heavenly in human nature."¹⁰

Consequently the second problem, closely linked to the first, to which Hale often returned, was that of the sequence of creation - did man's precedence here imply superiority? Hale was adamant that it did not; in fact she argued, as did other conservative publicists, that every step of the creation had represented an advance over the one before, and therefore woman was the pinnacle, the highest and finest of the Lord's works:

Every step in the creation had been in the ascending scale. Was the last retrograde? It must have been, unless woman's nature was more refined, pure, spiritual, a nearer assimilation with the angelic, a link in the chain connecting earth with heaven, more elevated than the nature of man.¹¹

It was this very perfection that had drawn the Devil, Hannah Tracy Cutler wrote, since woman represented "the most finished of all God's works,"¹² and because she was "the spiritual leader, the most difficult to be won."¹³

How then, did the conservative publicists reconcile their conviction of Eve's superiority with her role in the Fall, her capitulation to the Devil? Essentially there were two responses: the first re-interpreted the event to put Eve in a better light, and the second accepted Eve's actions as a lapse from obedience for which she and future generations of women had paid. Hale subscribed to the first response. Her re-interpretation of the Fall suggested that man and woman had sinned from different motives, and in the process paradoxically refuting man's characteristics of strength and reason. Woman's sin had been a "desire for knowledge", whereas man had eaten the apple offered by Eve purely to gratify his "sensuous inclinations."¹⁴

he ate because his wife gave him the fruit. Precisely such conduct we might expect from a lower nature towards a higher; compliance without reason or from inferior considerations.¹⁵

What is particularly interesting about Hale's interpretation of the Creation and the Fall is her suggestion that it was Adam, not God, that decreed that woman's principal role should be motherhood, and that this took place after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden: "then it was that

Adam gave to woman her specific name - Eve, or the Mother ... Thus was motherhood predicated as the true field of woman's mission."¹⁶ This separates the highest function intended for woman - that of her moral influence - from her maternal duties, a distinction that is found in the writings of other conservative publicists.

Eliza Farnham also came up with a more favourable interpretation of the sequence of events leading to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. But in the process of formulating her own interpretation, she came to feel a far greater scepticism about the origin of the Bible than any of the other conservative publicists. But this did not prevent her from attempting to show that man's understanding of woman's role in the fall of mankind was false, since she saw that a belief in woman's nefarious role lay "near the foundation of almost every religious faith entertained in Christendom."¹⁷ Her first argument lay in the paucity of the evidence to prove Eve's guilt:

if it be urged that Eve did violate a command, both reason and the enlightened religious sentiment have the right to inquire where are the proofs? Can a few words of doubtful authenticity, a mere fragment of a book¹⁸

really be considered sufficient to indict woman throughout all time, she asked? The question was rhetorical, for from the way the question is phrased it is clear that she did not believe it was. But neither was it enough she wrote, to simply suggest "that Genesis is a fable which will by-and-by fall to pieces of itself."¹⁹ No, the clearest evidence to vindicate Eve lay in examining the consequences of her act. The result

of Eve's disobedience, Farnham argued, was beneficial to mankind, for it was "she whose moral courage opened up the door of a career to humanity leading up to heaven"²⁰ Since the ability to make a distinction between good and evil is essential if man is to attain moral growth, and Eve's disobedience paved the way, Farnham felt it was therefore legitimate to question whether God had indeed ever forbidden Adam and Eve to taste the fruit in the first place:

Disobedience to a divine law must result in evil. If good comes of the act, we are not simply to question the divinity of the law; we are bound, in reverence to its reputed Author, to deny that it came from him.²¹

But most of the conservative publicists did not take their desire to re-interpret the Bible as far as repudiation of its divine origin. Both Margaret Coxe and Hannah Tracy Cutler, while sure of woman's superior moral nature as derived from the hand of God, nonetheless accepted the divine indictment of woman following her capitulation to the Devil, and argued that her condition throughout history, and in their own contemporary society, was the consequence of that fatal act, "the fruit of her disobedience."²² The only recourse for woman, according to these two conservative publicists, was "perfect submission to God's law", and acceptance of the ruling that "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."²³ Most certainly the descendents of Eve should not presume to challenge their fate, for to do so was "to arraign the conduct of her judge",²⁴ and anyway, his decisions were final:

God's purposes towards the female sex will necessarily remain as immutable and permanent as any others formed by his unchangeable mind, and can never be counteracted with impunity.²⁵

The purposes to which Coxe refers are established at length in the first part of her two volume Claims of the Country Upon American Females. For Coxe too, Eve represented an advance in the steps of the Creation, "one advanced, rather than degraded below her predecessor in destiny", and despite her role in the Fall, Coxe firmly maintained that woman was not "'a vessel formed for dishonor'; and appointed to an inferior mission under the divine economy".²⁶ Convinced that God had created woman with a special purpose, not in the material universe but in the moral, Coxe wrote, "to Him, therefore, let us look in humble confidence, beseeching Him to show the daughters of America the place he has designed them to fill in his moral universe"²⁷

Coxe did not, however, completely separate woman's position in the material world, from that she was supposed to fulfill in the moral. Her physical subordination to man, Coxe believed, was especially designed to promote those very feminine and Christian virtues of piety, humility, gentleness, love, purity, self-renunciation and subjection of will:

We firmly believe that the circumstances in which woman has been placed are, when viewed aright, and by the grace of God duly improved, powerfully calculated to develope [sic] and foster those Christian virtues which the Word of God specifies as the most important attributes of the renewed nature²⁸

And through the exercise of these virtues, woman was in the position to save mankind, morally regenerate society and bring man himself closer to God. Coxe's work abounds in the imagery of battle, for example the "artillery" of a wife leading her husband closer to God.²⁹ The parallel between woman's mission on earth, and the character and mission of Jesus is quite clear, and indeed explicit references to the similarity between

Jesus and Woman are not infrequent in the writings of the conservative publicists. Sarah Hale exulted that woman had "the high honour of a human nature akin to that of Jesus Christ",³⁰ and the picture evoked by both Coxe and Hale of woman redeeming America is a powerful one in all the writings of the conservative publicists. In a sense, the Calvinist belief in an "elect" appears almost to have been transferred by these publicists to the nature and role of woman. Just as the elect were chosen by God, so the conservative publicists saw woman as chosen by God to fulfill his moral purposes on earth.

Since, therefore, woman had been chosen by divine authority to fulfill a specific spiritual mission on earth, it is not surprising to find Hale asserting that "it should ever be borne in mind that a higher degree of moral power ought to be found in the character of woman, in whatever station she occupies, than is manifested by man."³¹ However, the lengths to which she would go in Woman's Record to defend this assertion confounded even some of her contemporaries. Few publicists attempted to exonerate Delilah, but for Hale even Delilah's story becomes the "history of woman's spiritual nature over the physical strength and mental powers of man."³² The story of Deborah was one of the most popular among conservative publicists looking for exemplars of feminine behaviour in the Bible; in a time of extreme danger Deborah assumed the leadership of her people and led them to safety, the aspect of her life that Stanton for one, a radical publicist, chose to emphasize.³³ But Hale selected Deborah's identification with motherhood as her most noble trait:

How beautiful is her character shown in the title she assumed for herself! Not "Judge", "Heroine", "Prophetess", though she was all these, but she chose the tender name of "Mother", as the highest style of woman³⁴

However, not all conservative publicists were prepared to find evidence of woman's superior moral nature in the story of any and every woman in the Bible. Paulina Wright Davis for one deplored the "value judgments" attached to each entry in Hale's book.³⁵ Davis is an unusual conservative publicist in that she prevaricated over whether woman's different nature from that of man implied superiority. Her writings are eclectic and erratic in argument, but nonetheless she did subscribe to a belief in a rigid sexual dualism throughout nature and mankind. She tried to argue that while man and woman were different, neither was superior to the other; however, as the next chapter will illustrate, her attempt at some sort of neutrality on the question often failed. In her study of the Bible, though, she was firm that the examples of womanhood within it did not prove woman's moral superiority; she herself "looked through the bible to see if the women of olden time were higher morally than the men,"³⁶ but did not find them so:

We find Judith with the head of Holoferness going out at evening to pray, we find Sisera driving a nail through the temple of her guest, before whom she had set food, and Bathsheba conspiring with David against Uria, and Rebecca lying and deceiving her husband for her favourite.³⁷

The histories of individual women in the Bible could cause problems for the conservative publicists, but generally they saw Christianity as effecting a great improvement in the condition of woman. Writing about Hebrew women of the Bible, Margaret Coxe concluded:

In each and all we find the moral agency of woman infinitely transcending both in kind and degree, that which was exerted by the sex among the most intellectual heathen races of antiquity.³⁸

For Coxe, even Christianity was too wide a term, for in a chapter entitled "Defective Creeds", she argues that under Catholicism women are unable to use the moral influence their Creator gave them as their most important attribute; in France, for example, "as God's moral agents [women] have effected little for the best little for the best interests of humanity ... they have failed to accomplish the object designed in their creation."³⁹

Only through Protestantism could woman fulfil her purpose as God's agent on earth, and Margaret Fuller was not above poking a little fun at men and women, such as Coxe, who despite their earnest desire to re-interpret parts of the Bible more favourably towards woman, would nonetheless defend it as woman's greatest safeguard:

the man most narrow towards women will be flushed, as by the worst assault on Christianity, if you say it has made no improvement in her condition.⁴⁰

Contrary to the conservative publicists, the liberal publicists such as Fuller did not devote much space in their writings to a detailed examination and analysis of the Bible. Elizabeth Oakes Smith dismissed the importance of the curse and exile from the Garden of Eden as having been superceded by the testimony of Jesus, and his law of love.⁴¹ And in keeping with the liberal publicists' emphasis upon the right of each individual to develop his or her own talents, Smith wrote, "when God created me, I will not believe he bestowed a single power which he did not design me legitimately

to use."⁴² Margaret Fuller found the Bible inconsistent in its portrayal of womanhood, one the one hand elevating, on the other denigrating, woman:

The severe nation which taught that the happiness of the race was forfeited through the fault of a Woman ... even they greeted, with solemn rapture, all great and holy women as heroines, prophetesses, judges in Israel; and, if they made Eve listen to the serpent, gave Mary as a bride to the Holy Spirit.⁴³

Likewise Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the most prolific of all the radical publicists, though she was far more inclined to lump the Bible together with the rest of man's literary efforts in which were to be found only a dismal recital of feminine examples:

from the Bible down to Mother Goose's melodies, how much complacency, think you, you would feel in your womanhood? The philosopher, the poet, and the saint, all combine to make the name of woman synonymous with either fool or devil⁴⁴

However, two of the older radical publicists, Lucretia Mott and Sarah Grimké, did in their early writings offer alternative interpretations of the Biblical texts. Lucretia Mott told her readers that careful reading of the Bible would provide women with a quite different understanding of the roles of the sexes:

Those who read the Scriptures, and judge for themselves, not resting satisfied with the perverted application of the text, do not find the distinction, that theology and ecclesiastical authorities have made, in the conditions of the sexes.⁴⁵

The arguments put forward by these two Quakers were directed more towards the divine commandments, dealing with the question of woman's subjection in this world, rather than any debate about her affinity with the next.

Grimké suggested that God's command to man in the Bible had been directed towards both sexes, and applicable to both, since man was "a generic term including man and woman", and anyway they had both been "created in perfect equality ... both made in the image of God."⁴⁶ As for the incident of the Fall, it only served to show Grimké the weakness of both sexes, for "there was as much weakness exhibited by Adam as by Eve."⁴⁷ But what really captured her attention was the translation made of God's judgement, "thou wilt be subject to thy husband, and he will rule over thee." Grimké was convinced that this passage had been incorrectly translated, "and thus converted a prediction to Eve into a command to Adam."⁴⁸ Presumably the crucial difference here between a prediction and a command is one of moral content: Grimké was convinced God had only predicted what would happen, rather than commanding the course of events in the future. And as for the injunctions of the Apostle Paul about women, Grimké had little patience: "I believe his mind was under the influence of Jewish prejudices respecting women ...", and she refused to give them much credence.⁴⁹

Although the significance attached to the Bible varied greatly among the publicists, the outlines of the conservative, liberal and radical positions on the nature of womanhood have begun to emerge. The conservatives were far more inclined to accept, even if to re-interpret, the Bible, and all found within it evidence of woman's different, and usually superior moral nature to have been determined at the very Creation. However, both the liberal and radical publicists were less inclined to

devote much attention to Biblical teachings, often regarding the Bible largely as a product of man himself, not of divine inspiration, and consequently reflecting man's own prejudices. The liberals pointed to the inconsistency with which the Bible portrayed womanhood, while the radicals denied the blanket distinctions of sex claimed by the conservatives.

Much the same positions can be found when examining the writings of the publicists on the secular history of mankind. Here both the conservative and liberal publicists shared a common fascination with the stories of ancient civilisations and their mythology. Eliza Farnham complained that with both Christianity and Mythology, the ideal and the reality had been far apart, for "while his [man] sentiment exalted woman to the rank of a superior, his belief and conduct have degraded her to the actual position of an inferior."⁵⁰ But despite this dichotomy between myth and reality, she found a great deal of consolation in the "very general uniformity with which the feminine ... is assigned to the control of the spiritual, the essential, the imperishable" in mythology, whereas the masculine was assigned that "of the present, the transitory, the external, the sensual."⁵¹ Illustrating her point, she drew up a list for readers of feminine symbols. Earth, Spring, Summer and Autumn were all female, while Winter, "stern, fixed, unfruitful" was male; even Justice, "that very masculine principle" she wrote tongue in cheek, was represented by the feminine.⁵²

Margaret Fuller was in full agreement, for "whatever may have been the domestic manners of the ancient nations, the idea of woman was nobly

manifested in their mythologies and poems⁵³ Mythology came to be seen by both the conservative and liberal publicists as evidence of a primitive recognition of the eternal verities of woman's nature:

In the Pythia of Delphi, the Syballai and Vestates of Rome, before whom the wisest and proudest citizens were compelled to bow in reverential homage, we may read an instinctive impression that woman was commissioned to guard the most sacred elements of our common nature⁵⁴

For Margaret Fuller, woman was the repository of mankind's creative impulse in the widest sense, "the electrical, the magnetic element",⁵⁵ as she describes it in Woman in the Nineteenth Century. "There are two aspects of woman's nature", she wrote in another passage, "represented by the ancients as Muse and Minerva"; the Muse represented "unimpeded clearness of the intuitive powers", and Minerva representing wisdom.⁵⁶ This fondness for the myths and legends of the past, rather than the lives that women in the past had actually lived, is particularly evident among the liberal publicists; Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Oakes Smith who were major liberal theorists, did after all see themselves first and foremost as literary women.

But the idea that woman's true history would not be found in the conventional concerns of historians was shared by all the publicists; history must rise above its past obsession with wars and diplomacy, wrote Eliza Farnham, and concern itself with "human progress in its finer and subtler leadings ... the plane of psychical motives and forces, where she has her stage of influences."⁵⁷ Equally the publicists were agreed that women must take the interpretation of the past into their own hands, and

Caroline Dall was one of the first to undertake the task. She is the only publicist to attempt to define the work of the historian, and unlike Sarah Hale she deplored the attempt to launder woman's past: "in books, goodness is rewarded, vice unsuccessful, ... But is it so in Life? ... is it not right, when one knows such lives are lived, to sketch them truly and forcibly, so as to reveal humanity to itself."⁵⁸

Dall suggested that historians were of two kinds: "seekers", who "collect, collate, test, and simplify material", and "observers", who make use of this material "and permit philosophic thought, general knowledge, and rare culture, to do their work with the accumulations so brought together."⁵⁹ Unfortunately, she felt that women had confined themselves to the role of "seekers" and she made a start at rectifying this imbalance. Dall's new feminine approach to woman's history interpreted the past through a theory of woman's influence, rather than active participation, in worldly affairs. Their influence had been of several kinds, she concluded, and examples that she gave were Margaret Fuller's "atmospheric" influence, the Duchess of Devonshire's "literary influence", and Lady Hamilton's other sort of influence, "frequently of the worst kind, and almost always blended with political ... that of women over their lovers."⁶⁰ In the plurality of her categories, Dall places herself among the liberals, but in her emphasis upon feminine influence, with implications of a distinct and separate feminine nature, overtly disapproving of, for example, the search for power in the political world, Dall places herself securely among the conservatives.

Dall's favourite heroine of history, and one she shared with several other radical publicists too, was Madame de Stael:

it is seldom that the varied faculties of the human soul, developed through the profoundest apprehension of Nature, Poetry, and Art, are exhibited in a single human being as they were in Anna Louisa Germaine Necker, Baronne de Stael-Holstein.⁶¹

The name of Madame de Stael (1766-1817) appears time and time again in the writings of the publicists, and it is evident that something about her life and work struck a chord for many of these women. Even Sarah Hale forbore any critical comment in the biographical entry for Madame de Stael in Woman's Record. It was de Stael's novel, Corinne, that aroused the most enthusiasm - the story of a woman whose attempt to live an independent, intellectual life was shattered when she gave her love to a man unworthy of her; unable to live with Corinne's brilliance, he chose another, suitably domestic, wife. Corinne's character clearly represented to many of the publicists their ultimate ideal of womanhood: intellectual, spiritual, unselfish, and they empathised with her refusal to comply with convention by suppressing her genius. Equally the prime emphasis of Corinne is upon the importance of self-realisation, self-development that was so important in the arguments of the radicals; however, this in Corinne is expressed through the acceptably feminine characteristics of creativity, intuitive genius so dear to the liberals.

Usually, however, the radical publicists chose to emphasize heroines of the real world, and they eulogized those women who had managed, by whatever means, to triumph in the material world, the world of man.

Despite Elizabeth Cady Stanton's expressed belief that "wherever we turn, the history of woman is sad, drear and dark, without any alleviating circumstances - nothing from which we can draw consolation", she did manage to come up with some shining examples of her own.⁶² Catherine of Russia and Elizabeth of England were "distinguished for their statesman-like qualities", Harriet Martineau and Madame de Stael for their "literary attainments", and Caroline Herschel and Mary Summerville for their "scientific researches".⁶³ As Stanton's collection of notable women shows, the radical publicists saw history illustrating the varied capabilities of woman, and Sarah Grimké made this point quite explicitly when she wrote about Elizabeth I of England, Catherine of Russia and Isabella of Spain:

I mention these women only to prove that intellect is not sexed; that strength of mind is not sexed; and that our views about the duties of men and the duties of women, are mere arbitrary opinions, differing in different ages and countries, and dependent solely on the will and judgment of erring mortals.⁶⁴

Contrast the attention given to these women by Grimké, with that of Margaret Fuller. Little is made of their achievements by Fuller, but a great deal is said about their character. As part of an example illustrating the malign influence of men upon women - one theme of Fuller's book is the need for women to "retire within themselves, and explore the ground-work of life till they find their peculiar secret"⁶⁵ - Fuller described Mary Stuart as "lovely even to allurements; quick in apprehension and weak in judgment; with grace and dignity of sentiment, but no

principle; credulous and indiscreet, yet artful;" Elizabeth was "strong and prudent more than great or wise; ... without magnanimity of any kind."⁶⁶

And so it is clear that the women publicists interpreted the past, both divine and secular, in fundamentally different ways. They were all agreed that woman had suffered, but what was meant by the term varied greatly. For the conservatives woman had suffered because man had suppressed the positive moral role that woman had been designed by the Creator to perform; like Christ to lead man to humility and piety, like Christ persecuted and scorned. Woman's nature was always moral, in whatever society or time, but only under Christianity could woman's innate worth be truly recognized, and allowed to flourish. There are, however, distinctions to be made between the different conservative publicists. Both Hannah Tracy Cutler and Margaret Coxe saw woman's position in society as a just punishment for her role in the Fall, and the product of divine judgment. Others, such as Sarah Hale and Eliza Farnham, insisted that the Bible had been incorrectly understood, dominated by masculine prejudice, and that woman's creation and role in the Fall only proved her mental and spiritual superiority to that of man. They saw history as the unjust usurpation of the rightful recognition of woman's superior nature.

The liberal publicists agreed that man had misinterpreted and maligned woman throughout history, but worst of all woman had accepted man's estimate of her worth. Woman's lot was worse than that of man because

she herself was not responsible for the restrictions placed upon her:

it may be said that man does not have his fair play either; his energies are repressed and distorted by the interposition of artificial obstacles. Aye, but he himself has put them there; they have grown out of his own imperfections. If there is a misfortune in woman's lot, it is in the obstacles interposed by men, which do not mark her state⁶⁷

So wrote Margaret Fuller, who did not accept the rigid sexual dualism of the conservatives, always entering a plea on behalf of the exceptional woman, yet whose writings about history share the focus of the conservatives upon the inner self, woman's character, rather than her role in material life.

Radical publicists had little to say about woman's role in a moral universe, and were more interested in what she had done in the material universe. Arguing that women shared the same range and variety of characteristics as man, radicals selected examples from history to prove that women could, when allowed to do so, function as effectively as men in politics, science and literature.

Yet all the women publicists, of whatever stripe, were inclined to complain that history was at best an unreliable indicator of woman's true nature, and when another tool came to hand in the early 1840's, they embraced it with enthusiasm. Eliza Farnham suggested that this new evidence was about to revolutionise history and man's understanding of himself:

It has been well said, that History is re-written in the light of Modern Science. It is equally true that human nature, with its relations, the fountain and source of history, is to be re-read in the light of the wondrous revelations which this Nineteenth Century is making of its hitherto hidden parts.⁶⁸

Farnham was writing about the impact of science upon the mid-nineteenth century popular mind.

NOTES

1

Hannah T.C. Cutler, Woman as She Was, Is, and Should Be (New York: S.W. Benedict, 1849), p. 21.

2

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CHAPTER THREE

HER PECULIAR ORGANIZATION

The work that Providence has appointed for woman in the various details of domestic life, is just that which, if properly apportioned, is fitted to her peculiar organization.¹

So wrote Catharine Beecher, one of the foremost social theorists among the conservative women publicists, in her Letters to the People on Health and Happiness in 1856. The phrase, "her peculiar organization" recurs frequently in the writings of many of the publicists, but what did they mean by the expression? First of all, the word "organization" encompassed both woman's physical and mental attributes, her physiology and her psychology. Through the use of analogy, and aided by the teachings of Phrenology, conclusions about woman's mental characteristics were based by the verifiable facts of her material organization. Secondly, the term "peculiar" undoubtedly implied that all women shared a set of physical and mental attributes distinct from those of man, and unique to woman.

Catharine Beecher's reference to "Providence" as the source of woman's position indicates a religious foundation to her definition of womanhood - however, the women publicists consistently moved beyond such religious reference to use the concepts and analogies of contemporary popular science. Further, religion and science were not opposed at this time, prior to the evolutionary debate, and science was seen as the means to

discover the laws of nature and the universe that were initially decreed by the Creator. Generally mid-nineteenth century America had developed a fascination for science; William Ellery Channing, the notable Unitarian clergyman, writing in 1841, remarked:

Through the press, discoveries and theories, once the monopoly of philosophers, have become the property of the multitudes ... Science, once the greatest of distinctions, is becoming popular.²

Despite the fact that the formal education of many of the women publicists was unlikely to have included extensive study of science, popular books and articles were widely available, and read, by the 1840's. Lectures on scientific developments were especially popular and formed a significant part of the Lyceum programmes, which attracted large numbers of women.³ The publicists themselves included articles on scientific topics ranging from Astronomy, Natural History to elementary Chemistry in the papers and journals that they edited. "Science disperses chimeras as the sun does fogs", wrote Sarah Hale in 1846, and it seems her fellow publicists largely agreed.⁴

The publicists applied the lessons of popular science to their study of womanhood in two ways. First of all, they wished primarily to be thought of as scientific in their work; and several attempted to apply the inductive method to their investigation of woman's nature. Secondly, they drew upon scientific concepts and theories in a general sense. Specifically such theories as the Nebular Theory, and Phrenology had a great influence, but perhaps more important were the general assumptions that underlay scientific endeavour at this time. Nature, including man,

was seen to be an orderly, predictable entity composed of numerous different parts each designed and adapted to fulfil a specific function and responding to fixed laws.⁵ Consequently the majority of publicists turned to woman's physiology as the key to her part in this perfectly functioning harmonious universe, for as Eliza Farnham announced, "the human being is to be studied ... primarily through the material organization which first makes him known."⁶

What then, was the scientific method, and how did the publicists employ it? A prominent Boston surgeon and medical journalist, John C. Warren, described the method of inquiry to be followed in the physical sciences: "first, the careful observation of facts - and secondly the comparison of these facts so as to deduce from them the laws of the science in question."⁷ Despite the use of the word "deduce" by Warren, there is no doubt that he is describing the inductive process, that is, reasoning from the particular to the general, and this kind of approach was adopted by several of the publicists in their detailed empirical observation and comparison of woman's physical characteristics. However, one publicist, Eliza Farnham, explicitly endorsed the deductive method in the scientific study of woman:

First of all, deductive reasoning, she argued, was far more natural to woman with her superior intuitive capabilities; and second, this was a better method anyway, for "which sees farther" she asked, "the inventor who comes down from a universal principle, to the machine which only illustrates it ... or the clockmaker or mechanic, who approaches the

principle through the machine."⁸ But the contradiction between the scientific community's inductive methodology, and the deductive approach of Eliza Farnham, may be more apparent than real. For many of the scientists read by the publicists, and the women publicists themselves, shared certain a priori assumptions about the natural world they were studying.

The first assumption was the divine creation of the world; William Carpenter, whose works on human and comparative physiology were read, and extracts published, by the publicists, concluded:

All our science, then, is but an investigation of the mode in which The Creator acts; its highest "laws" are but expressions of the mode in which He manifests His agency to us.⁹

The second assumption, shared by both groups, was that this divinely created world was designed to function in order and harmony, and that everything within it had been created with a specific function and place for which it had been carefully adapted. This holistic approach was also endorsed by Carpenter, when he directed the attention of his readers to:

the Evidences of Design presented by the structure of Living Beings, ... the perfect adaptation which exists between all their minute details, and the harmony of the parts they have to perform in the grand system of the Universe.¹⁰

These two assumptions together generated a form of monism, according to Cynthia Russett, for if the same hand had created the world, then it could be argued that the same laws operated in different spheres of reality, and it "encouraged employment of identical methods of analysis and of identical theories in every sphere."¹¹ The direct influence of such

monism can be seen upon one of the conservative publicists in particular, Maria McIntosh, who stated in Woman in America that she wished to apply natural principles to the moral world:

But if it be admitted that the Great Spirit who presides over the natural phenomena of our world, arranges also its moral and social influences, will it not follow that those principles which are invariably manifested in the one, will reappear in the other?¹²

And finally, such monism laid the basis for the widespread acceptance of the use of analogy as a valid scientific tool, and this was particularly useful when both the scientists and the women publicists were faced with describing a structure or process that they could not actually see, for example, woman's mind. William Carpenter described how analogy was to be used by the student of science:

The analogies to be pursued must be those suggested from already ascertained laws and relations. Thus, in proportion to the extent of the inquirer's previous knowledge of such relations subsisting in other parts of Nature, will be his means of guidance to a correct train of inference in that before him.¹³

Such advice condoned a rather loose application of analogy, of which the conservative publicists particularly were prone to take advantage. They applied analogy to compare the structure of woman's mind with that of her body, and extracted analogies from nature and the universe to suggest woman's function and place in human society.

And so, in conclusion, since both contemporary scientists in America and the women publicists, shared a number of explicit a priori assumptions about the nature of the world they were investigating, the difference between an inductive and deductive approach would appear to be only a

slight difference of emphasis. And one final assumption that was accepted by both the conservative and liberal publicists, was a belief in a fundamental sexual dualism permeating all of nature.¹⁴ One unknown correspondent of The Una even applied such a dualism to inanimate matter!¹⁵ Man and woman could empirically be shown to be both physically, and by analogy, mentally, totally unlike: two distinct elements whose combined characteristics formed a whole. What then, were the distinctive physiological, and consequently psychological, attributes of woman that combined to form her "peculiar organization"?

There were two different arguments put forward by the conservative publicists, both based on the study of woman's anatomy. The first, most thoroughly elucidated by Paulina Wright Davis, the publisher and editor of The Una, based woman's nature and function upon the finer structure and more delicate organization of woman's anatomy. The second, exhaustively present by Eliza Farnham in her two volume study, Woman and Her Era, defined woman through her reproductive structure and function. Both employed extensive use of analogy between matter and mind.

Through a series of editorials in The Una between 1853 and 1855, Paulina Wright Davis explored in depth the significance of woman's physiology. The sexual dualism implicit in her approach is made quite clear:

We have taken the ground that man and woman in both body and mind, are characterized respectively by such differences in organization, function, and adaptation, as may for want of a descriptive phrase, be called distinction of sex.¹⁶

She began with a study of woman's anatomy, and found that woman's skeletal and muscular construction was quite different from that of man:

in the osseous system of the two there is a marked difference even in the substance of the bone, though chemically considered, of precisely the same elements; the texture is finer, the protuberances to which the muscles are attached, and which anatomists have taken so much pains to individualize and name, are smaller;¹⁷

Such differences of kind were found throughout woman's anatomy, for example Davis found that even "the circulating and nervous systems are equally strongly marked, by their exquisite perfection, indicating the subtle spiritual-pervading of sex."¹⁸

The conclusions she drew from such anatomical differences between the two sexes were that "man exhibits the bolder outline; Woman has the more exquisite texture", but this did not imply that woman was necessarily weaker than man, or physically his inferior. Putting this belief into practice, Davis was one of the first women to travel around the north-eastern states giving lectures on woman's anatomy using a specially imported mannequin from Europe that, it is reported, occasionally caused her audience to faint. She was a firm believer in the physical health, and potential strength, of women. First of all, employing a principle from the natural sciences, she argued that despite woman's smaller and finer structure, and the tax of maternity, woman lived longer and therefore:

Reasoning from analogy, we rightly conclude that the mechanism is most perfect, though it be most complex and apparently most delicate, which sustains the greatest amount of pressure and endures the wear and tear of work the longest.²⁰

Davis attributed the seemingly prevalent ill-health among her feminine contemporaries to both ignorance and the demands of fashion, in the form of tight lacing. "The physical weakness and slaveries of woman have nothing whatever to do with her original constitution", she wrote, "they form no part of her nature."²¹

Other conservative publicists, who accepted Davis' analysis of the differences between masculine and feminine anatomy, nonetheless quailed at her robust attitude towards woman's potential physical strength. One of the most consistent in voicing her belief that woman was indeed physically weaker than man, and required special protection on that account, was Jane G. Swisshelm. "We have our belief that woman is physically weaker than man" she expounded in an editorial in the Saturday Visiter, "and naturally entitled to his protection on account of her peculiar organisation."²² Indeed, Swisshelm believed that the customs of society were correctly based upon just this understanding:

The rule which requires a gentleman to give a lady his arm to dinner, is an indication of a great law of nature which says he is the stronger, and owes her assistance.²³

It is rather ironic that Swisshelm should expound woman's frailty; her own life was a testimonial to the physical courage and mental strength of woman. Her husband was in the habit of keeping a wild cougar chained up in the house, and more than once when it escaped Swisshelm had to defend herself.²⁴

However, what is most interesting about the analysis of woman's anatomy made by Paulina Wright Davis is not that woman did possess both

strength and endurance, but that she did not emphasize - indeed she barely mentions - the reproductive structure and function of woman. It would be easy to attribute this virtual omission to the fact that Davis herself had no children of her own - although during her second marriage she did adopt two - but this does not account for the fact that the majority of conservative publicists shared her position. In other words, they did not find woman's nature and function to be located in her womb; rather the basis for analogy between woman's body and mind was the smaller, more refined, nature of her entire anatomical structure. It is impossible to separate the assessment of the material and the immaterial in the analysis of womanhood made by the conservative publicists, and Davis was no exception:

Anatomists, sculptors, and painters, recognize this [gender] difference in a hand, arm, or finger. Why then should we not recognize a₂₅ corresponding difference in the sentiments and affections.

There were two aspects to be considered by the publicists in connection with woman's mind: her intellectual, and her moral capabilities. Davis devoted two editorials to woman's moral nature, and one to her intellectual abilities; her first editorial on the question of woman's moral nature provoked such a flood of correspondence that she felt the subject merited a second attempt. Davis was unique among the conservative publicists in that she disclaimed any moral superiority on the part of woman; she insisted that man and woman simply displayed different moral virtues:

We have set up no claims to a superior moral nature for her. We have kept steadily in view the dissimilarity of the sexes ... We have set aside the claim which we might plausibly institute on the ground of superior moral nature, and which would be readily accorded to us by a large class of men²⁶

In this she was right; a glance at virtually any of the speeches or polemics on the topic of Woman made at this period, by theologians, reformers, writers, or scientists, labors the point of woman's superior moral nature. William Carpenter explicitly linked woman's physical and mental character in the following way:

in the superior purity and elevation of the feelings she is ... highly raised above him. Her whole character, physical as well as corporeal [sic], is beautifully adapted to supply what is deficient in man; and elevate and refine those powers which might otherwise be directed to low and selfish objects.²⁷

Theodore Parker, Unitarian minister, reformer, and supporter of the woman's rights movement, made much the same point when he told the 1853 Woman's Rights Convention:

I think man will always lead in affairs of intellect - of reason, imagination, understanding - he has the bigger brain; but woman will always lead in affairs of emotion - moral, affectional, religious - she has the better heart, the truer intuition of the right, the lovely, the holy.²⁸

Theoretically Davis could not accept this view, partly because it was usually coupled with a denial of woman's intellectual abilities as with Theodore Parker, and so she attempted to outline the "distinctive moral nature" of woman by reference to her physical organization. For example, discussing the qualities of benevolence, conscientiousness and hope, Davis concluded that for woman they were "especially sustained by her delicacy,

of sensitiveness, and the fine tone of her physical organization."²⁹
Equally woman's intellectual capabilities differed from those of man; but her attempted neutrality in dealing with the different moral and intellectual characteristics of the sexes becomes increasingly tenuous as her argument progresses. And it is difficult not to see a qualitative judgement entering her analysis when she makes such statements as, "the intuition and inspiration which are distinctive of the feminine intellect rise above the systematic philosophy which is the special strength of the masculine mind."³⁰

Davis drew a parallel between man's physique and his mental capacities, just as she did for woman. As man's physical strength suited him to rough, manual work, his brain was best for the groundwork necessary for intellectual pursuits, and

when bones and muscles, iron nerves and hard massive brains, have well done their subsidiary work, feminine felicity of comprehension and execution will come in to the dominion in all the world of mind³¹

For Davis, woman's mind with its keener sensibilities and higher intuitive capabilities, was "eminently fitted to take up the completed issues of the masculine reason, and to hold and employ them in their highest forms effectively."³² Finally she concludes, in a passage that most clearly illustrates the analogy between body and mind that is at the base of her interpretation of the attributes of man and woman, that the mental powers of men are "superiority in inferior things. It is the bone and muscle of mind, contrasted with the nerve and artery of it...."³³

In contrast with the anatomical approach represented by Paulina Wright Davis, is the physiological study of woman done by Eliza Farnham. Farnham developed the most complex and detailed study of womanhood as the maternal function in her two volume Woman and Her Era, written in the late 1850's. Beginning her study with the rhetorical question, "has woman any characteristic form which ... interprets Nature's purpose in her corporeal constitution?", she answered by pointing to the size and shape of woman's pelvic region, and her womb.³⁴ This "unique, interior, separating organ" conferred upon woman Nature's highest function, that of maternity, and made her "Nature's chief executor."³⁵

Farnham begins her study with a syllogism, the initial premise of which was derived from the study of comparative anatomy:

Life is exalted in proportion to its Organic and Functional Complexity; Woman's Organism is more Complex and her totality of Function larger than those of any other being inhabiting our earth; therefore her position in the scale of Life is the most exalted - the Sovereign one.³⁶

Woman's organic and functional complexity lay in her reproductive organs, and since "each added organ is Nature's direct testimony to the presence of an added power", in this case woman's "more expanded consciousness", Farnham's final conclusion, that woman is superior to man by virtue of her more complex physiology, was inevitable. "It is clear then, she wrote, "that sex is a grade of development."³⁷ Unfortunately this was, Farnham agreed, as yet an "unacknowledged truth" among her contemporaries, but she argued that the disciples of science were always slow to accept conclusions they had not yet reached themselves, and certainly "the conclusion is the most revolutionary yet reached in our development."³⁸

Although, interestingly enough, Farnham is on record as having participated in woman's rights conventions, she had little patience in print with many of their claims. In a series of articles written to rebut the proposals of the movement, she concluded:

it seems scarcely possible that any person acquainted with the physical economy and structure of both sexes could for a moment believe they were designed for the same sphere of action.³⁹

Since woman's primary function was maternity, her physical and mental capabilities must be adapted purely toward that end, and Farnham did not accept that women could have other interests or desires:

But if she be thus physically disqualified, she must necessarily be mentally so. Deity would never have endowed any being with desires and mental capacities to do what its physical constitution rendered impossible.⁴⁰

Paulina Wright Davis and Eliza Farnham represent the two extremes, as it were, of the physiological reductionism applied to the study of woman by the conservative publicists. The majority of the remaining conservative publicists adopted the general anatomical approach of Davis, but added to it Farnham's conviction of feminine superiority. Very few rested their case upon the structure and function of maternity alone; rather they drew from woman's smaller and more refined physique analogous conclusions about her more refined sensibilities and capabilities, the function of which were again best described by analogy, this time with the grand laws of the universe. Sarah Hale described woman's innate power thus:

The sun brilliant and powerful, gives light and heat to our planetary system; all eyes may see his glory, all nature bask in his beams;- but the mightier influence of gravitation, which binds Orion and the Pleiades with our planet, controls the universe, and reaches - perchance - to the throne of God; who has seen gravitation, or can estimate its power? Thus it is in the moral world.⁴¹

The importance of using gravitation as an analogy was likely taken by Hale from the "Nebular Theory" which was current at the time in popular science articles. The Lily ran a series of articles about it, written by W.C.M., who described the primary importance of gravitation lying in it being "the first law established in matter", and the means by which the Creator held his creation together.⁴² By using such an analogy, therefore, Hale was implying that woman's morally redemptive function was the single most important aspect of her womanhood.

The transference of laws from one realm of scientific study to another, appears too in the writings of Margaret Coxe, and Maria McIntosh. Always woman's influence is represented by analogy with an unseen force in Nature, and McIntosh equates it with the vital principle itself. Again, the material world is man's, "but while all the outward machinery of government, the body, the thews and sinews of society, are man's", woman "controls its vital principle ... like nature in secret, she regulates its pulsations."⁴³ And Margaret Coxe, drawing again on the idea of the complementary nature of the sexes, chose to employ analogy with magnetism to explain how essential the moral function of woman was:

The irresistable and overwhelming compression of the material particles of which our globe is composed, which would have resulted from the unresisted sway of the law of attraction, has been likewise prevented by the action of the opposing law of repulsion, which in its turn, if uncontrolled, would have caused to dissolve and dissipate into an aeriform fluid, the most solid forms of matter ... may not the Almighty Parent of the human race in framing the mental and moral constitutions of the two sexes, have had respect to the same great principle of procedure, and prepared them to perform their respective parts in the mechanism of society⁴⁴

In making these analogies between body and mind, and so accepting an organic difference in the structure and operation of woman's mind, the publicists were greatly influenced by the teachings of phrenology. Nearly every one of the publicists' lives were touched in one way or another by phrenology, and they all mention the great effect that it had upon their thinking. Sarah Hale saw Spurzheim speak on his American tour in 1832, and "the effect on my own feelings will never be forgotten."⁴⁵ When matron at Sing Sing prison, Eliza Farnham "used to lecture her charges from George Combe's *The Constitution of Man*"⁴⁶ and Paulina Wright Davis enthusiastically endorsed phrenology in the The Una:

Before the days of Phrenology no author of distinction either pretended clearly to understand the system of his predecessors or was willing to accept his teachings. Metaphysics was the reproach of science and the disgrace of reason and an incomprehensible puzzle in itself besides. Now by the light shed upon the truth of nature through the labors of Gall and Spurzheim the whole matter of the mental constitution and laws is transparently plain, ... Every woman of tolerable talents comprehends the philosophy of mind as readily as she learns Geography.⁴⁷

Developed by Gall and Spurzheim in Europe, and widely publicised by George Combe, a Scottish barrister, in the first half of the nineteenth century, phrenology posited that the mental powers of man consisted of separate faculties, each of which was located in a specific region of the brain. From the size of different regions of the brain, determined by external examination of the cranium, the degree of development of different faculties could be determined. The relative strengths of faculties within each individual were inherited, but phrenologists also made judgements about group characteristics, the north American Indian for example, or

women. George Combe classified negroes as inferior, the north American Indian as "intractable and untameable",⁴⁸ and Spurzheim had the following to say about woman:

The basilar region of the female head is also smaller, the occipital more elongated, and frontal developed to a minor degree, the organs of the perceptive faculties being commonly larger than those of the reflective powers. The female cerebral fibre is slender and long rather than thick. Lastly, and in particular, the organs of philoprogenitiveness, ideality, and benevolence, are for the most part proportionately larger in the female⁴⁹

Spurzheim did grant the possibility of a woman more intelligent than a man, but essentially he saw woman's mental characteristics as determined by her maternal function in society: "it is quite evident," he concluded his study of the female head, "that nature has destined the two sexes to particular and dissimilar situations, and that she has endowed the various dispositions of each with different degrees of activity."⁵⁰ Again the idea of the complementary nature of the two sexes reappears, and George Combe emphasized the importance of order and harmony as the basis for his phrenological judgements: "that constitution of mind, also," he told his readers, "may be pronounced to be the best, which harmonizes most completely with the morality and religion established by the Creator's arrangements."⁵¹

Not only were the conservative publicists greatly influenced by the teachings of phrenology; so too were the liberals. Elizabeth Oakes Smith found in phrenology the authoritative proof of woman's innate morality. "I see that the very base of my organization is upon Love", she wrote, "I see this, not only philosophically, but phrenologically."⁵²

But Smith was not referring to love in a restricted sense, for like many of the conservatives, she did not confine her definition of womanhood to motherhood; nature "did not create her for the one purpose of the family relation."⁵³

What then was the purpose of womanhood, and how did the liberal publicists define it? The leading exponent of the liberal position is undoubtedly Margaret Fuller, who was in turn editor of the Transcendental journal, The Dial, and literary critic of the New York Tribune. Her principal book, published in 1845 five years before her death, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, was for a long time the standard around which many in the woman's rights movement rallied, yet Fuller herself was not an active reformer. Margaret Fuller, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith and Caroline Dall, were committed above all to the concept of individual freedom. This commitment often travelled uneasily with their continuing belief in innate feminine character, the two only being reconciled in the case of Fuller by a concept of flexibility in human nature:

Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.⁵⁴

Fuller had only contempt for those who insisted upon a uniform, physiological reductionism defining the character of all women, for as she wrote:

History jeers at the attempts of physiologists to bind great original laws by the forms which flow from them. They make a rule; they say from observation what can and cannot be. In vain! Nature provides exceptions to every rule. She sends women to battle, and sets Hercules spinning;⁵⁵

But despite this brave stand, there is no doubt that Fuller did believe in a feminine character distinct from that of the masculine, or as Caroline Dall remarked, the sexes were not "precisely alike."⁵⁶

"The especial genius of Woman", wrote Fuller, is "electrical in movement, intuitive in function, spiritual in tendency".⁵⁷ Even with a good intellectual education, which she advocated, Fuller felt that woman "must retain the same nervous susceptibility while their physical structure is such as it is."⁵⁸ It is clear, then, that Fuller's estimation of woman's singular characteristics rested upon the material foundation of woman's physique. Essentially she did accept the sexual dualism so dear to the conservatives, for in another passage she defines man as representing energy, power and intellect, woman as harmony, beauty and love.⁵⁹ Caroline Dall expressed the same idea when she wrote that "God himself, in balancing the world's forces, has blended her moral nature with her mental, purposely to check her brother's aggressiveness."⁶⁰ What these liberal publicists could not accept was the rigid conformity with which all women were supposed to behave, and the suppression of the talents of those born with exceptional gifts. The concern of the liberal publicists was not with the cause of all women, or even most women, but with the few:

I have no doubt, however, that a large proportion of women would give themselves to the same employments as now, because there are circumstances that must lead them. Mothers will delight to make the nest soft and warm. Nature would take care of that; no need to clip the wings of any bird that wants to soar and sing, or finds in itself the strength of pinion for a migratory flight unusual to its kind. The difference would be that all need not be constrained to employments for which some are unfit.⁶¹

Fuller pleaded for the right of the few, herself among them, to lead their own lives according to their own dictates, for the suppression of the talented or beautiful was to her, the worst crime man could inflict on woman. "The gain of creation consists always", she wrote, "in the growth of individual minds, which live and aspire, as flowers bloom and birds sing, in the midst of morasses."⁶²

Elizabeth Oakes Smith expressed the same anxiety on behalf of the gifted individual. "It is because I recognize individuality, and reverence it, that I will not apply the same laws to all," she wrote, and by way of example contrasted Florence Nightingale to "nice Biddy". "Do not", she implored, "attempt to convert the soulful harmonies of the one into the everyday cackle of the other."⁶³ But the same recognition of an innate sexual dualism in human nature co-exists with her faith in individuality. "There is a difference in the soul as in the bodies of the sexes," she wrote, and man is "Lord of the material Universe", while woman is "nearer allied to the heavenly."⁶⁴ It sounds very familiar.

It is, then, all the more startling to find a group of women publicists who denied absolutely the existence of any fundamental sexual dualism in human nature, and rejected the body-mind analogy at the basis of the thought of all the other women publicists. Consistently over the years Elizabeth Cady Stanton labored the theme of woman's identical needs and capabilities to those of man. Although she accepted the existence of laws of nature, stating upon one occasion that "the laws of mind are as

immutable as those of matter", she argued that the same natural laws were applicable to both sexes and had nothing to do with differences in physical organization.⁶⁵ Man, she wrote upon one occasion:

is thoroughly educated into the belief that woman's nature is altogether different from his own; he has no idea that she is governed by the same laws of mind with himself.⁶⁶

Anne McDowell made her position just as explicit in the pages of her paper, the Woman's Advocate, in 1856. "To no innate faculty can he lay exclusive claim", she wrote about man, "the same passions, the same intellectual powers, the same moral sense which impel, illumine, control him, modified by position and circumstances, impel, illumine and control her."⁶⁷

Through the pages of The Lily Stanton, often writing under her pseudonym 'Sunflower', engaged in running debates with other contributors over the nature of womanhood. To Jane G. Swisshelm, who maintained that society's customs were correctly based upon natural law, Stanton replied:

In regard to Nature's Laws having anything to do with our customs, the fact is, we are so artificial that we know precious little about Nature ... The idea of a man offering a woman his arm to walk in to dinner, in obedience to a Law of Nature which says he is stronger, and owes her assistance, strikes me as absurd.⁶⁸

On another occasion Stanton wrote in The Lily that "the power of the mind seems to be in no way connected with the size and strength of the body",⁶⁹ provoking Antoinette Brown, a student of theology and a woman's rights lecturer, to ask, "but why does Mrs. Stanton deny all natural mental difference?"⁷⁰ The reason was clear in the mind of Elizabeth Cady Stanton: "admit a radical difference in sex, and you demand different spheres - water for fish, and air for birds" she explained.⁷¹ Stanton

had no intention of being assigned, as she described the idea of her contemporaries, "a sphere somewhere mid earth and heaven."⁷²

The principal argument, however, employed by the radical publicists to refute the physiological determinism of their fellow publicists was the argument about the influence of the environment, society and culture, upon woman's character. For once in her life drawing an analogy, Stanton compared the restraints of society upon woman's freedom to develop freely with the effects of the fashionable tight lacing: nature "has been gross enough to make the manifestations of mind and matter harmonize", she wrote, "and notions of freedom cannot be infused into hearts that have no room to beat."⁷³ To really know what woman was, Stanton asked that "the childhood of woman must be free and untrammelled", for she believed woman to be "modeled, like a piece of clay" into an artificial nature.⁷⁴ Lucretia Mott agreed when she described woman as "crushed by customs", and she despaired of hope for woman "while man assumes that the present is the original state designed for woman, that the existing 'differences are not arbitrary nor the result of accident', but ground in nature"⁷⁵

The radicals believed that with the same educational opportunities woman was capable of the same intellectual achievements as man, and they blamed the poor education she had, and still continued to receive for her poor record of achievement. Amelia Bloomer repeatedly argued in

The Lily:

It is owing altogether to the false system of education, that we are such weak, helpless, dependent, good for nothing creatures.⁷⁶

"God made them different in sex", she said of humanity at another time, "but equal in intellect."⁷⁷ Anne McDowell subscribed to the same belief in woman's capabilities, should she receive the same opportunity:

Man has attained no mental eminence that is not just as attainable by woman, with the same facilities, the same time for study, and the same inducements.⁷⁸

It is interesting that the radical publicists often reached these convictions after being profoundly influenced by phrenology. Elizabeth Cady Stanton read Gall, Spurzheim and Combe, "all so rational and opposed to the old theologies" and which had the effect of liberating her from the clutch of Calvinism:

Thus, after many months of weary wandering in the intellectual labyrinth of "the Fall of Man", "Original Sin", "Total Depravity", ... I found my way out of the darkness into the clear sunlight of Truth.⁷⁹

She even had her head "read", and wrote to her sceptical father, Judge Cady, "I think you will agree with me that it often hits the nail on the head - I really did not mean to make a phrenological comparison - in a rather striking way."⁸⁰ It might seem difficult to reconcile this enthusiastic response to phrenology with Stanton's own statements denying any mental difference between the sexes, and with her own undoubtedly forceful and intellectual bent. However, writing as 'Sunflower' in The Lily, she defended phrenology with the following argument:

The phrenologist tells us that woman's head has just as many organs as man's, and that they are similarly located. He says too, that the organs that are the most exercised, are the most prominent.⁸¹

And in this way Stanton was able to return to the theme of the negative effect the environment generally had upon the degree to which most women could develop their abilities.

However, another radical publicist, Anne McDowell, took issue with the teachings of phrenology:

since it has been a pet theory of purblind Science that there does exist a marked and radical difference in the cerebral conformation of the sexes. This theory we consider an impudent and ridiculous libel upon Nature.⁸²

She herself made a point of checking the claims of the phrenologists;

"we have examined the heads of hundreds of children, and are satisfied that from early infancy upward, there exists no such difference."⁸³

The trouble with science, McDowell told her readers, was that it employed little common sense:

We remember reading an elaborate work upon the cerebral difference of the sexes, in which the author asserted that the superior or mental organs preponderated in the male breed, and the inferior or animal organs in the female; and brought to prove the preponderance of the cerebellum in Woman, the assertion that in social conversation she inclines to throw her head back; thus putting effect for cause, as is customary with theorizers.⁸⁴

The common response to why women threw back their heads, McDowell assured her readers, was that women were nearly always shorter than men.

And so, in conclusion, it is clear that the idea of a female "peculiar organization" was not shared by the radical publicists. But even among those conservative and liberal publicists who made the idea of woman's "peculiar organization" the basis for their definition of womanhood, the way in which the term was understood differed. Analyses varied from Paulina Wright Davis' refined structure/elevated moral and intellectual

function, to Eliza Farnham's emphasis upon the maternal structure and function. These isomorphic views of womanhood drew, however loosely they were applied, upon ideas in the natural sciences, such as structure, function, adaptation and equilibrium which in turn undoubtedly played a part in shaping the publicists' thought.

It is difficult to assess how far the conservative and liberal publicists reflected current contemporary opinion on the nature of womanhood. Certainly they adopted the principle of physiological determinism, of the overwhelming importance of function, that also lay at the root of, for example, prevailing medical opinion.⁸⁵ Most historians are agreed that medical literature in the mid-nineteenth century totally subjugated woman's self, body and mind, to the influence of her uterus. In 1854 a physician wrote that "woman's reproductive organs are pre-eminent ... they exercise a controlling influence upon her entire system."⁸⁶ This view was not confined to the medical profession however, and is to be found in many other masculine contributions to the "Woman Question". In a lecture entitled "Woman", and read before the woman's rights convention in Boston on September 20th, 1855, Ralph Waldo Emerson essentially said the same thing. Charging both literature and the press with a morbid view of woman's nature, he said:

In all, the body of the joke is one, namely to charge women with temperament; to describe them as victims of temperament; and is identical with Mahomet's opinion that women have not a sufficient moral or intellectual force to control the perturbations of their physical structure.

But his audience were not about to hear a refutation of that view, for a

few paragraphs later, he concluded:

But for the general charge: no doubt it is well founded. They are victims of the finer temperament ... Nature's end, of maternity for twenty years, was of so supreme importance that it was to be secured at all events, even to the sacrifice of the highest beauty ... Men are not to the same degree tempermented, for there are multitudes of men who live to objects quite out of them, as to politics, to trade, to letters or an art, unhindered by any influence of constitution.⁸⁷

However, as must be apparent, the conservative publicists neither rested their definition of womanhood exclusively upon the maternal function, nor did they accept the implicit loss of control over self that is apparent in Emerson's lecture. And both the conservative and liberal publicists applied the rules of physiology to both sexes, not just to woman alone; man was seen to be just as much the product of his material organization as woman. The conservative publicists, while accepting the importance of material organization as the basis for the correct definition of womanhood, nonetheless both expanded the function and attempted to develop a powerful image of womanhood that differed from that usually presented by their masculine contemporaries.

And so the argument between the conservative and radical publicists came down to a debate over nature versus nurture, with the liberal publicists fluctuating between the two positions. Given this fundamental dichotomy in the thinking of the women publicists, how did their prescriptions for the ills of woman, of their society, differ, and what reforms did they advocate?

NOTES

1

Catharine E. Beecher, Letters to the People on Health and Happiness (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856; New Haven, Conn.: Research Publications Inc., History of Women, reel 243), p. 110. Catharine Beecher's use of the term "peculiar organization" would imply that at least a degree of physiological determinism lay at the root of her thinking, which does not agree with Katherine Kish Sklar's contention that Beecher's prescriptions were based on social and economic pragmatism.

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3

Deborah Jean Warner, "Science Education for Women in Antebellum America", Isis, 69 (1978): 58-67; and Carl Bode, The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

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George H. Daniels, American Science in the Age of Jackson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 66.

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Maria McIntosh, Woman in America, her Work and her Reward (New York: D. Appleton, 1850; New Haven, Conn.: Research Publications Inc., History of Women, reel 278).

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R.W. Emerson attributed this to "Swedenborg, a sublime genius who gave a scientific exposition of the part played severally by man and woman in the world, and showed the difference of sex to run through nature and through thought." Rosemary Agonito, ed., History of Ideas on Woman (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), p. 215.

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Ibid., vol. 1, no. 7 (July 1853), p. 88.

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Ibid., vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1853), p. 9.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

- 22
The Saturday Visiter, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 24, 1852), p. 2.
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Ibid., vol. 4, no. 25 (July 12, 1851), p. 98.
- 24
Swisshelm, Half a Century, p. 146.
- 25
The Una, vol. 1, no. 7 (July 1853), p. 88.
- 26
Ibid., vol. 1, no. 8 (August 1853), p. 105.
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The Woman's Advocate, vol. 2, no. 40 (October 18, 1856).
- 28
Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, 1:281.
- 29
The Una, vol. 1, no. 8 (August 1853), p. 105.
- 30
Ibid., p. 120.
- 31
Ibid., p. 121.
- 32
Ibid., p. 120
- 33
Ibid., vol. 1, no. 4 (April 1853), p. 41.
- 34
Farnham, Woman and Her Era, 1:84.
- 35
Ibid., 1:29; 2:424.
- 36
Ibid., 1:20
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CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

How then did the conservative and liberal publicists suggest that woman could fulfil the purpose evident in her design, and what was the future envisaged for woman by the radical publicists? The fundamental difference between the two sets of prescriptions can be categorised as the best means of exercising woman's 'moral influence' for the conservatives, or of achieving 'self-realisation' on the part of the radicals, with the liberals hovering between the two positions. The radicals demanded that all barriers to woman's full participation in labour and politics, and all her legal disabilities, be removed on the basis of her identical needs and abilities to those of man. However, the conservative publicists founded their prescriptions upon society's need of woman's counterbalancing influence, her innate morality.

Yet how this was to be achieved caused the conservative publicists grave difficulties, and what emerges from their writings is a serious contradiction between the prescriptions and ideals of the majority of the conservative publicists, and the facts of their own lives. Virtually none lived the life of serene domesticity that they often urged upon their readers, yet, perhaps in reaction against their own lives, they often wrote about the unsuitability of woman's nature for labour. At the same time, they were aware that their injunctions simply could not

be followed by many women forced to earn their own living, as they had themselves, or by many unmarried women. And so by removing the basis of woman's innate moral nature from her maternal structure and function, to locating it in her anatomy as a whole opened the way to a theory of limited participation in the public sphere which would enable women to support themselves without compromising their womanhood.

Despite the fact that she herself ran a girl's seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, Margaret Coxe continued to locate woman's sphere in the roles of wife and mother.¹ She argued that through these roles women could influence public life by forming the character of her husband and sons. Home, for Coxe, was the place for woman to direct most effectively her "special moral agency", and the example of her living piety would bring those around her to the practice of Christian virtue.² Equally Eliza Farnham stressed the role of motherhood, consistent with her belief in the supreme importance of the maternal function. "All that I ask for Woman is what Nature designs for her", she wrote, and "no female having the capacity for motherhood has the right to renounce it."³

Believing that woman "was endowed for a higher and broader sphere than physical action", Farnham felt that laboring in the material world compromised woman's innately spiritual nature; writing about peasants, serfs, slaves, and operatives, she concluded:

The departure in personal development, from the true feminine type, which these women exhibit, confirms ... Woman's peculiar traits, capacities and claims ... by the time they reach maturity, they are physically monsters in form, and spiritually such in their natures - being somewhere between manhood and womanhood, without the graces and gifts of either.⁴

Yet despite this evident conviction, Farnham was well aware that life was less than perfect, and that women were forced by necessity to work to support themselves or contribute to their family income. Since this was so, she conceded that she was in favour of women working in those jobs where "it is possible to succeed in it without being a man, or becoming masculine", and she supported demands for equal pay.⁵ However, not once are either of these two proposals developed, and so it is unclear what work she felt was suitable for women or whether they should be competing for the same work as men, as the demand for equal pay would seem to imply.

The same contradiction between conviction and experience is to be found in the writings of Jane Swisshelm. In the Saturday Visiter Swisshelm had sharp words for what she perceived to be the hypocrisy of man in his treatment of woman:

We have looked at the Recorder and his clerks on a cold day, nicely fixed in a well warmed, lighted and ventilated office, built with the public money raised by indiscriminate taxes on men and women, and then passed out to look at women, shivering at apple stalls, carrying armfuls of sticks, or baskets of coal, and reflected that respectable female laborers were earning two dollars per week and boarding themselves, while we had just paid the gentleman up in the office a dollar, or perhaps two an hour, for copying a piece of writing; and we have been deeply impressed with the fostering care and chivalry which led men to confine women's sphere to 'the domestic circle'.⁶

Like Farnham, Swisshelm had to work to make enough money to support her family, and the experience appears to have only sharpened her conviction that women should not do the same work as men. Certain that woman was physically more fragile than man, Swisshelm advocated that women, if they had to work, should be allowed the lighter labour, perhaps such as the clerical work above, which would further ensure no conflict of interest between the sexes in the workforce. Although Swisshelm only poured scorn on the conventions held by the woman's rights movement, she did have sympathy with some of their aims, such as fair pay for woman's labour, but she insisted that men and women should not do the same work:

The idea is altogether a mistaken one that 'equal rights' for woman implies that she has a right to do anything that men do, and vice versa ... When woman's proper work is paid for according to its value, there will be no women to spare as rivals in the men's department.

And so, reluctantly, both Farnham and Swisshelm felt forced to acknowledge that labour for women was a reality, and so supported some of the demands of the woman's rights movement.

However, one conservative managed to achieve a positive synthesis between belief in woman's peculiar organization, and how she could exercise the moral influence this gave her while not compromising her womanhood. This was Catharine Beecher who was extremely influential among the conservative publicists. Beecher began her argument first from the point of view that America needed woman's contribution especially at this point in its history, suggesting that the horrors of the French

Revolution could happen in America as the consequence of the floods of new immigrants.⁸ Maria McIntosh picked up on the same argument:

"Europe is pouring out her pent-up thousands", she warned her readers, and entreated them to consider becoming missionaries in America's West.⁹

McIntosh directed a special appeal towards the women of the South, imploring them to combat prejudice, prejudice against labour for money, and in America as a whole, women were to use their influence to "allay the animosities of party and the prejudices of caste."¹⁰ This appeal appears not to have been, however, an attack on slavery, but rather one upon idleness, a popular theme among the conservative publicists.

The second reason employed by Beecher was that woman's position had changed, and not for the better and she is the only publicist to make any reference to woman's changing economic or social role:

In former days, when women spun and wove, and made butter and cheese, their daughters were their intelligent and well-trained assistants; and the style of dress and all the details of life were simple, and easy, and comfortable. These days have passed away.¹¹

Beecher seems to have identified two specific causes for concern emerging from these changes: the emergence of a class of wealthy and leisured women, whose idleness she deplored, and a new predicament for the single woman. This latter concern was undoubtedly generated by the events of her own life, for although the head of several very successful girls' seminaries, her own financial situation was never very secure, and she spent most of her life without a home of her own.¹² The result of these concerns was a life-long campaign centering around woman's education.

First of all she attempted to improve the quality of education received by girls, and she herself taught a wide range of subjects to her students, including Rhetoric, Logic, Chemistry, Moral Philosophy, and Latin.¹³ These were subjects that had not been available, for example, to Elizabeth Cady Stanton at Emma Willard's seminary in the 1830's. Secondly Beecher instituted training programmes for women teachers, and set up an organization to send women teachers to the newly developing western states of America. However, her inclusion of subjects in the curricula such as Latin and Chemistry did not mean that Beecher envisaged a completely new role for woman, rather an extension of her traditional one. Her vision, as Sklar describes it, was to create "a web of interlocking social institutions, including the family, the school, and the church" that "would form a new cultural matrix within which woman would assume a central role."¹⁴ In other words, the extension of woman's moral function into a specific participation in the public sphere.

Catharine Beecher's emphasis upon education as the vehicle by which to both promote woman's influence and improve her social and economic position struck a chord among many of the conservative publicists. Despite their shared belief that woman's moral influence was destined for a wider sphere of activity than the nursery, many were vague about how this was to be achieved, and Beecher's programme provided one way to reconcile these two ideas. Sarah Hale, in particular, was a vocal adherent of the push to improve woman's education, without however being at all specific about what reform she wished to see:

Believing, as we do, that the moral improvement of the world depends almost entirely on the kind of education women receive, and the way in which they use the influence it gives them, we cannot refrain from urging, often, the subject upon our readers.¹⁵

While enthusiastically endorsing Beecher's plans for women teachers, Hale still expected women to exercise their moral influence through domestic roles. "Home is the sacred residence designed by divine goodness for the happiness of woman", she wrote, and remained the best channel through which woman could hope to influence public life.¹⁶

For these conservative publicists the idea of harmony was paramount in their understanding of sexual roles, and metaphors of chaos entered readily into their vocabulary when they contemplated the demands made by the woman's rights movement that placed woman in competition or conflict with man. Sarah Hale denounced those of her contemporaries advocating woman's rights:

Some of my own sex ... are seeking to 'emancipate' themselves, and contending for the right of entering the arena of business and public life equally with men. The attempt will never succeed. Thanks be to heaven, woman cannot put off the moral delicacy of her nature. Could she do so, it would be as if Venus, leaving her sweet office of shining the morning and evening star, should become a fiery comet, and rush through the sky, bringing dismay with her light, and causing a deeper darkness as she passed away.¹⁷

Hale was sure that the "theories of Mrs Mott would disorganize society", Lucretia Mott being one of the radical publicists; "does she not perceive", Hale added, "that, in estimating physical and mental ability above moral excellence, she sacrifices her own sex, who can never excel in those industrial pursuits which belong to life in this world."¹⁸

For Hale, man represented the material, woman the spiritual, and the furthest she could contemplate woman's activity extending into the public sphere was in the teaching of children, still couched in terms of moral influence.

But other conservative publicists could see no contradiction between woman's moral influence, and exercising it through the right of suffrage. In fact, the question of the vote split the conservative publicists down the middle. Eliza Farnham, of course, was adamantly opposed for woman "was not made to exercise these powers; ... she cannot exercise them without doing violence to her nature."¹⁹ Another argument against suffrage was advanced by Maria McIntosh, who believed that political inequality had been ordained by the Bible; "let those who would destroy this inequality, pause ere they attempt to abrogate a law which emanated from the all-perfect mind" she warned.²⁰ However, Jane Swisshelm did not believe political rights such as suffrage emanated from the Bible, but rather were laid down in the Constitution and she was proud to announce that "we were the first writer west of the mountains to set up that claim" of suffrage.²¹

Both Hannah Tracy Cutler and Paulina Wright Davis endorsed the right of suffrage precisely on the grounds of woman's superior moral nature. In an editorial in 1854, Paulina Wright Davis denied that the vote would negatively affect woman's nature, and argued that the interests of the country required woman's moral influence:

Moreover the difference of sex and resulting difference of character, being always and absolutely preserved as by the laws of nature they must be, the feminine element in the civil government of this country is required to counteract the mischief arising from increased suffrage held as it is, by everything masculine²²

Whereas Paulina Wright Davis emphasized the need for woman's different, and complementary, influence in public affairs, Hannah Tracy Cutler wished it because woman was morally superior:

not that we may become like men in our moral natures, but because that we are unlike them; and hence harmony demands the counterbalancing influence of our softer sympathies, our more gentle natures, to balance the stern, cold, calculating spirit of the other sex.²³

And so the prescriptions endorsed by the conservative women publicists varied from domesticity to wage labour to suffrage, although the basic analysis of woman's nature, and its purpose, that was the foundation of conservative thought was the same. First of all, the belief in woman's different anatomical, physiological and mental constitutions from that of man permeates their thinking, and secondly, the concept of woman's larger function as 'saving' American society and restoring Christian values to public life. However, how woman was to best exercise her wider moral function without becoming tarnished by contact with the material world posed the conservative publicists a problem, particularly when it was evident that not all women could avoid such contact. Consequently limited participation in the public sphere came to be accepted, reluctantly by some but more positively by others. Nonetheless, the dominating idea remained that of woman's singular influence being her paramount responsibility and contribution to society.

What is, perhaps, most striking about the prescriptions endorsed by the publicists, particularly those of the conservatives, is their lack of focus and detail. With the exception of Catharine Beecher, who both advocated and actively initiated educational reform and professional careers for girls as teachers, the practical advice given to readers on how to best fulfil the innate feminine function of moral influence was almost non-existent. These publicists could, for example, have suggested that women at once swell the ranks of the 'moral societies' that flourished during this period, engaging in temperance, prison reform, and missionary work. Often these societies were attached to the numerous evangelical churches, and the total absence of such advice suggests that the publicists had removed the responsibility for morality away from the sphere of the church altogether. Moral virtue had become the province of womanhood, but in an individual sense. Nancy Cott attributes this emphasis upon individual virtue to the "secularization of the evangelical Christian view that society improved as more and more people professed faith - i.e. individual moral qualities determined social gain or failure."²⁴ Consequently progress could only be achieved through the strengthening of individual character and not collective action.

This explains the importance attached by the conservative publicists to the role of human will. Despite their fundamental determinism, will played a crucial part in whether woman chose to exercise her moral function. Margaret Coxe wrote that God "compels no one, irrespective of her own free will as a moral agent, to discharge her appropriate vocation",²⁵ and Hannah Tracy Cutler argued that it was upon the will of woman that the

regeneration of human society depended.²⁶ The laws governing woman's mind were similar to those governing woman's body - she could, as with tight lacing, choose to ignore them, but the result could only be damaging. Woman could ignore the laws of her being, but she could not choose in what direction to develop her mind, for as Sarah Hale made quite clear, "the difference in the constructive genius of man and woman is the result of an organic difference in the operation of their minds."²⁷

This same preoccupation with the moral influence of woman is equally apparent in the writings of the liberal publicists. Caroline Dall, who was active in the woman's rights movement, advocated suffrage because "it is the power of conscience and love she is to bring to bear on the ballot-box."²⁸ Combined with this belief in woman's innate nature was the corresponding liberal commitment to the right of each individual to develop "according to instinctive individual bias",²⁹ and Dall supported the removal of all barriers to women in education, labour, and law. Yet there is more ambivalence in the liberal approach; the conservative publicists almost uniformly expected woman's reward to come in heaven, whereas the liberal publicists were equally inclined to emphasize the right of the individual to self-fulfillment, and recognition on this earth.

Elizabeth Oakes Smith argued that woman would not be taken seriously by her contemporaries until she was seen as an equal, and in her society this meant that women had to satisfy economic criteria, for this was the basis upon which individuals were judged. Pre-empting her critics,

Smith raised the query that "it may be thought that, in claiming the right and dignity of labor for my sex, I am departing from the order of Nature."³⁰ Despite this, she argued:

woman must be accepted as a creation, and if society is so organized that the recognition of her as such must come through the medium of labour, the holding of property, then let her be no less a woman.³¹

Smith did not believe that woman's participation in society would affect or should compromise woman's innate moral nature, and she always maintained that for woman, "the indefinite influence springing from the private circle is not enough."³² But Smith was not really very interested or concerned about the majority of women, for she is essentially writing about a specific minority, her fellow-intellectuals, whose position she felt was more frustrating in her generation than it had ever been before:

In our age, unless the woman of intellect - (for the type is maturing itself to that development which is highest and most beautiful) - unless she is allowed the free exercise of her talents, is far more lonely and wretched than her poor sister of a bygone age.³³

This pre-occupation with individual freedom, and that woman not be defined purely by her functions in marriage and motherhood, is also evident in Margaret Fuller's work. Fuller agreed that woman "seems destined by nature rather for the inner circle",³⁴ but she did not feel institutional constraints were necessary to keep her there. Let "every arbitrary barrier", she begged, "be thrown down", and no chaos would result, rather "a ravishing harmony of the spheres would ensue."³⁵ Caroline Dall summarised the liberal creed most succinctly when she

wrote:

The God-given impulse of sex, if left in complete freedom, will establish, in time, certain distinctions for itself; but these distinctions should never be pressed on any individual soul.³⁶

Both the liberal publicists Elizabeth Oakes Smith and Caroline Dall, and four of the five radical publicists endorsed through the woman's rights movement after 1848 a large number of specific reforms. Legal reforms, such as the right of married women to their own wages, and legal recognition of the right of mothers to the guardianship of their children were among the law reforms envisaged. Lucretia Mott was particularly concerned about the right of women to their wages, for she had "known cases of extreme cruelty from the hard earnings of the wife being thus robbed by the husband, and no redress at law."³⁷ In terms of the labour options open to women, these publicists called for both the opening of colleges and professional schools to women students and the opening of skilled jobs to women, for as Amelia Bloomer declared, "a girl's hand and head are formed very much like those of a boy ... and capable of apprenticeship in any trade."³⁸ And, of course, the demand for suffrage became increasingly important over the years, but the radicals demanded suffrage on the basis of woman's identical needs and capabilities, and not difference from, those of man. But Stanton was acutely aware that both arguments could be employed in favour of suffrage:

If we are alike in our mental structure, then certainly we ought to have a voice in making the laws which govern us - if we are not alike, then we must make our own laws, as we alone can tell what we need.³⁹

Stanton and her fellow radicals endorsed suffrage for the former reason, Davis, Cutler and Swisshelm for the latter.

This raises a rather interesting question about the nature of the suffrage demand, which has recently drawn the epithet of the most 'radical' demand made by the woman's rights movement.⁴⁰ Since it could be, and was, advocated on the basis of woman's similarity to man, and upon the basis of her difference from man, it was virtually the one issue that allowed women of quite different philosophical assumptions about the nature and role of woman to work together. Suffrage was one demand made by the movement that did not force its exponents to agree upon a single definition of womanhood and publicists from the conservative, liberal and radical camps could, and did, endorse suffrage, either as the logical extension of woman's moral influence, or as woman's civil right. This may help explain why, after the Civil War, suffrage became the principal aim of both wings of the woman's rights movement.

Only one radical publicist did not associate herself with the woman's rights movement, Anne McDowell. McDowell was convinced that the subject of expanding woman's labour opportunities, and securing adequate remuneration, were matters far more fundamental to the well-being of most women than the question of suffrage or law reform. She had few romantic illusions about the majority of work options open to women, and refers in her paper to the "slaves of the cotton loom", and sympathizes with domestics over the solitary nature, and long hours, of the job.⁴¹

Through the advertisements in her paper she searched for women type-setters, watch-makers, and other skilled workers, and her creed is best illustrated by her claim that women have "the right to use their hands and heads, in any, and every capability, that they may have a will, or ability to act in."⁴² Despite this parting of the ways over the best strategy to improve woman's position, McDowell shared all the philosophical beliefs of her fellow radical publicists, which she concisely expressed as follows on June 7, 1856:

It is our earnest opinion that very much of the evil, inequality and false position of society has its origin in the supposition that boys⁴³ and girls are by nature differently constituted

Perhaps Elizabeth Cady Stanton expressed indirectly the major difference between the radical view of womanhood, and that of the conservatives and liberals. Addressing the arguments of those men who argued that nature's laws determined women's subordination to man in all spheres - a position which was vehemently denied by all of the publicists - she expressed a rejection of physiological determinism which broke completely with that underlying the established views of womanhood common in her time.⁴⁴ Both the conservative and liberal publicists assumed that woman had a singular function, the boundaries of which were physiologically determined. Woman might expand this function into new freedoms and roles, but only within narrow limits. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, by associating physiological determinism with male domination and rejecting both as arguments which reinforced the subordination of women, could therefore escape much of the intellectual confusion and

inconsistency which plagued her sisters. Thus, as she put the question, from which the title of this thesis is taken:

If I'm designed yon lordling's slave
By nature's law designed
Why was an independent wish
Ere planted in my mind?⁴⁵

The conservative and radical publicists began their quest in search of the true nature of womanhood with completely different questions. The conservatives commenced with the over-riding preoccupation with function, what was woman's function and consequently, her nature. The radicals asked why women were not allowed into certain areas of life, those of the public sphere. From these questions they emerged with completely different conceptions of woman's purpose and role; the conservatives identified woman's 'moral influence' as her primary function, while the radicals pointed to her need for 'self-realisation' on the same basis as man. These answers are not entirely congruent with the categories of domesticity versus feminism, and private versus public sphere that have been used to conceptualize the thought of this period. On the basis of 'moral influence' the conservatives argued for varying degrees of participation by woman in the public sphere above and beyond the domestic roles of wife and mother, with her responsibilities extending beyond those of the immediate family.

Further the ideas of the publicists have never been placed in the context of their individual lives, and doing so proves to be revealing. The conservative publicists, who, with the exception of Davis, all worked

to support themselves and their families, were the least sympathetic to the cause of unlimited labour opportunities for women. It appears that their experience often only made them more adamant that women should not have to work for wages. Yet they developed a theory of womanhood that could accommodate limited and sex-specific work for women. Quite the opposite is true of the radical publicists, who with one exception again, did not have to work to support themselves. Yet these women had often been the eldest child, denied the education of the brothers, and acutely aware of the limits placed upon woman's aspirations on account of sex. On the other hand, the liberal publicists had received very good education from their fathers and yet were constrained by the customs and conventions of their society from utilizing their abilities to their fullest. It is hard to escape the conclusion that experience played a large role in determining how these publicists defined womanhood.

Although the radical publicists made a complete break with the physiological determinism underlying mid-nineteenth century views of womanhood - and thereby made the most original contribution to the debate over the "Woman Question" - it was the conservative definition of womanhood that was shared by the majority of women publicists. By skillfully developing the physiologically-based contemporary view of womanhood, the conservatives expanded woman's function into a larger and more powerful role while maintaining the sexual dualism. The frontispiece, of the kneeling skeleton, symbolizes the anatomical design and its concomitant spiritual function meant by the majority of publicists when they described woman as "by nature's law designed".

NOTES

- 1
Hale, Woman's Record, p. 826.
- 2
Coxe, Claims of the Country on American Females, 1:37 and 13.
- 3
Farnham, Woman and Her Era, 1:29 and 86.
- 4
Ibid., 2:352; 1:88.
- 5
Ibid., 1:310; 2:341-346.
- 6
The Saturday Visiter, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 24, 1852), p. 2.
- 7
The Woman's Advocate, vol. 2, no. 3 (January 26, 1856).
- 8
Catharine Beecher, The True Remedy for the Wrongs of Woman
(Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1851; New Haven, Conn.: Research
Publications Inc., History of Women, reel 243), p. 64.
- 9
McIntosh, Woman in America, p. 104; see also Paulina Wright Davis
in The Una, vol. 2, no. 6 (June 1854), p. 280.
- 10
McIntosh, Woman in America, p. 96.
- 11
Beecher, Letters to the People on Health and Happiness, p. 108.
- 12
See Sklar, Catharine Beecher.
- 13
Ibid., p. 61.
- 14
Ibid., p. 172.

- 15
Godey's Ladies Book, vol. 23 (November 1841), p. 236.
- 16
Ibid., vol. 39 (November 1849), p. 366.
- 17
Hale, Woman's Record, p. xlv.
- 18
Ibid., p. 753.
- 19
Brother Jonathan, vol. 5, no. 9 (July 1, 1843), p. 268.
- 20
McIntosh, Woman in America, pp. 21-22.
- 21
The Saturday Visiter, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 24, 1852), p. 2.
- 22
The Una, vol. 2, no. 6 (June 1854), p. 281.
- 23
Ibid., vol. 1, no. 1 (February 1853), p. 14.
- 24
Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood, p. 96.
- 25
Coxe, Claims of the Country on American Females, 1:47.
- 26
Cutler, Woman As She Was, Is, and Should Be, p. 21.
- 27
Hale, Woman's Record, p. xlv.
- 28
Caroline Dall, Woman's Rights Under the Law (Boston: Walker, Wise & Co., 1861; New Haven, Conn.: Research Publications Inc., History of Women, reel 320), p. 150.
- 29
Ibid., p. 143

- 30
Smith, Woman and her Needs, p. 47.
- 31
Ibid., p. 47.
- 32
Ibid., p. 16.
- 33
Ibid., p. 109.
- 34
Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, p. 34.
- 35
Ibid., p. 37.
- 36
Dall, The College, the Market, and the Court, p. 8.
- 37
Stanton et al., History of Woman Suffrage, 1:373.
- 38
Bloomer, Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer, p. 165.
- 39
The Lily, vol. 2, no. 5 (May 1850), p. 38.
- 40
See DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage.
- 41
The Woman's Advocate, vol. 2, no. 6 (February 16, 1856).
- 42
Ibid., vol. 2, no. 1 (January 12, 1856).
- 43
Ibid., vol. 2, no. 22 (June 7, 1856).
- 44
Contrary to Rosalind Rosenberg, "In Search of Woman's Nature", p. 146: "As long as the female personality remained a function of woman's unique metabolism, a radical alternative to the Victorian view of womanhood remained impossible."
- 46
The Una, vol. 3, no. 3 (March 1855), p. 39.

APPENDIX 'A'

<u>Name/Date of Birth</u>	<u>Regional Affiliation</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Catharine BEECHER b. 1800	New England and Cincinnati	Teacher and Head of Girl's Seminary
Amelia BLOOMER b. 1818	New York State, Ohio 1853, Iowa 1856	Deputy Postmistress & Newspaper Editor
Margaret COXE b. 1800	New Jersey - Ohio	Teacher and Head of Girl's Seminary
Hannah CUTLER b. 1815	New England	Teacher and Writer
Caroline DALL b. 1822	New England	Teacher & Newspaper Editor
Paulina DAVIS b. 1813	New York State and Rhode Island	Newspaper Editor
Eliza FARNHAM b. 1815	New York State, Illinois	Teacher and Prison Matron
Margaret FULLER b. 1810	New England	Teacher, Newspaper Editor & Literary Critic
Sarah GRIMKE b. 1792	South Carolina, Philadelphia & N. York	None (private income)
Sarah HALE b. 1788	New England and Philadelphia 1837	Teacher and Journal Editor
Anne MCDOWELL b. 1826	Delaware and Philadelphia	Newspaper Editor
Maria MCINTOSH b. 1803	Georgia and New York City	Writer
Lucretia MOTT b. 1793	Massachusetts - Philadelphia	Teacher
Elizabeth SMITH b. 1806	Maine and New York City 1837	Writer
Elizabeth STANTON b. 1815	New York State	None
Jane SWISSHELM b. 1815	Pittsburgh and Kentucky 1857	Teacher and Newspaper Editor

APPENDIX 'A'

<u>Religion</u>	<u>Husband/Children</u>	<u>Father</u>	<u>Education</u>
Presbyterian- Episcopalian	None	Presbyterian Minister	Home & Sarah Pierce School, Litchfield
Presbyterian- Episcopalian	Lawyer & 2 adopted children	Clothier Presbyterian	Home and District School
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Home
Presbyterian- Episcopalian	1) Lawyer, 2) Army 3 children	Unknown	Common School and Oberlin 1847-48
Unitarian	Unitarian Minister 2 children	India Merch. Unitarian	Father, governess & private school
Presbyterian- Baptist - ?	1) Merchant, 2) Manuf. 2 ad. child.	Army	"sketchy" formal education
freethinker	1) Lawyer, 2) ? - Div. 3 children	Unknown	One year Quaker boarding school
Transcend- entalist	Married in Italy 1 child	Lawyer	Father and private school
Episcopalian- Quaker - ?	None	Lawyer Episcopalian	Private tutors
Episcopalian	Lawyer d. 1822 5 children	Tavern keeper	Mother and Brother
Episcopalian?	None	Cabinet Maker	Unknown
Unknown	Unknown	Lawyer	Mother and Girl's Academy
Quaker	Merchant 6 children	Sea Captain Quaker	Public and private schools
Congregation- alist - Unitar.	Newspaper Ed. 5 children	Merchant	Private school
Presbyterian - ?	Lawyer 7 children	Lawyer	Tutors, Johnstown Acad. & Troy Acad.
Presbyterian- Convenanter-?	Business/Farm div. 1857. 1 child	Merchant	Public school

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