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Transcendental subjectivity: Desire and protean gender in the social criticism of Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson

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The Ohio State University, 1993
TRANSCENDENTAL SUBJECTIVITY:
DESIRE AND PROTEAN GENDER IN THE SOCIAL CRITICISM OF
FULLER, WHITMAN, MELVILLE, AND DICKINSON

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
J.F. Buckley, B.S., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1993

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DEDICATION

As I now recall that day so many, many years ago, the
sun was shining and nature was offering me resplendent
conditions for traversing the nearby woods. Yet, as a boy
of eight leaning against our combination day bed and sofa,
I traversed The Lives of the Saints, sharing the formidable
tasks, gasping at the horrific torment of countless
religious personages. Seated beside me was my mother, Mary
Alice Buckley, patiently explaining words and implications,
ever dissuading my puerile effort to grasp this text.

The thirty plus years which separate that day in a
tenant house from these days in Ohio State’s libraries and
classrooms have evermore savored the presence of that
loving tutor, my mother. Her love of the written word, of
learning, which she so long shared with me has never left
me, has, in fact, sustained me. Never has she set
parameters; instead, she has encouraged me, regardless of
my direction and desire. For that reason, dear Mother, I
dedicate this dissertation to you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Just four years ago, upon my arrival at The Ohio State University, I met Professor James Phelan, then the Director of Graduate Studies. He was attentive and encouraging as I attempted to detail my interest in the relationship between American culture and American literature. His incisive intellect, couched in his caring humanity, provoked me to delve deeper. Never has he ceased being such a source of encouragement.

Although his tutelage is a giving of much knowledge, Professor Phelan conveys erudition but discourages the recondite; he seeks excellence but eschews the sectarian standard of measuring what is excellent. In short, as his pluralistic thought appraises, he appraises his own assumptions.

Such traits are obviously worthy of notation here; however, Professor Phelan has done much more for me. As he, without fail, turned his penetrating reason and probing intellect to each and every one of my ideas and insights, he not only guided my research—he guided my life. He encouraged and assisted my research into the exigencies of publishing gay and lesbian literature, all the while
allowing my own work to lead me to conclusions and projects beyond the scope of one dissertation.

It is for his guidance and friendship along the path which culminates in this work that I most want to thank Professor Phelan. He took the time to be interested in me as a student and as a person desiring to find a place for myself in academe. Long will his influence illuminate my path after this work. Thank you Jim.

That route started long ago in SUNY College at Fredonia, where Professor George Sebouhian teaches American literature. The enthusiasm and joy with which Professor Sebouhian approaches nineteenth-century American literature and the importance he finds within that period long ago convinced me that it was to be that period upon which I wanted to concentrate. For this I thank you, George.

Along with introducing me to the Transcendentalists, Professor Sebouhian also told me of Professor Julian Markels. For this I owe him a great debt of gratitude because when first I met Professor Markels, I understood what is meant by "a scholar and a gentleman." While exhibiting a most exacting scholarship and a vast knowledge, he invariably has invited me and all his students to engage him and his assumptions in critical dialogue. In his seminars or over a cup of coffee, Professor Markels exemplifies what is exciting and rewarding in literary scholarship: the possibility of true
intellectual interchange between friends and colleagues. Thank you, Julian.

I am equally indebted to my own good fortune for allowing me to study with Professor Jeredith Merrin. Long an inveterate and practiced reader of novels, I tread with less assurance among the meter and caesura of poetry. Then I enrolled in a seminar on modernist poets and met Professor Merrin. There, in a few short weeks she opened a door onto the beauty and joy and importance of poetry. In so doing, she opened doors within me neither she nor I knew existed. She has offered me knowledge and a forum for my ideas as I struggled with poetry; she has offered me friendship and support when my friend lost his struggle with AIDS. Her "Lightening" may have "Struck" others—and I am sure it has—but as for me, "I would not exchange the Bolt / For all the rest of Life." Thank you Jeredith.

It has not only been in knowing professors, though, that I have been inspired and challenged. Each month, Professor Phelan convenes his Informal Seminar for those whose dissertations he is directing. There, among fellow students, I have had the advantage of much valuable comments and criticism. I owe this group much, and I owe Professor Phelan much more for instituting such a great concept. Thank you all.
A member of that group, and a close friend, is Katie Dyer, "Father Katie" to me. She has argued with me and encouraged me more than almost anyone. She has listened to my personal troubles and to my dissertation ideas. She has, in order to assist me, read various books and then discussed my use of them. Thank you, Father Katie.

It seems difficult to close this, but such must occur. Consequently, I want to thank again especially all those above, as well as all those wonderful people in the English Department at The Ohio State University. Thank you for making the last four years a memorable and evolutionary part of my life.
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The Romantic Period in America, that time between 1830 and the start of the Civil War in 1865, that time called the first great creative period in American literature, often witnessed the romantic spirit of the age flame forth as the spirit of morality and reform:

During the years from 1830 to 1860 a host of reformers in a variety of reform movements together examined and attacked every American institution, every idea, every conceivable sin, evil, or burden of suffering.¹

Such a flame was fueled by the philosophical Romanticism of a speculative and idealistic group of writers—the transcendentalists. For these writers, although there was no single definitive transcendental philosophy which united them, there was a consensus that the intuitive, the personal revelation, transcends corporeal and cognitive experience. For the transcendentalists, the divinity of the individual, the fact that the human being has the potential to partake of what Ralph Waldo Emerson calls the "Over-Soul," that which animates all of nature and is

shared with God, empowered their social conscience.

While there are many writers with whom we associate this philosophical Romanticism, it is to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville that F.O. Matthiessen turns when he delineates the period of 1850 to 1855 as the American Renaissance: these are the "five of our major writers" whose "conceptions" alter "the function and nature of language." These five writers, although they are not always alike, treat of "the relation of the individual to society, and of the nature of good and evil," express "the transcendental conviction that the word must become one with the thing," identify "the poet with the prophet or seer," and connect "art and the other functions of the community" in a manner which F.O. Matthiessen credits for there being a renaissance within the American Romantic Period (xiv-xv).

While it is not amiss to laud these five writers for participating in a rebirth in American literature, for fueling a departure from the sentimental romanticism of their predecessors and contemporaries, as well for their attempts at reform, it is important to note, as Jane

Tompkins does, that criticism [such as Matthiessen’s valuing of nineteenth-century American writers] creates American literature in its own image because American literature gives the American people a conception of themselves and of their history.

In short, Matthiessen’s work can be viewed as an exercise in "consensus-formation as well as canon formation."

The canon which Matthiessen forms, as we are obviously aware, excludes too many women and too many African-American writers, most notably the authors of the extremely popular slave narratives of the later nineteenth century. Along with these omissions is another of at least equal—if not more—importance. All authors and narrators and characters, to the extent that we picture them as human, have a biological sex that is male or female. They also have desires which foment and empower their actions and thoughts. It is an awareness of how this biological sex and innate desire, being either prescribed or proscribed by culture(s), constitute simultaneously not only narrative but subjectivity, that is lacking in Matthiessen and most other critics interested in nineteenth-century American literature. In short, the gendering of biological sex and

---


4 Donald E. Pease, "Moby-Dick and the Cold War," The American Renaissance Reconsidered, ed. Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 113-155, 118.
the consequent effects on subjectivity are not adequately taken into account in critical writing relative to American literature. Jonathan Arac notices this in "F.O. Matthiessen: Authorizing an American Renaissance":

Some problems emerge . . . from comparing the letters [from Matthiessen to the painter Russell Cheney] and American Renaissance. In the long section on Whitman . . . Matthiessen dispersed references to . . . homosexuality (585; cf. also 535), the "power of sex" (523), and transient "Good Moments" (541)—which are remarkably condensed in an early letter to Cheney.®

Matthiessen, "as early as 1925," can formulate a private narrative to Cheney which expresses his acceptance of his own homosexuality. Yet, in formulating what is to be the American literary canon, Matthiessen is no longer "the whole man" he presents himself as when corresponding to his lover. In the homophobic overarching culture of early twentieth-century America, Matthiessen purges Whitman's homosexuality from American Renaissance after sounding very Whitmanesque in telling Cheney that he is attracted to "a husky laboring feller asleep on a bank," that he "is of blood and earth too, as well as of brain and of soul" (Arac 91). Thus, according to Thomas E. Yingling, much has been "displaced or scattered or disallowed," and he calls for "a reassembled homosexual text . . . for the sake of understanding the cultural production of signs that

surround and identify sites such as the homosexual from within and without."

It is this need to understand the enculturation of gender and desire, the engendering of desire, that leads me to examine not only how desire and subjectivity enable us to understand the cultural production of narrative, but especially how desire and subjectivity empower the spirit of morality and reform, the social criticism of some of those most canonized and most "acceptable" writers of the American Renaissance: Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson, four who struggle with the idea of an innate desire and society's implication in expressing that desire. Although they are writing by mid century, these writers seem aware that the second half of the nineteenth century in particular was a period in which the idea of a "true self" and a singular identity based on one's "innate" femininity or masculinity took hold in Western society.


7 Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, "Introduction," Feminism and Foucault (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988) xii. Diamond and Quinby's project is an investigation of the relationship between Foucault's philosophy and the current work of feminist theory. Yet, they and other contributors address the culture suasion we all feel to present a unified, clearly gendered subjectivity to society at the very time that we are to varying degrees aware that doing so is accepting domination.
According to Michel Foucault, culture, in effect, is gendering subjects according to a cultural consensus of what is acceptable:

The essential point is that sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood, that the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful, or dangerous, precious or formidable; in short, that sex was constituted as a problem of truth.®

In short, nineteenth-century American society and the desire and subjectivity of nineteenth-century American individuals are inseparable. It is in such a milieu that Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson--an essayist, a writer of fiction, and two poets—are writing. They place the individual at the center of life and of their art, and portray unique human feelings and beliefs in a variety of forms and genres. They treat of the relation of the individual to society, and of the nature of good and evil; they identify the poet with the prophet or seer who connects art to the community. And, as transcendentalists, they have faith in the individual’s ability to transcend the merely corporeal. In so doing, they reveal a disjunction between an innate desire related

® See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 3-13. Foucault shows us how sex is transformed into discourse and is thereby part of the ubiquitous and anonymous power of society. My interest here is in what society does with our biological sex.
to biological sex and society's gendering of that desire.

Their desire to correct or avoid the ills of society leads them to posit an individual subjectivity whose expression of desire evinces a fluid sense of gender. This subjectivity is an extrapolation of transcendental thought, at first critical of nineteenth-century America, then, in the case of Dickinson, critical of transcendentalism's cultural optimism. In addressing their society by way of viewpoints which are not clearly gendered in a culturally acceptable manner, Fuller and Whitman and Melville and Dickinson may now, in retrospect, be seen as correcting Lacan's beliefs that desiring something by definition leads to objectifying and that the realm of language is accessible only through the realm of the imaginary. Fuller, Whitman, and Melville, in progressively more complex fashion, describe a desire that desires that the desire of the "other" join with it to create a subjectivity which neither seeks an object nor is an object of desire. Dickinson, in problematizing the transcendentalism of Fuller, Whitman, and Melville, presents us with a consciousness working and writing far beyond Lacan's conception that language (symbolic order) can be utilized only by employing already familiar images (imaginary order).
Margaret Fuller in her 1845 *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Walt Whitman in his many revisions of *Leaves of Grass*, Herman Melville in his 1851 *Moby-Dick*, and Emily Dickinson in many of her poems from 1858-1866, show a sensitive awareness of the relationship between the foundational or essentialist view of gender and the role society plays in gendering us as subjects. Although these four often reveal a nineteenth-century bias toward stereotypical perceptions of gender, they nonetheless evince an awareness that such "natural" conditions of sex have complicated social connections. For them, as for us, male and female are biological classifications determined by genitalia; what is masculine or feminine, what is the social role of male or female, is quite another question, one deeply implicated in cultural practices. It is with this mindfulness—in fact, through the filter of this complex awareness of gender—that these writers approach society. Although Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson do not share a single approach to gender which fully integrates all their individual views, each one rejects in her or his own way stereotypically gendered desire: Fuller combines and thereby confutes masculine and feminine stereotypes; Whitman expresses nearly all possible desires of both genders; Melville's Ishmael engenders (him?)self in a variety of ways in order to speak from various points of
view; Dickinson's desire finally moves beyond any desire which can be seen as gendered desire. Thus, these four writers collectively expose as naively limited their society's culturally inscribed roles of gender and the conflicts attendant on those roles--they transcend them.

In crucial and obvious ways their narrators create a subjectivity that is not only an intuitive, spiritual, transcendental force for social critique, but is also a subjectivity empowered because this force is an expression of desire associated with no specific static, culturally validated gender. In Fuller, Whitman, and Melville, this subjectivity is a spiritual viewpoint from which to critique nineteenth-century American society. In Dickinson, this subjectivity is a spiritual viewpoint which reveals the limitations of transcendentalism. Both of these viewpoints shed new light on our present-day understanding of subjectivity and gendered desire.
CHAPTER I
Transcendental Subjectivity:
A Critique of Society,
A Critique of Transcendentalism

Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, and Herman Melville are caught up in the desires of males and females as they derive from biological sex and as nineteenth-century American society engenders those desires. For Fuller, heterosexual desire leads not to objectifying the opposite sex but to a union in which men and women desire a goal which emphasizes their complementary status; for Whitman, heterosexual and homosexual desire lead to an American subjectivity whose voice unites all desires; for Melville, homosexual and heterosexual desire are kept in flux which leads to an ambiguously gendered subjectivity whose desire critiques the American psyche. All of these writers thereby gain a more egalitarian perspective on the actions of America. To achieve their respective ends, each relies on a personal intuition of an ideal which is validated by a personal relationship with God. Each believes in democracy and individualism and in an epistemology based on the human capacity to transcend the senses and logic in order to receive "truth" from a higher realm. They are all
transcendentalists, but their interpretation of this philosophy leads them to transcend society's codified expressions of desire.

Dickinson, though not as often considered a transcendentalist as the other three, is in fact an artist who carries transcendentalism to its limits. While believing in a personal relationship with God—or with some spiritual force—and in the possibility of transcending the physical and merely cognitive realms to receive truth, Dickinson so rigorously relies on individual or introspective intuition that she reveals how transcendentalism eventually leads to a self-contained consciousness, a consciousness conscious of consciousness. She is a transcendentalist revealing the limits of transcendentalism.

Despite differences among these four, as a group they stand out from their contemporaries because their comments on society result from a transcending into a sphere where desire is associated with no specific gender. Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson employ speakers or narrators who either espouse androgyny or who express a desire which is neither stereotypically masculine nor stereotypically feminine. Fuller asks for a joining of what is stereotypically masculine and what is stereotypically feminine. Whitman asks for an American
individual who is both masculine and feminine, and his speaker purports to be or to contain those undiscriminating masculine and feminine subjects—even though "he" often projects a marked homosexual persona. Melville's Ishmael works to establish (him)self as simultaneously female and male. Dickinson, in desiring to investigate the human consciousness poised between death and an unknown immortality, creates a speaker whose desire is focused on what is beyond gender, a purely spiritual being who eludes gender constructions. In truth, long before the advent of gender studies and culture studies, Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson demonstrate that there exists an intricate relationship among biological sex, culture, gender, and power.

That these four would turn to a "social criticism" which is empowered by an awareness of the fluidity of gender is in part explainable by the close connection between sex, gender, desire, subjectivity, and culture. Even before we "notice" ourselves as individuals, separated from the culture with which we are nonetheless connected, there is biological sex. Almost every one of us is born with either a penis and testicles or a vagina and ovaries—the hermaphrodite being extremely rare. So, sexual organs are easily prioritized in determining gender. A penis and testicles are necessary constituents of "being a man" and a
vagina and ovaries necessary constituents of "being a woman." Such physical determinations appear to offer little to fret over—we are either male or female, the penetrators or the penetrated. Our sex, it appears, is a natural fact and we are only being natural in acting as our sex or gender predisposes us: we either deliver the semen to the egg, or we hold the egg, waiting for the semen.

Yet, sexual behavior is not fully explained by our biological endowments. We do not "have sex" with all whom we meet, and when we do have sex—regardless how impersonal it might be—it is never solely and exclusively a case of genitalia meeting genitalia: there is always a meeting of images, of socially encoded identities that are desired by each for various reasons and to varying degrees. We seek out the type of person in whom we will be "interested." Having met them, we are acutely aware of their "looks," their personality, their demeanor; if we "like" them, we seek further "involvement," whatever that may mean to us at that specific time. We individualize or qualify the "male" or "female" with whom we might "have sex," with whom we wish to spend some time. In fact, we never fall in love or go to bed or even become enamored of a mere biological male or biological female. We require more, much more than one type or the other of genitalia. Where, though, if we were pressed to say, does biology leave off and culture take
over in "determining" us, in "making" the female or the male someone who is desired, someone who can satisfactorily fulfill our desires? Does being female [or male] constitute a natural fact or a cultural performance, or is naturalness constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?"^1

This relationship between the biological and the cultural can be in part explained by Jacques Lacan and his "mirror stage." It is here that we apprehend our "self" "as an identification" an image, a social "I."^2 Our biological gender, as determined by our sexual organs, has been from the earliest hours of our birth overlaid with signals that more or less fit us. We get signals that we should be such and such or that we should prefer such and such; we are in a relationship with our culture. What derives from this for us is in the form of a gestalt, "an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted" (Ecrits 2). When we are

^1 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990) viii. While Butler's project in her Preface and in her first chapter, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," is to investigate how women are gendered by a society interested in exerting power over them, she raises interesting points regarding how we "see" gender, how we define what is male or female. See also Butler's essay, Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in Diana Fuss, Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories Gay Theories (New York: Routledge, 1991) 13-31.

looking at our mirror image, the one our culture sees, we are looking at an ideal apprehension of ourselves, a unity of all the traits espoused by the social construct contained within us, what Lacan calls the "Other." As Biddy Martin says

all categories of the natural or the normal, as well as the unnatural or abnormal, are . . . social constructs rather than distinctions given at the level of the body or individual psyche, categories that have been produced discursively and which function as mutually determining oppositions to normalize and to discipline.

Thus, there is within us an unconscious construction taking place, a construction that is more or less foreign, an "Other." We internalize, if you will, what it means to be a man and a woman; there is within each of us a presence constructed by our culture:

Lacan uses a capital O to make clear that it's not just the fellow you're talking to in the street. You depend on an idea of man, or of God, or of the State, or of a dictator, or of order. Whatever it is, it sets up a kind of dam in you. . . . The dam existed before you were born; it will exist for your own children.

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But we recognize that this gestalt is only a constituent or element of us. It reflects a socially perceptible unity that is not completely representative of us or attainable by us. Of this we are well aware. We realize that we are no longer in a unified relationship with our mother, and we realize that we are not quite the same as our social image. In short, we are in a state of desiring what we lack. According to Lacan, however, this is not truly desire until we learn language. It is through language that we communicate; it is through language that we convey our desires:

Let it suffice to say that from this point forward the child's desire, its endless quest for a lost paradise, must be channeled through the subterranean passageways of the symbolic order, which makes it possible that things be present in their absence in some way through words.

We know that social success must follow the social image, and we are well aware that our social image does not fully represent us. However, that it does not fully represent us has greater importance than revealing to us our paranoic knowledge of ourselves. From this stage on we see that which is outside us as objects. That which is not our inner "self," that which is not included in our sense of being a subjectivity (a somewhat unified collection of

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beliefs) is an object. If it is not "Me," it is an object.

Nonetheless, we desire to be unified; we lack unity and want to unify ourselves. This desire, though, objectifies, since we focus desire outside ourselves—even if we desire that some other subject desire us. To desire the desire of an "other" is to desire that we become the valued object of some other desiring subject. This condition is unavoidable within any cultural structure, even in cases of apparently altruistic desire. If a reforming subject desires recognition of civil rights for slaves, then that desire is a desire for some other subjects in nineteenth-century America to desire what that subject does. The subject desires that others will desire what it does; its desire thereby becomes the object of an other's desire, an act which objectifies its desire and negates its subjectivity which is defined in the act of desiring. The reforming subject's desire is subsumed by the desire of others, and the subject as a desiring, definable subjectivity, becomes but an object.

This is so because, according to Lacan, the subject is always constrained by the cultural structure evidenced during the mirror stage. In the mirror stage the subject desires to be acceptable to the socially constructed image or "I" that society validates. The standards for this "I" are in the socially constructed "Other" which has been
building with every social interaction. In short, desire expressed within and confined to any social order is doomed to dissatisfaction, since what is outside the desiring subject is objectifiable as an "other"; however, that "other" is represented inside the desiring subject as that subject's "Other." A desiring subject thus ends up desiring to be desired, objectifying desire, objectifying itself, negating its own "selfhood."

However, desire is a most persistent force. Lacan tells us that the time when a subject identifies with its social image, its "I,"

is [the] moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other. (Ecrits 5)

For Lacan, these desires evince themselves only as transference or repression (Ecrits 141), a result of desire being the desire of the "Other," the socially constructed standard of behavior internalized by the subject (Ecrits 288). But the Real Order is the locus of desire; consequently, desire subsists outside symbolization, outside the control of the conscious or unconscious. Desire may be fenced in by the Symbolic Order, but it is never permanently constrained. Hence, to claim desire will always seek cultural approval or transference or repression

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is, I feel, to dismiss too quickly the potency and possibility of innate desire. At the very least there exists the possibility of a desire which does not turn upon itself, which does not respect cultural constraints. This is evidenced on a very superficial level when we desire to be desired by those as similar to us as possible. We seek out situations which return our desires with support and meaning. We desire validation of our subjectivity; we want support for what we perceive ourselves to be; we want a social environment that supports our desires; we want as little disruption from our internalized "Other" as possible. In so desiring, we help create and maintain our culture. Our desire leads to action, and we want our actions to mean something. This adds up to an even stronger reciprocal relation between us and society: "no sociocultural environment exists or has identity independent of the way human beings seize meanings and resources from it." Thus, meaning exists coincidentally with and as a constituent of all cultures because it is our intentional effort which helps create and sustain the cultures to which we belong: the overarching culture of America, the constituent culture of academia, etc.

It these cultures which in turn affect, actually

effect the manner in which we thereafter intend or desire--

our desires, remember, return us to our relationship with

our internalized "Other." We are, it seems, determined by

and we determine culture because that "Other" always

precedes us. Although cultures change and new ones do

arise, no subject is born sans culture:

Culture refers to persons, society, and nature as

lit up, and made possible by some already-there

intentional world, an intentional world composed

of conceptions, evaluations, judgments, goals,

and other mental representations already embodied

in socially inherited institutions, practices,

artifacts, technologies, art forms, texts, and

modes of discourse. It is those inherited

conceptions, evaluations, judgments, and goals

embodied in cultural things (institutions,

artifacts, discourse), about which the intending

think, out of which the intending build their

lives, and with respect to which the intending

give substance to their minds, souls, wills, and

directed actions. (Shweder 26)

All this "makes" us as individuals into subjects

within a culture--such as nineteenth-century America.

Culture, being a "net-like organization," is the scene of

the dissemination of power.9 We, as individual subjects,

are aware of our "selfhood." We see ourselves as

individual in Lacan's mirror stage which glaringly shows

our relationship with culture. Even though we sense

difference between ourselves and our social image, we are

9 Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge, trans. Colin

Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, ed.

culturally "determined": our society validates certain images for us and precludes others. And, despite our unease, we perpetuate society's power by "recognizing" its effects on our social image which we maintain by maintaining membership in that society. We are our own policing agency. According to Foucault,

"discipline "makes" individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise."\(^\text{10}\)

So, what starts as purely biological sex is culturally engendered during the mirror stage, and desire becomes something to be validated in concert with gender roles. What the subject desires is, like the social "I," something to be validated by that subject's culture. We never desire or act or even perceive ourselves outside of our relationship with our culture. It is little wonder, then, in nineteenth-century America, that the Northeast is a haven for abolitionism as well as for temperance and women's rights movements, that there exists a vast contiguous area of slave-holding states, that experimental socialist communities are springing up. America's individuals are intentionalizing constituent cultures which provide support and meaning, which provide objectives that allow individuals to project a social image more closely

aligned to their actual, innate, Real Order desires. Groups of similar "subjectivities" cohere in the act of desire, and a portion of nineteenth-century American culture is being intentionally altered, changed as a whole.

That such groups come into existence recalls to mind the Real Order desire which is to some degree always outside cultural power. So too do these groups hint at the realization that for a subject to perceive itself as an individual in the presence of a disciplining society is to acknowledge the existence of differing desires: individual and group. Again we are aware that social consensus invariably excludes some desire. Why else repression, regression, and discipline?

Changing society, then, becomes an extension of the demarcation of desire. There are in nineteenth-century America, four writers whose use of transcendentalism extends the possibilities for expressing desire. They call into question the inescapability of Lacan’s labyrinth of objectifying desire and the pervasiveness of Foucault’s notion of discipline. Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson, obviously without any awareness of the Lacanian doctrine that society is but a network of desires desiring to be the objects of desire, extrapolate on the transcendental notion of the importance of the inspired poet who is a standard unto himself. "The spirit within is
the only writer," according to [Amos Bronson] Alcott, a sentiment echoed by Orestes Brownson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Jones Very, and other transcendentalists such as Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson.¹¹ Purposely avoiding the gendered "Other" within, these four direct recalcitrant Real Order desire, focusing it for change on a realm outside what nineteenth-century American culture has already encoded, outside the subject/object relationships of society. For Fuller, Whitman, and Melville this realm joins together the masculine and the feminine in various ways. For Dickinson this realm is a culmination of a desire to be conscious of consciousness, and gender itself is conspicuously transcended.

In writing their transcendental texts, these four challenge American society, and eventually the American philosophy of transcendentalism, by challenging gender roles, the most obvious exemplification of cultural disciplining and the most pervasive mode of controlling an individual's participation in society. These four challenge what nineteenth-century America means or intends by "woman," a gendered subject whose role is defined as domestic and supportive of man; they challenge what nineteenth-century America means or intends by "man," a

¹¹ Lawrence Buell, Literary Transcendentalism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973) 56.
gendered subject whose role is to be assertive and grasping and to penetrate nature, begetting on it a new nation and a new order, even though to be American in the nineteenth century is to be firm and forthright and upstanding when dealing with others while having a supportive and nurturing center for the protection of citizens.

Of course, not all nineteenth-century Americans endorse such stereotypical roles for men and women; however, these beliefs are prevalent enough in nineteenth-century American society to prompt Fuller, Whitman, and Melville to carefully base their cultural critique on a concept of desire that is not linked to a uniform concept of gender. They avoid using language in the manner Diamond and Quinby describe as "reverse discourse" which would only place their narratives in opposition to specific cultural gender roles (xi). For them to write either as a "man" or as a "woman" would be to direct their desires against already established objects, to assume positions which are already gendered. The woman attacks the man for ill treatment and ends up being described as what she is not, as "she" who is other than "man." So too for the male author. If Fuller, Whitman, and Melville were to be likewise aggressive and merely oppositional, they would likely end up describing themselves in the terms of that which they dislike. In short, gendered attacks against
gendered objects only sustain the binary opposition which foster those objects—the opposition of subject and object internalized during the mirror stage. For these writers there are more viable options: Fuller posits an androgynous union of men and women; Whitman gives voice to nearly all desires; Melville’s Ishmael shifts between male and female.

Dickinson also focuses her desire on a realm of unspecified gender. However, her writing is less a critique of nineteenth-century America than it is a revelation of the limits of transcendentalism. She carries the nineteenth-century American belief in the power of the individual poet to transcend the corporeal and thereby receive a higher truth to such extremes as to call into question the efficacy of transcendentalism as a tool of social criticism. Dickinson also shows the limits of the Lacanian notion that the symbolic is only approachable through the imaginary. According to Lacan, the unconscious is the locus of imagoes or images and cliches which orient the manner in which we perceive others, and these unconscious images or cliches are what in turn structure the language of the subject. The only approach to language is through the imaginary realm of images and cliches which give meaning to language.¹² Dickinson, however, in taking

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transcendentalism to the extreme of a consciousness conscious of itself, writes around existing images and cliches, positioning her speaker over a void which forces the creation of new imagoes.

And, since Dickinson's speaking subjectivity, along with Fuller's, Whitman's, and Melville's, desires what is outside of culture's subject/object structure, she (along with Fuller, Whitman, and Melville) reveals another limitation in Lacan's belief that human desire is the desire of the "Other." Her speaker is not merely self-conscious; her speaker is self-consciousness without a gendered self. Such self-consciousness is not defined by its act of being conscious of itself as an it or object. Dickinson's speaking subjectivity is conscious of being a being being conscious. Desire for her speaker, and for Fuller and Whitman and Melville, is an act that shares in the act of desiring. In Dickinson's case, though, the cliches or images of the Symbolic Order are either avoided or subverted in her transcendentially poetic enterprise.

Although these writers subvert the culturally inscribed relationship between gender and desire in order to critique nineteenth-century American society, and in so

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doing also help us understand the limits of Lacanian and transcendental thought, there are many who do not so eagerly share the idea that a worthwhile critical perspective on subjectivity and desire can be based on a protean notion of gender such as that to which Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson subscribe. Annette Kolodny, in taking issue with Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, asserts the necessity of investigating women's writing as something specifically female because there exists "an other tradition," a feminine tradition in writing that is discernable from male writing. Sandra Gilbert believes that all aspects of personal subjectivity which are private are at once public and accordingly political, the necessary concern of any writer or critic involved in social issues.

What, for instance, could be more fundamental, more a matter of ultimate realities, than an exploration of the relationships between sexual self-definition and literary authority, or an examination of the hidden psychosexual meanings of writing itself, the quintessentially cultural activity that distinguishes us not only from animals but also from one another?  

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Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, in the introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*, sets forth as axiomatic the basis for her book. And in so doing she, like Gilbert and Kolodny, emphasizes the importance of working with desire that can be clearly attributed to a gender. For Sedgewick, the relationship between desire and cultural gendering of biological sex creates a tension which can be seen in most literature:

Many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century.16

That gender and biological sex are considered important aspects of literature—and hence in need of investigation—is evidenced by the appearance of complete studies devoted to the influence of a specific gender on social activities such as writing. Elizabeth Abel's collection of feminist essays, *Writing and Sexual Difference* is one such text.17

Critics, asserting the importance of differentiating between biological sexes and between cultural genders, are not alone. Creative writers, too, are expressing the


17 Elizabeth Abel, *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).
belief that gender can not be ignored when critiquing culture. Adrienne Rich, in "Transcendental Etude," speaks as a lesbian who cannot record her love in the language which is contaminated with patriarchal—and hence, gendered—values. She desires a language that is gendered for her, not an androgynous language:

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two women, eye to eye
measuring each other's spirit, each other's
limitless desire,
a whole new poetry beginning here.
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... Such a composition has nothing with eternity, the striving for greatness, brilliance—only with the musing of a mind one with her body, . . .

... pulling the tenets of a life together with no mere will to mastery, only care for the many-lived, unending forms in which she finds herself.  

Although they have many differences, Fuller's, Whitman's, Melville's, and Dickinson's use of a subjectivity which "transcends" desire gendered by culture comes close to the recent feminist belief that "the unity of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler 31). These four transcendental writers address such ills of culturally constrained desire, but they accomplish their critique without relying on a

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simple androgynous melding of stereotypical gender roles.

However, as we shall see in chapter five, Dickinson's self-conscious modern sensibility becomes more critical of transcendentalism than of society. And, while we can agree that these writers' use of transcendentalism points to possibilities for desire and language which the likes of Lacan does not see, I leave it to you, my reader, to judge the efficacy, ultimately, of the Romantic idealism of Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson.
CHAPTER II
Margaret Fuller's Androgynous Ideal

Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is a feminist statement, "the quintessential feminist treatise,"¹ "a major feminist document,"² because she does highlight the disproportional position of woman in nineteenth-century America and does lay out the need for change. Yet, she does not merely seek redress. Unlike feminists who attempt to oppose patriarchal society and its treatment of women, Fuller, not aiming to coerce, persuade, or ridicule, largely avoiding the lurid and the emotional, attempts to engage her readers in a dialogue.³ In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller values the subjectivity


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of both her reader and herself, just as she values the
subjectivity of both the male and the female. She would
have the male and the female share a union which "may be
expressed as pilgrimage toward a common shrine":

Father and mother should assist one another to
learn what is required for this sublime
priesthood of Nature. But, for this, a religious
recognition of equality is required. (W 61)

For Fuller, this equality comes in stages. "The Household
Partnership" is an equality of shared physical duties (W
61). "Mutual Idolatry" is a narrow sphere of shared
adoration (W 62). "Intellectual Companionship" is an
equality of friendship (W 62). But it is Fuller's wish
that male and female desire to worship "a common shrine";
this is the most valued stage of heterosexual union (W 69).
This common shrine would be the object of desire for both
male and female; there would be no objectification of one
subject by the other; there would be instead a shared focus
of desire, a sharing of desire, a joining of male and
female desire into one desire for a goal that can be viewed
as androgynous.

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'M Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century.
1845. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980)
69. All further references to this work will be from this
text and will be cited parenthetically with W and the page
number.
Desiring a goal somewhat removed from the prescribed gender roles of patriarchal society seems logical: Fuller knows the sentiments of nineteenth-century America. Only the abolitionists, those "champions of the enslaved African" who, "partly from a natural following out of principles" and "partly because many women have been prominent in that cause," are the ones making, "just now, the warmest appeal in behalf of Woman" (W 18). She knows that "there exists in the minds of men a tone of feeling toward women as toward slaves" (W 22). Fuller is politically astute enough to be aware not only of how her culture treats women, but of how most of nineteenth-century America will receive her plea:

As to the use of the pen, there was quite as much opposition to Woman's possessing herself of that help to free agency as there is now to her seizing on the rostrum or the desk; and she is likely to draw, from a permission to plead her cause that way, opposite inferences to what might be wished by those who now grant it. (W 24)

Fuller's wish for a dialogue, for a means of advancing the cause of women and of men equally has a rather ironic source in transcendentalism. During the Romantic Period of America, when the country is experiencing the philosophical romanticism of Transcendentalism, she is writing a plea for the individual--for each woman and for each man:

We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man. Were this done . . . we believe the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown . . . and that no discordant
collision, but a ravishing harmony of the spheres, would ensue. (W 26)

However, her own transcendentalist colleagues, with whom she is well-acquainted, with whom she shares ideas, with whom she shares a philosophical inclination if not a coherent philosophical movement, offer no solace, it appears, for the plight of her sex. The very philosophy which espouses the value of the individual, the very philosophy upon which Fuller’s work is based, is, like nineteenth-century America, sexist. Regardless of its main tenets, it seems that transcendentalism is a philosophical enterprise closely connected with gender roles which society values:

While her strategy and rhetoric assume the universality of Transcendentalist claims, her need to argue it undermines that assumption. In urging that universal human truths be extended to women, Fuller unwittingly calls their universality into question, and discloses them to be contingent or incomplete.®

Her very text is couched in and is an expression of transcendental beliefs; yet, she is also arguing against certain tendencies of transcendentalism. Despite its championing of individualism, transcendentalism does not allow for any and all constructions of the individual.

Nevertheless, Fuller sees in the romanticization and idealization of the subject "the revisionary critical and social possibilities of that subject." To subvert oppressive gender roles in society, the individual must subvert those roles in her life since she is the primary avenue of social improvement. Fuller, like other transcendentalists, sees in the individual the microcosm of the whole:

If the first axiom of Transcendentalist thought was that the individual is potentially divine, the second was that the individual is valuable only sub specie aeternatis, in his universal aspects. (Buell 269)

Fuller, though, allows for any individual. It is in the consciousness of each individual subjectivity that her ideal society is founded because "relations with another soul, which, if not eternal in themselves, must eternally affect" the individual (W 58-59). There can be no select few, because "while any one is base, none can be entirely free" (W 10). Each individual must improve. "Everything . . . grows from the essential life of the being" (W 116).

Fuller, espousing unfettered individualism rather than social conflict as the means to realizing an ideal partnership between the sexes, does join other

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transcendentalists in affirming "certain principles":'

(1) an intuitive idealism which accepted ideas as ultimates; (2) a view of the imagination or intuition . . . giving a direct apprehension of reality which the logical faculties . . . could not furnish; (3) the concept of an organic universe . . . [in which] the whole could be grasped by contemplation and intuition; (4) a living religion in which miracles seem natural; (5) the divinity of man . . . ;(6) a concept of Genius . . . ; (7) a freedom and spontaneity in art . . . ;(8) an individual moral insight which should supersede the dollar as the standard of conduct; (9) self-improvement as the primary avenue of social improvement; (10) individualism, i.e., reliance on God, rather than conformity to the will of a political or social majority; (11) an optimism about the potentialities of individual lives and the universe. [emphasis added] (Harding and Meyer 122-123)

In subscribing to these transcendental beliefs, Fuller has much in common with the likes of Henry David Thoreau, another critic of nineteenth-century America. In fact, in looking at Walden I see evidence of a project remarkably similar to Fuller's. Both transcendentalists aspire to improve society through the improvement of the individual. Thoreau, in "Economy," says that he require[s] of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to

He wants sincerity and truth, which require being an individual "distant from" others, involved in self-culture. This is the start of his project: a self creating of itself its own society. So too for Fuller, who asks that women be allowed a phase of autonomous introspection preparatory to their involvement in society:

What Woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home. (W 27)

I would especially refer . . . to what Man should do . . . to obtain mastery over outward, through an initiation into inward life, and severe discipline of faculty. (W 114)

Let her put from her the press of other minds, and meditate in virgin loneliness. (W 108)

When the intellect and affections are in harmony; when intellectual consciousness is calm and deep; inspiration will not be confounded with fancy. (W 93)

Thoreau's purpose or ultimate aim in writing *Walden* is even more akin to Fuller's in writing *Woman*, it appears, than are his required preparations for being an ideal individual. He is troubled by the presence of the surface of existence, the exigencies of being a member of a

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culture:

young men . . . whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools . . . Better if they had been born in the open and suckled by a wolf. . . . They have got to live a man’s life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well-nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life. (Walden 5)

Fuller is likewise upset

that, while it is the destiny of Man, in the course of the ages, to ascertain and fulfil the law of his being, so that his life shall be seen, as a whole, to be that of an angel or messenger, the action of prejudices and passions which attend, in the day, the growth of the individual, is continually obstructing the holy work that is to make the earth a part of heaven. (W v-vi)

Furthermore, Thoreau and Fuller are both focusing on, and desirous of attaining some spiritual realm. Thoreau says that "the value of a man is not in his skin, that we should touch him" (Walden 136), and Fuller says that "by being more a soul, she will not be less Woman, for nature is perfected through spirit" (W 161). Thoreau, in "The Ponds," which is the ninth of eighteen chapters, the middle of the book, the textual "heart" of Walden, tells us that he has "spent the hours of midnight fishing from a boat" on the pond, where "anchored in forty feet of water, and twenty or thirty rods from the shore" he was "communicating by a long flaxen line with mysterious nocturnal fishes. . . . It seemed as if [he] might next cast [his] line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element, which
was scarcely more dense. Thus [he] caught two fishes as it were with one hook" (Walden 174-175). Fuller, in the center of her book or close thereby, tells us that "the fourth highest grade of marriage union is the religious, which may be expressed as pilgrimage toward a common shrine" (W 69). Both writers start with the physical world and tell us how to go about living and preparing ourselves. Both, then, aim toward the spiritual.

Both texts, likewise, are dependent upon the "I" and the "eye" of the transcendental poet. Thoreau mentions purposely his use of the pronoun because, he tells us, his "egotism" and his knowledge of himself make it necessary (Walden 3). Fuller likewise values her role as poet, although she does not ostensibly refer to her use of the "I":

> [What] in gleams, in dim fancies . . . visits the mind of common men . . . is soon obscured by the mists of sensuality, the dust of routine. . . . [however] the truths, which visit the minds of careless men only in fitful gleams, shine with radiant clearness into those of the poet, the priest, and the artist. (W 39)

Although I cannot claim with certainty that either of them are influenced by the history of "I" in autobiographies, I do believe that Fuller and Thoreau each see themselves as an "I" which speaks for culture, an "eye" which sees the truth of culture, and an "aye" which is optimistically engaged in improving culture. In so doing
they are akin to Augustine who tells of his inner life in *Confessions*; they are akin to Bunyan who gives a view of God in *Pilgrim's Progress*; they are akin to Rousseau who is both worldly and romantic in his *Confessions*. All of these are poets constructing personas with special visions.

In both *Walden* and *Woman* there is also the appearance of dialogue, of a conversation. There is, in both texts, a pulsing or "ebb and flow undulation" designed to produce a maturing or evolution. There is a thesis/antithesis in effect which is an evolution or growing up. A brief look at *Walden* reveals that "Economy" and "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" have little drama and are introductions to the work. Here, Thoreau defines his "I" as we have seen and condemns society. "Reading" is personal and expresses a valuing of written knowledge gained in secluded communion with revered books; "Sounds" is an exploration of the outside, the commercial. The cattle trains passing Walden Pond in "Sounds" are followed by a "Solitude" where those who visit seem not to infringe, seem to share common roots. In "Visitors," the physical is again mixed with the spiritual. "The Bean-Field" is between "Visitors" and "The Village." Thoreau places "The Bean-Field" chapter between the solitude of the woods and the people of the village as if it too were a position, a difference between complete aloneness and complete society: "so my field was, thought
not in a bad sense, a half-cultivated field" (Walden 158). In "The Ponds" he returns to cultivating thought, having just left "The village." Such thought is followed by "Baker’s Farm," where he nearly cultivates only the soil. "Higher Laws," the next chapter, is a feeding of the imagination and bodily appetite; this is juxtaposed with "Brute Neighbors," where the poet and the hermit bother each other. Thoreau then tells us of a very private "House Warming" but follows it with "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors" so that the physical presence of other beings is juxtaposed with the solitude of a personal "home." There is next the activity of "Winter Animals" which jars with the placidity of "The Pond in Winter." This leads to "Spring" and "The Conclusion," which, though itself final, is an awakening much like the Spring season. As a consequence of this dialectic of self developed in the progression of his chapters, this conversation with ideas, Thoreau emerges a new self after his two years and two months at Walden Pond; so, too, he hopes, will we after reading his account.

Less organized than Thoreau, since she uses no chapters and is often repetitive and digressive, Fuller is, as I will show later, nonetheless engaged in a similar dialectic intended for self-improvement. Although her book can be seen as a sermon, it is like other "transcendental
"literature" in that there is

a free association of ideas. One authority requires that another be included; one mythological figure suggests another. Ultimately the thought patterns lead from the conscious, to the subconscious mind, to the transcendental wellspring of truth, the divine intuition.®

Despite these many similarities, despite the similar desire to improve the individual, there is one glaring difference: Thoreau bases his romantic ideal upon the patriarchal structure of cultural learning, while Fuller bases her romantic ideal upon the redirecting of desire; for her, desire must not objectify; hope lies beyond the subject/object structure of society as represented in the mirror stage. Hopefully, both man and woman are to desire the same object; their gendered desires are, hopefully, to act as one desire for a spiritual union, an androgynous uniting of desire, if you will.

In "Reading," the third chapter in his dialectic of unfolding selfhood, a personal one midway between the first two chapters which introduce his text and himself and the next two chapters which introduce sources outside himself and his solitude in the woods, Thoreau praises the recorded literature of patriarchy and dismisses the spoken word by referring to a dichotomy so gendered as to preclude Fuller

or any woman. This is a very telling exclusion, given that Thoreau values reading as one of the very few "authentic" activities:

> there is a memorable interval between the spoken and the written language, the language heard and the language read. The one is commonly transitory, a sound, a tongue, a dialect merely, almost brutish, and we learn it unconsciously, like the brutes, of our mothers. The other is the maturity and experience of that; if that is our mother tongue, this is our father tongue, a reserved and select expression. [emphasis added] (Walden 101)

Although he says, in "Visitors," that he has "had twenty-five or thirty souls, with their bodies" as visitors, it is only the Canadian woodchopper to whom he devotes many pages (140). No woman is mentioned. Even though Thoreau sees this woodchopper as "cast in the coarsest mould" with "a stout but sluggish body," in whom "the animal man chiefly was developed," he translates for him a section of the "Iliad whose tenor is homosexual mourning (Achilles weeping for Patroclus)" (Yingling 149). But, "rather than being a homosexual act," Thoreau's reading experience here is reflective of "an Oedipal one, one in which allegiance to the father suppresses the power of the mother" (Yingling 149). His dialogue is between men; it is a translating of the homosexual Greek into the homosocial patriarchy of Walden. Nature is the locus where the primacy of logocentric, phallocentric dialogue is evinced.
Even in ending *Walden* Thoreau maintains his stereotypically masculine relationship with nature. It is something to be penetrated, to be understood; it is the spiritual text of God which the male can decipher; nature is pregnant with meaning. To improve society, man need only penetrate into its virginal depths and engender there a life which, thanks to man, will grow to truth. To understand, to read society is to seek what is within. Nature is at the core, and Thoreau, in reading his Walden, is actively working within the larger text of life. His search is for the egg, the natural egg of life deep within patriarchy:

> Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree, which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its well-seasoned tomb. (*Walden* 333)

Fuller, like Thoreau, is educated in and aware of this patriarchal society. Her education is "according to the eighteenth-century man’s knowledge of classical learning," an education which introduces her to "Latin at six" and recitations for her father each evening.¹⁰ From this education is omitted any pretense of what might be construed as stereotypical feminine diffidence. Such words

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as "but," "if," and "unless," as well as phrases such as "it may be so" are banned (Ellison 227). Her father's tutelage ingrains in young Fuller a duality of feminine and masculine. She comes to feel a dissimilarity with "women's culture or a female tradition"; she is secluded from what she refers to as "true life" by an "intellect" obtained from a man. Her knowledge of her culture and of certain truths make her unable to fit the normative role for women:

Fuller wrote about the split in her psyche in spatial terms, as her father's library and her mother's garden, the paradigmatic spaces that have become associated with the masculine and feminine traditions in American women's writing from the nineteenth century up to Alice Walker. ("Miranda and Cassandra" 316)

It is no wonder that Julie Ellison sees Fuller as "the first American theorist of the predicament" of the woman critic addressing the ills of her society: "she reflects on feminine subjectivity as the experience of conflict between the critical passion and the passion for intimacy (Delicate Subjects 5). Positioned between the stereotypically masculine and the stereotypically feminine, Fuller nonetheless seems to avoid what Sandra M. Gilbert sees as the contagion of androgyny: the fact that it ignores "the

relationships between sexual self-definition and literary authority.\textsuperscript{12} Fuller's "authority" is the transcendental notion that the human soul is united with God—and by definition with other souls so inspired. This is the realm to which she aspires. And she eludes a situation where "sexual identity is polarized and all the disturbing, dark, and powerful aspects of femaleness are projected onto maleness."\textsuperscript{13} She very carefully avoids, or attempts to avoid, any culturally validated expression of desire—gendered desire, in other words.

Instead of a social critique girded up by the patriarchal structure, and instead of a social critique attempting to withstand that patriarchy, Fuller espouses what seems to be a traditionally romantic faith and nationalistic pride:

\begin{quote}
It is inevitable that an external freedom, an independence of the encroachments of other men, such as has been achieved for the nation, should be so also for every member of it. That which has once been clearly conceived in the intelligence cannot fail, sooner or later, to be acted out. (H 15-16)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} See "What Do Feminist Critics Want" in The New Feminist Criticism page 36. Gilbert does not here specifically address androgyny; however, her advocacy for a criticism which validates biological sex and gender previsions a distrust of critical approaches which do not ultimately separate "male" and "female."

\textsuperscript{13} Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 264.
She places herself outside the issue, outside the pressure of either gender: "Without enrolling ourselves at once on either side, let us look upon the subject from the best point of view" (W 20). Now we can easily take this to be a disclaimer and nothing more, a mere rhetorical device to elicit the approbation of both genders; however, Fuller truly attempts not only to operate from such a location but also to create such a place where both genders can find meaning and support. It is her opinion that once women have all the opportunities available to men, and once both genders have been allowed to become accustomed to the situation, there will appear a purer and more sundry beauty in society because "the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown" (W 26). This divine or supremely good energy will pervade or spread through every part of nature, through every man and woman.

It is not here, however, that Fuller rests. Having male and female equal is but a start. Equality both leads to and evolves from the divine energy permeating nature. It is in the spirit of all beings that such divine energy exists; it is in the innately spiritual, not the culturally gendered, that equality is grounded and that society will be invigorated. This is what Fuller "conceives," a setting where such is possible. She "gives birth" to a speaker whose subjectivity is brought into focus by desiring a
realm without the subject/object dichotomy of her society. She, unlike Thoreau, does not devote any portion of her text to a reiteration of patriarchal, single-sexed values. Fuller does not treat the culturally engendered surface such as Thoreau does in his detailed description of the strong, silent type who has entered nature to cut wood. Instead, she focuses on the spiritual aspect of being, removing her desires from the gendering forces of the mirror stage. Here, she intends to join together all human creatures: "By Man I mean both man and woman; these are two halves of one thought. . . . twin exponents of a divine thought" (W vi).

This joining of genders commences in the form of a dialectic of self, in the form of a conversation between various philosophical possibilities, much like, in form at least, those I discussed earlier in Walden. As such, Woman is rhetorically demanding, but gets at the psyche or soul by its circuitousness and conversational redundancy.

"Margaret Fuller’s famous Conversations, seminar-style classes which the Boston area elite paid to attend, were a form of . . . consciousness raising" (Urbanski, "Feminist Manifesto" 203). Rather than assume a didactic position, a position that could be associated with encultured gender roles, Fuller forces the reader to evaluate assumptions. On page two of the Preface she tells us "Man" signifies
"both man and woman" (vi). Then, in discussing "the promise" of humanity, she tells us that "men" have claimed the protection of the gods (7-8). We wonder if these are not, after all, the same, given Fuller’s use of the terms. By the next page, it is "man" who is discussed in relation to "his inheritance," and we again wonder if another term has been substituted for the human race (8). In her text, between her use of these "men" and "man" terms, Fuller tells us that "marks have been made by the footsteps of man (still, alas! to be spoken of as the ideal man), wherever he has passed through the wilderness of men (W 8). Her introduction to the world of gender at first asserted that she will call men and women "Man"; however, she continually hints at references to mortal males, whom she seems to confuse with Jesus, only to talk of some ideal mortals. In so doing, Fuller forces us to reappraise our notion of human beings and how we gender them unconsciously.

This discussion of man/men/Man/man/men is conducted by a "we," but the exclusive use of "we" soon becomes a greater reliance on "I." Fuller leaves the exclusive use of the socially inscribed "we"--a "we" that includes the society denying women equality--after she finishes her dialectic enquiry into the philosophical implications of male pronouns. From then on she juxtaposes "we"--which can be seen as a desire for social acceptance--with "I"--which
can be seen as a desire for individual expression. Once she starts employing this "I," Fuller tells of Miranda, whose story closely resembles her own education. Here, she engages in a conversation with an alternate self (Urbanski 136). This Miranda is "a child of the spirit. She took her place easily, not only in the world of organized being, but in the world of mind" (W 28). She (Fuller/Miranda) is the artist to whom "outward adversity came, and inward conflict"; yet, because "self-respect had early been awakened" she can know "an outward serenity and an inward peace" (W 28).

Fuller, aware of the power of cultural norms facing this romantic idealism, next discusses Ceres/Demeter in conjunction with Proserpine/Persephone. The goddess of the generative power of the earth is joined with her daughter who is able to/constrained to live both in the underworld and the physical world. The goddess Ceres/Demeter cannot completely free her daughter because Proserpine/Persephone has tasted of "life" of Hades. But the constraint placed on the daughter is an experience in which the mother cannot partake. The worlds of one augment those of the other; together Ceres/Demeter and Proserpine/Persephone are far more knowledgeable than either would be alone.
Diana, Minerva, and Vesta, who, according to Fuller are "each . . . self-sufficing," are introduced following this mother and daughter pair (W 39-40). Diana, goddess of the woodland and a protector of women, along with Minerva, goddess of crafts and trade guilds and a member of the Capitoline triad which includes Jupiter and Juno, are joined with Vesta, the goddess of the hearth and family. These three are not limited by forces outside their control as are mother and daughter. With Diana, Minerva, and Vesta, what is outside the home and hearth is nonetheless joined with the home. Furthermore this self-sufficient feminine power is joined, because of Fuller's dialectic, with the limitations of mother and daughter.

Even the anagram is engaged in this give-and-take conversational dialectic: "Frailty, thy name is woman" not only heads the first page of her book proper, but it reappears on page sixty-eight. She says that if Hamlet could so speak, then she is stigmatized, marked because a male's soul or spirit is yet too distant from her--and all females. This is not physical closeness, as she tells us in her lauding of "Calderon's Justina . . . [and] her lover . . . [whose] souls are liberated together by the martyr flame into 'a purer state of sensation existence'" (W 56). It is "not so much the Eve as the Madonna" that Fuller sees as the ideal female with whom the male should unite (57.
Thus, obviously, there is a marriage of souls, a union outside the corporeal for which Fuller is preparing us. This enterprise is, by definition, mental, and her mental sphere is only public to the extent that it is textual. She is thinking through her ideal in print; she is looking inward and quoting other texts as she writes her own text. In a very conversational tone, one that hardly evinces concision and revision, she questions and answers herself, answers the questions of fictional characters. In such a tone she likewise often asserts philosophical edicts and follows them with examples.

While so expending her efforts at self-culture, "through an initiation into inward life," Fuller's subjectivity becomes universal as she links her own experience to that of the experience of all women and prophesizes that in the future life will be better for them. (Urbanski 137)

*Woman*, in short, is more spontaneous than pedagogical, more emotive than didactic, so that what Perry Miller says about Emerson also applies to Fuller; her text is "a hymn to the mighty "Self" who may govern, actually give laws to, the objective universe." And her manner of presentation is

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14 Perry Miller, *The American Transcendentalists* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957) 48. Miller is discussing only Emerson here; however, Fuller, like Emerson, relies on "what Emerson called a 'Saturnalia' of faith. *Woman* is Fuller's speculation on and extrapolation of her conversations which were the genesis of a very spiritual endeavor for her.
at heart transcendental—at least according to one dominant understanding of the term.

As an organized movement, Transcendentalism can almost be said to have begun and ended as a discussion group. Much of its internal ferment and a good deal of its external impact can be attributed to talkers like Alcott and Margaret Fuller; even its writing is largely oral literature, in the sense of having been composed originally for the pulpit or the lyceum. (Buell Literary Transcendentalism 77)

Fuller’s dialectic between the private and the public locates what is personal and individual in interaction with society, revealing that she is working very much like Foucault. She is placing the concept of the individual within and of culture: it is society that "creates" the sense of individualism because the inner essentiality of the Real Order desires are consequently highlighted against the backdrop of cultural norms. Norms make subjects aware of "self." In her "Preface," she remembers her original title, "The Great Lawsuit.—Man versus Men; Woman versus Women," and notes that she prefers it because it demands "thought to see what it means" (W v). It is the ideal, the essential concept Man that is at odds with men in general; so too for Woman, who is an ideal with little in common with women in general. The gender roles have been normalized by a patriarchal society busy with expansion and capitalism and monetary growth. She sees the failure of human beings to achieve their ideal, to live as their inner
essential self encourages them to because of "the action of prejudices and passions which attend, in the day" (W v).

We are too much involved in the physical aspects of life, too deeply involved in the mundane and ordinary, too interested in maintaining the success of the corporeal rather than improving it. We must attend to the higher realms of existence, the spiritual, which tends from the individual—we must consider our individual role in relation to our culture.

This is not to be achieved in some separate culture. She does not desire some Walden Pond to where she might retreat. Instead, America’s overarching culture, where males and females exist together, must itself provide meaning and support for what are universal human rights. As it stands, what nineteenth-century American culture means by human beings is still not equal. Fuller yet sees in her public a projection of validated meaning on the stereotypical "Man":

that the idea of Man, however imperfectly brought out, has been far more so than that of Woman; that she, the other half of the same thought, the other chamber of the heart of life, needs now take her turn in the full pulsation, and that improvement in the daughters will best aid in the reformation of the sons of this age. (W 13)

There needs to be a reconsidering of what is meant by "Man" because the term has had far more support and intentionally positive use than has "Woman." While she is aware of
society's use of "Man" for men and women, she is also aware of the deep-seated intentions and desires that are projected upon the term. She is sensitive to the fact that a social image, Lacan's mirror image, is generally masculinized by culture. Women, no matter how at ease with their biological gender, are left to evaluate themselves in terms of a patriarchal culture. They are *gendered* by society to the extent that what they think and do and feel are given validation and meaning in a culture which values masculine intentions and desires. But, as individuals aware of their individuality, subjects are likewise aware of discrepancies between what Foucault implicitly recognizes as validated and constrained desire and their own irrepressible Lacanian Real Order desires. In sensing such difference, subjects sense the avenue of societal change—their own individualism.

Fuller, intending to establish a new societal whole that supports and provides meaning for males and females without distinction, first wants woman "as a *nature* to grow, as an *intellect* to discern, as a *soul* to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home [emphasis added]" (W 27). "Our common home" asserts that all beings are given equal powers notwithstanding biological gender. What is limiting advancement, she says, is that we "see not as yet, clearly,
what we would" (W 10). "As soon as the soul can affirm clearly that a certain demonstration is wanted, it is at hand" (W 10). "There is but one law for souls" and the only "interpreter" of such soul or essence of life is the "son of God," not any other being, not a man, not a woman (W 26).

This is the precipitation and consequence of Woman. In this milieu evolves the mind or spirit of not just woman but of man as well; together, they reach the object desired by Fuller: a culture empowered by and supportive of an absence of prescribed gender roles, an absence of the imposition of gendered actions. Here Miranda will not hear that she "deserved in some star to be a man" (W 30) because of her mind. Fuller sees no inherent gender roles, none that are always already associated with biological gender: "Penelope is no more meant for a baker or weaver solely, than Ulysses for a cattle-herd" (W 33).

In such an ideal setting "the sexes should not only correspond to and appreciate, but prophesy to one another" (W 33). Each gender should love in the other what it is that is different; each should help the other by presaging what should be. The opposite sex will see the future of the other, and vice versa. The role of each will be the desire of the other. What is the future of the male will be the desire of the female; what is the future of the
female will be the desire of the male. Already loving difference, not controlling and using it, the sexes will create an arena of mutual support and love. With the male foretelling for the female and the female foretelling for the male, there will be a future of interacting genders. The correspondence Fuller espouses, one of male and female differences fitting together in a unified whole, will be one where difference is welcomed at the very time that such welcoming beings are issuing forth a harbinger of a melding of that difference. It is the intellectual acceptance of difference that is similar to both sexes—a very cerebral unity. In fact, the loving nearness of the two sexes is, for Fuller, the nearness of "another mind" (W 81–82). Two sexes are sharing a similarity, an acceptance of each other. The driving force is the mental or spiritual interaction that informs each other of perceived differences and how those differences are accepted. It is difference that is the norm. To be different is to be a part of the whole. Difference is accepted, and conformity is not expected or accepted for itself. It is not valued. Eventually, some plateau or ideal is to be reached where the very sharing of intellectual activity is the bond. Thinking of and desiring what it is that empowers difference is a similar activity.
Accordingly, Fuller's stages of equality between the sexes are on a continuum that values the spiritual over the physical, all the while allowing sex differences. There is "the household partnership" where "the man furnishes the home; the woman regulates it. Their relation is one of mutual esteem, mutual dependence" (W 60). Next Fuller mentions a union "of mutual idolatry" in which "the parties weaken and narrow one another" because the woman is "an unlovely siren and the man an effeminate boy" (W 60). After this, Fuller describes "intellectual companionship" or "a marriage of friendship" where the husband acts toward the wife as a brother toward a sister (W 60-61). The union that Fuller idealizes, however, is the fourth one, "the religious, which may be expressed as pilgrimage toward a common shrine" (W 69). At the same time "this [union] includes the others" (W 69) since, for Fuller, there is no escape into the woods or the "blithe air" of unreality. There is a need for society and the individual's ideals, even if the two are temporarily different. After all, one comes from the other just as each depends upon the other. This ideal state of union is, as she notes, a "perfect freedom . . . where there is no marrying or giving in marriage"; instead, "each is a purified intelligence, and enfranchised soul--no less" (W 51). Male and female exist as spiritual entities enfranchised by each other. There
is, for each, a desired object, a locus where each is enfranchised or provided support and given meaning. This locus exists as a setting providing approbation for all "faculties," but Fuller's ideal is not an imposition on males and females with the consequence of individualization and discipline. There is instead an almost androgynous object of desire that intentionally includes both sexes. The social image carried by female or male is not distanced from what the individual, self-conscious self desires. Neither male nor female is constrained by societal norms prescribing gender roles. What one subject desires individually is accepted and validated by the other. There is not, therefore, the distance of fictionality between the social, mirror image and the unconscious self. There is not an "Other" carried inside the unconscious of individuals waging war on some variance from a norm. Rather, there exists a culture providing meaning and support for all desire, a situation which leads to the evolution of a subjectivity unfettered by gender roles. Personal, individual desire need not anymore disguise or sublimate itself because it ushers forth from the "wrong" gender, the incorrect social image.

As a step toward this goal, Fuller asks first only for a contiguity of desire. Where the female desire differs from the male, the male need only desire what is remaining,
what is coterminous. So too for the female, who, in
desiring what is juxtaposed to her desire, creates, with
the male, a unified whole. Thus Lacan's edict that desire
is always a desire for the desire of the "Other" is
undercut. It is not the social ideal that is desired; it
is Fuller's ideal society:

The growth of Man is two-fold, masculine and
feminine.

... These two sides are supposed to be expressed
in Man and Woman, that is, as the more and the
less, for the faculties have not been given pure
to either, but only in preponderance. (W 154-55)

This in itself, though, is not an espousal of some
level of spirituality which entertains equally the
desire(s) of both genders. Harmony is not in itself the
unity of male and female, or the absence of any discernable
gendered desire. Therefore, Fuller, after admitting
harmony is elusive, calls for "a clearer vision and better
action" so that "Man and Woman may regard one another as
brother and sister, the pillars of one porch, the priests
of one worship" (W 157). She wants "sex self-subsistence
in its two forms of self-reliance and self-impulse, because
[she] believe[s] them to be the needed means of the present
juncture" (W 160-161). She does not ever abandon the "one
worship" which unites both male and female. Her urging "on
Woman independence of Man" is a preparatory stage to the
eventual egalitarian meeting of the two genders. Women
must become more in tune with their own being, their own subjectivity before joining men in some whole. "By being more a soul, she will not be less Woman, for nature is perfected through spirit" (H 161). There needs to be two independent spirits focused on what is important to themselves before society can improve, before the two sexes can interact. "Woman, self-centred, would never be absorbed by any relation; it would be only an experience to her as to man" (H 162).

At this point there is, as we see, an autonomously evolved individual who is celibate and spiritual. All individuals capable of evolving are such celibate, spiritual, autonomously evolved equals. Desire has been focused on the objective of becoming "more a soul," on becoming closer to the transcendent "Over-Soul" of Emerson. This is before entering into the ideal union. Then, since it is through the desires of the individual that a viewpoint or subjectivity is expressed or exposed, we have spiritual, autonomous, desiring individuals whose intentions are directed at a desired object. In this case it is a role for each that is desired. A cultural milieu is intentionally constructed that is supportive of that celibate, self-reflexive subject. Even though this is but a very limited arena providing meaning and support, it involves a cultural/personal manifestation of the
expression of self-interest "surrounding" each subject.

With subjects enamored of, focused on, desirous of the truth of gender roles, they "obtain mastery over outward, through an initiation into inward life" (W 114). "Everything . . . grows from the essential life of being" (W 116). This essential life of being is what Fuller desires. With the object of truth as the focal point of desire, subject's desire is the desire to know desire; the intention is to understand intention; action is the act of apprehending action. Hence, when the male and the female meet in Fuller's ideal union, they are not desirous of each other as objects. The cultural milieu surrounding each and supporting each with meaning is one where truth and spirituality are the desired objects. In this there is one object but two genders; there is one object of desire, one intention for two biological genders. It is the spiritual aspect of subjects which unites:

Every relation, every gradation of nature is incalculably precious, but only to the soul which is poised upon itself, and to whom no loss, no change, can bring dull discord, for it is in harmony with the central soul. (W 106)

Fuller, then, like Shweder, intentionalizes a cultural setting where her ideal finds support and meaning. In desiring one object, two genders are present as male and female in one unity, joined by one desire emanating from differently sexed and gendered beings. There is, thus, in
Fuller's ideal response to the ill treatment of women, an androgynous solution. Male and female enter into one unified whole; male and female have one desire. Each individual brings her or his purified, spiritual desire to know what empowers the self. Each desires the truth of desire. They are, though biologically different and heterosexually motivated, androgynous to the extent that their desire is for one object. Their subjectivity is consequently similar their expression of desire defines them as sharing one desire, one object of desire.

Fuller so pursues self-culture and societal improvement that she is not left in a pond, not an "iris" in a "walled-in pond." She is not fishing up and down in a solitary sphere. Instead, although her transcendental activities broach the physical and enter the spiritual, Fuller's subjectivity is altered so that desire desires an androgynous "object." She would have all individuals so focused. Then, the "self-centered would never be absorbed by any relation." She would have their self-centeredness share a center of desire. Two sexes, one desire. Two autonomous beings, one desire. This is Fuller's subjectivity and her society; this is what she holds up to nineteenth-century America as an ideal, an androgynous ideal.
CHAPTER III
Whitman’s Hermeneutic of Fluid Gender

First completing *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 and thereafter producing seven more editions in the course of revising and appending, Walt Whitman appears to present vastly differing personae—each with vastly differing faculties and compulsions. F.O. Matthiessen sees him as a poet who "indulge[s] in rhetorical assertion instead of building up the exact plastic shape of what he [feels]"; he opts instead to "be swept into the currents of the unconscious mind [of the reader] and . . . plumb emotional forces far beyond the depth of most other writers of his day" (*American Renaissance* 23, 574). D.H. Lawrence, however, sees him as "really too superhuman" and consequently "mechanical," which leads to a desensitization and a loss of individuality:

Your mainspring is broken, Walt Whitman.
The mainspring of your own individuality. And so you run down with a great whir, merging with everything.
You have mentalized your deep sensual body, and that’s the death of it.¹

Yet Karen Oakes sees Whitman, over the course of the various editions of Leaves, as abandoning his "more generous, subtle, and intimate relationship with his reader," his "feminine" current, in order to assert "a culturally masculine voice" and thereby submit to "the constraints of patriarchy" because his "status as homoerotic other in an increasingly homophobic culture" necessitates it. Instead of maintaining his close "intercourse" with his readers, Whitman, according to Oakes, becomes more removed and "autonomous"--he becomes more masculine as a result of patriarchal pressure. Sandra M. Gilbert sees Whitman writing "not poetry" but fretted into "intergrat[ing] the complex outlines of traditional generic poetry" in order to attain "structural identification with the tradition against which he claimed to set his individual talent." With the inclusion of such poems as "O Captain! My Captain!" Whitman "becomes a public orator, certifying his own institutionalization as representative man with, as it were, the insignia of regular rhyme and meter" (Gilbert 140). In short,


according to Gilbert, Whitman worries about his acceptance within the patriarchal structure of nineteenth-century America; thus, he shifts from his innovative poetry to a more traditional style and subject matter. His "male . . . psychosexual imperatives" cause him "to need to inscribe the masculine through the deployment of aesthetically certifying forms" (Gilbert 144).

Nonetheless, most readers, it appears, agree with David Kuebrich who attributes to Whitman "the power to reacquaint overcivilized society with the instinctive, especially the sexual, roots of human nature." If the foregoing views are at all representative, most readers also seem to agree with Kuebrich in seeing Whitman as "fail[ing] to provide a dominant myth" or unifying force for his work, even if they read Whitman "as the prophet of the political and spiritual possibilities of our national community" (Kuebrich 177).

But reading the poems of Walt Whitman as he last arranges them in the edition of 1891-2, I believe it is difficult to see any definite swerving away from the "barbaric yawp" of innovation with which he first commences Leaves. Rather, we are caught up in the lyrical sensation of Whitman in the act of addressing his culture, desiring

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that it become as he wishes, desiring that readers become like unto what he desires for himself. Since Whitman is "unequipped with the characters of narrative fiction who can enact a displaced interpersonal drama" (Oakes 171), we are invited to read the last version of *Leaves* as a narrative that completes Whitman's subjectivity; moreover, we are invited to accept his version of that completed subjectivity as the completion of our own, and to view that in turn as the ideal subjectivity of America. This experience is different, but not drastically so, from other narratives, such as we encountered in Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* or will encounter in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, because as we follow the progression of a prose narrative, so too do we follow Whitman whose subjectivity is progressing. This movement is akin to what James Phelan calls "a dynamic event, one that must move, in both its telling and its reception, through time." Now I realize that Phelan mentions only creative efforts containing rather specific characters and narrators. Although such an already-developed character is missing from Whitman's text, his final edition of *Leaves* evinces the movement Phelan describes because the poet "gives it shape and direction by the way in which [he] introduces,  

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complicates, and resolves (or fails to resolve) certain instabilities" (Reading 15). The instabilities which Whitman resolves are those of his subjectivity and result from his expressing seemingly antipodal points of view and biases, from his expressing various desires. We follow him trustingly; yet, as we listen he shifts from a heterosexual male voice in one poem, to a homosexual male voice in another, to a heterosexual female voice in yet another. We cannot help but realize that we are being addressed by a poet who has very deliberately arranged the impression he portrays. In fact, Whitman tells us in his May 31, 1889 "Prefatory Letter to the Reader," that he has had a plan for Leaves:

To-day completes my three-scores and ten years--rounds and coheres the successive growths and stages of L. of G. with the following essay . . . and gives me the crowning content, (for these lines are written at the last).  

Given this assertion that he has returned to Leaves again and again and is now "crowning" the entire text, and the fact that we can see Whitman shift genders and gender roles, I view the many poems in the death-bed edition of Leaves as a unified narrative which needs to be seen as a

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hermeneutic that experientially wends its way toward a fluid concept of gender. *Leaves*, as such, is the trace of a nineteenth-century American Orphic poet's path as he engages in a hermeneutic endeavor to know the possibilities of the desiring subjectivity beyond mere physical gender where desire can exist without objectifying an "other," without the desiring subject desiring as object another subject. Whitman attempts an "in-depth analysis of representative positions" and thereby seeks to understand.⁷ Reading Whitman provides a lyrical impression which yields an assembling of emotion that is couched in the tension between stereotypical gender roles. We interpret the subjectivity of Whitman in one instance and re-interpret that subjectivity over and over. We delve into maleness and into femaleness again and again, into stereotypically masculine and feminine and homosexual language. Whitman's use of language is so overtly self-conscious that at any one time we, as readers, sense Whitman is desiring, in the stereotypical manner of gendered desire, first one object and then another. We see first one, and then another, and then another culturally

⁷ See W. Wolfgang Holdheim, *The Hermeneutic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) 226-270 for an explanation of how narrative is a means of obtaining knowledge. My interest is in how Whitman arranges his poems, causing us as readers to engage in a hermeneutic experience of gendering and desiring in relation to that gendering.
gendered "implied author" such as Wayne Booth speaks of in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*:

However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner—and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work."

As he shifts genders, Whitman also presents nineteenth-century America’s overarching heterosexual culture with a new and scabrous language. He is altering poetic tradition with his craggy language, causing readers to be conscious of him as he shifts from one gendered point of view to another. This leads us, if and when we "understand" Whitman’s poetic work, to something other than a naive understanding. Hans-Georg Gadamer tells us that "reading the text is the highest task of understanding" because

the process of understanding moves entirely in a sphere of meaning mediated by the verbal tradition. . . . A reading consciousness is necessarily a historical consciousness and communicates freely with historical tradition.

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Nineteenth-century American readers, aware of the tradition of the Romanticists which has produced the "Fireside Poets," are forced to avoid a simple understanding of Whitman because of his break with tradition and history. There is a linguistic and poetic change from traditional Romantic form along with a most glaring renunciation of gender roles. What had been hitherto accepted by American society is altered, questioned. From the perspective of the Romantic tradition and from culturally accepted gender roles, readers enter into Whitman's poems. Here they are asked to follow him within a poem in an accepting and credulous manner only to be faced with the knowledge that the speaker is changing in subsequent poems. While considering Whitman's interest in changing from one gender role to another, we are aware of his increasing vitality and efficacy just as we are aware of how gender roles act as strictures. We, like his first nineteenth-century readers, leave and re-enter the world of our own flesh-and-blood existence. However, we enter each new interpretation with a new understanding because we are already the product of the last interpretation. We are thrust into and out of various experiences of and viewpoints on the world. We cannot help noticing that Whitman's ambiguously gendered consciousness is not encumbered by culturally prescribed roles that are either
feminine or masculine. We see a free subjectivity and compare it with our own constrained cultural roles. There is no definite prescription or method or defined object for us in this new hermeneutic experience which reading Whitman provides us; rather, we are provided the exhilaration of being with a subjectivity defined by its fluid image of gender. If we are engaged, hermeneutically engaged, we progress toward an understanding that is not what Phelan calls the "conscious ordering" of narrative; instead, it is a cumulative impression of a subjectivity.

Ultimately, though, over the course of *Leaves*, Whitman seems to harmonize, arrange so as to remove conflict, if you will, not the spiritual but the corporeal of American individuals:

Whitman's poetry is not simply a party politics or a nationalistic politics, but a radically materialist "body" politics based on novel ideas about the fundamental equality and interchangeability of human bodies.¹⁰

As Thomas E. Yingling notes, "it is precisely the case that sexuality in Whitman is intertextual with . . . concerns such as democratic and mystical unions" (6). In this lies Whitman's approach to *Leaves*. In the bodies of individual Americans he sees first physical desire, then physical

desire as a sign of spiritual union. Therefore, although no informed critic would today read Whitman as other than gay, it is, I believe, limiting to see Leaves as a text which desires to affect readers only as a homosexual text. Whitman is desirous of creating a subjectivity representative of all bodies and all desires; he so desires this end that his subjectivity at the close of Leaves is very fluidly gendered.

It is this impression which Whitman posits as the hope of American culture. Speaking in a manner familiar to the American Renaissance, that of the orphic poet, Whitman presents himself as "inspired seer" relying "for his utterance upon his moments of inner illumination" (Matthiessen 523). He is a poet "who stands outside of human life and yet shakes it with his truth." Such a poet is a prophet, a producer, a "liberating god and the most complete or representative of men." It is this orphic poet who has "the authority to discriminate moral and aesthetic excellences," who is related to "the highest

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11 Thomas E. Yingling discusses Whitman's sexuality in *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text* on pages 4-7, 22-23, 211-213, and 228. See also Michael Moon's "Disseminating Whitman in Displacing Homophobia" pages 235-253.


aspiration of his age," who imposes "upon men by charming
or winning their consent," who is "the ideal man," who
stands "for universality," who has "a harmonizing capacity"
(Yoder xiii, 4). As an orphic poet Whitman joins with
other transcendental voices of nineteenth-century America.
However disparate in basic philosophy these other
transcendentalists might be, they often espouse the
efficacy of the orphic poet in correcting social ills.
While it is simplistic to see any one writer as embodying
the transcendentalist movement, and I do not intend that he
should, Ralph Waldo Emerson does present us with an ordered
evolution of ideas concerning the Orphic poet during the
late nineteenth century. He first develops his notion of
the poet in the 1836 seminal essay on transcendentalism,
Nature. Here, "the Orphic poet stands . . . for truth
revealed by supernatural commission and a literal influx of
the divine" (Yoder 7). The poet relies not on merely
observing and interpreting. Instead, he is the one who can
"become a transparent eyeball"; he can "see all"; he feels
"the currents of the Universal Being circulate through"
him.¹⁴ When Emerson speaks of the poet he is speaking of

¹⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature, The Collected Works of
Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson, 3 vols.
(Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1971-) 1:10. All
further references to Emerson’s writings except "Fate" will
be from this collection and will be cited by referencing
the essay and the volume and the page number.
one who modifies the physical world, one who brings his poetic power to bear on it and "beholds something as beautiful as his own nature" (Nature 1:10). The orphic poet can, in effect, stand outside the everyday world and thus be rewarded with a "higher thought or a better emotion" (Nature 1:10): "The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms things to his thoughts" (Nature 1:31). What is most efficacious and most lasting is not the physical world. "The foundations of man are not in matter, but in spirit" (Nature 1:42). By 1841, in "Self-Reliance," Emerson envisions an orphic poet even more independent, even more an outsider to the everyday life of man: "it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity" (2:43). With the publication of The Conduct of Life in 1860 nature is no longer to be controlled "by a supernal breath of Will." "Only now and then some superior man, by his gift of thought, [can] merge his will" with nature and partake of an orphic moment (Whicher 303). "Once we thought, positive power was all. Now we learn, that negative power, or circumstance, is half." "Half" is the important word: Emerson tells us that "a man must ride alternately on the

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15 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate," The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols. (New York: Bigelow, Brown and Company, 1903-4) 6:9. Further references to "Fate" will be from this volume and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
horses of his private and his public nature" ("Fate" 32). He reserves the freedom within man: "Intellect annuls Fate. So far as a man thinks, he is free" ("Fate" 15). This special man, this orphie poet has, by virtue of his will, special power. He is less constrained by fate because of this poetic power; he can transcend the everyday by turning the commonplace to his own needs: "A good intention clothes itself with sudden power. When a god wishes to ride, any chip or pebble will bud and shoot out winged feet, and serve him for a horse" ("Fate" 32). Emerson, throughout his essays, believes "that what [makes] one man more representative than another [is] the degree to which he [is] a receptive channel for the superincumbent spirit" (Matthiessen 632). The orphie poet remains central to himself, is self-reliant and "cannot rely on an outer world but only on an inner self, experienced as superior to the external world" (Pease 130-131).

But Whitman as orphie poet, unlike Emerson or other transcendentalists, desires that each and every desire which is struggling against the culturally inscribed "Other" in each and every subject be included in his subjectivity. What is central to all individuals is a sense of a shared subjectivity to which the orphie poet summons others. This new subjectivity is intended to become the ideal American, the ideal America. His desire
to be America's poet, to create a new type of poetry in which to express the experience of being an American, leads Whitman to encompass all who are in America.

Whitman's approach to creating a subjectivity which is all-encompassing is, as noted earlier, a hermeneutic enterprise. As such, we can consider Leaves as containing aspects or parts of Whitman's presentation of his orphic endeavor to his readers. While each of these aspects should not be viewed as occurring exclusively in one part of Whitman's undertaking, we can view Leaves as stages in the creation of a new American subjectivity, one that is so fluidly gendered as to speak for all forms of desire. In this light, then, we can consider that Whitman devotes the first portion of his text to the first aspect: creating a subjectivity who is all-encompassing--and hence evincing a mutable gender. The second aspect is an awareness of his audience. After this we can see the poet's subjectivity transcending, evolving, growing with America. This is followed by an awareness of time: past, present, and future. Finally, Whitman pauses, takes leave of his readers, considers his project in perspective.

The first portion of Leaves, the one devoted to creating Whitman's subjectivity, the subjectivity in which we as Americans are encouraged to partake, starts with a move from the spiritual to the physical. This subjectivity
is unlikely to be seen walking around Whitman's native Camden. Although he "sings" of the ordinary physical person, the subject separate from all "others" due to its own "other"ness, he sings of a self that is "democratic" and "En-Masse" as he starts *Leaves* with "Inscriptions" (1). He directs his attention toward more than the mere "physiognomy alone," toward more than the "brain alone." He is interested in the "Form complete," which incorporates "the Female equally with the Male." He forms the two genders into one voice, a voice which speaks from the spirit behind the physical. The body signifies here for Whitman something "En-Masse" and all-encompassing, something spiritual:

One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person,  
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,  
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I  
say the Form complete is worthier far,  
The Female equally with the Male I sing. ("One's-Self I Sing" 1)

So encompassing is this sense of self that in "Sands At Seventy," the penultimate collection of poems, Whitman will again use "En-Masse" in "Small the Theme of My Chant" (525). Then the subjectivity which will speak for America will be complete and Whitman can hear his voice in American society: "One's-Self--a simple, separate person. That, for the use of the New World, I sing" (525). But before that
can occur Whitman must reveal the soul behind the physical: in "Eidolons," a poem in "Inscriptions," he sees this soul as the real person. That is where the real body, the real presence, the whole of a human being is located:

The body permanent,  
The body lurking there within thy body,  
The only purport of the form thou art, the real I myself,  
An image, an eidolon. (8)

Whitman's desire, then, is something far beyond the physical love of one gender for another, or the physical love of one gender for its own kind, for that matter:

It is a painful thing to love a man or woman to excess, and yet it satisfies, it is great,  
But there is something else very great, it makes the whole coincide,  
It, magnificent, beyond materials ... ("Starting From Paumanok" 21)

Although earlier he tells us in obviously homosexual terms of the "ideal of manly love, indicating it in" himself ("Starting" 19), he still desires to "earn for the body and the mind whatever adheres and goes forward and is not dropt by death" ("Starting 22). Although he "will therefore let flame from [himself] the burning fires that were threatening to consume" him ("Starting" 19), Whitman sees desire for the body as but part of some "whole." All physical desire is indicative of spiritual desire. All sex is spiritual experience which transcends the physical realm originating it. The means of transcending is by partaking in the subjectivity of Whitman, for here in his poetry he
finds the spiritual behind the physical:

And I will show of male and female that either is
but the equal of the other,
And sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate
in me, for I am
determin'd to tell you with courageous clear
voice to prove you illustrious,

And I will thread a thread through my poems that
time and events are compact.

I will not make poems with reference to parts,

And I will not make a poem nor the least part of
a poem but has reference to the soul,
Because having look'd at the objects of the
universe, I find there is no one nor any
particle of one but has reference to the
soul. ("Starting From Paumanok 23)

We cannot separate the body from the soul, the
spiritual because as Whitman says, "the body includes and
is the meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the
soul" ("Starting" 24). The body is and contains the soul,
just as the body of Whitman's poetry, Leaves, is and
contains the soul--of Whitman and of us, who, like him are
em(bo)dy(ments) of the soul. His relationship to us is
through this soul, and it is through the soul he asks us to
see what all bodies have in common. He creates "for [us] a
programme of chants"; he sings of America—which he calls
"lands female and male, / . . . the heir-ship and heiress-
ship of the world." He sings "here for you! and here for
America!", and he sings of "the present" which he "raise[s]
aloft" as well as "the future of the States," of which he
is the "harbinge glad and sublime" ("Starting" 26). He is
the "harbinge," the very precursor of America.

What Whitman "sings" of or puts to verse is a song of himself and song of all his auditors and a song of the possibility of language. His words reveal his subjectivity; his words reveal the everyday and the unique; his utterance is the projection of his desire which reveals his subjectivity as one desiring all objects, even the subjectivity which he last employed in a preceding poem. Eventually he becomes the reader; reading and being aware of what he has written, Whitman proceeds to join with those to whom he speaks. He asserts he is a catalog of bodies; her asserts he is us, our very soul. He "becomes" us reading his words, reading him, joining him. "O you and me at last, and us two only. / . . . O to haste firm holding--to haste, haste on with me" ("Starting" 28).

This blending of his subjectivity with ours is highlighted in "Song of Myself." He commences with "I" and ends with "you." There is a circle here, a completeness or "O," which is echoed throughout *Leaves*. In sections one through six of "Song" Whitman introduces his first self. It is a self which is recumbent and celebratory--but above all inclusive:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. ("Song of Myself" 28)
This new self is a new voice, one different from Longfellow’s in *Hiawatha* and Whittier’s in *Snowbound*: "The sound of the belch’d words of my voice loos’d to the eddies of the wind" invite us:

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun,
(that are millions of suns left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self. ("Song of Myself" 30)

Whitman is creating or engendering as he writes, for "there never was more inception than there is now" (30). But what he is engendering is a subjectivity which desires to join its spirituality with a characterized "you." Close to the end of what I call the first portion of "Song of Myself," in section five, when Whitman speaks clearly from a gay male’s perspective and tells us of "the hugging and loving bed-fellow [who] sleeps at [his] side" (31), he desires unity with his audience. "And I know that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers" (33). The knowledge garnered, the spiritual realm entered through the expression of physical desire connects the poet to all men as if they are also his brothers. Such men are not what they are when they embrace him and kiss him on the street; instead, he is also a brother. But
women, too, are his "sisters and lovers." Physical love is the keelson or structural support of the very creation of the world, of life itself. Whatever gender is the object of that physical love matters little since desire of the body is desire of the soul; desire is the insight that melds the single soul and the dual possibilities of the bodies of both genders. In loving the man, Whitman also has a brother; in loving the woman, Whitman also has a sister. There is an object of love that is also not an object in the same sense; objectiveness is itself challenged.

With this desiring self, Whitman now gives us what I see as the second portion of "Song of Myself": a journey in space and time. The poet's upright actions mark a birth or beginning as he positions himself and asserts that he is "the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as [himself] / . . . Every kind for itself and its own, for me mine male and female" (35). What is Whitman's "kind" is expressed in section fifteen, the catalog section which reverberates with the "beat" of America; it is Whitman's American Beatitudes; it is his poetic blessing of what is ordinary as well as distinct in America; it is his blessing of what is experienced by reading his poetry: "the pure contralto," "the pilot," "the deacons," "the lunatic," "the squaw," "the young sister,"
"the young wife," "the drover," the opium-eater," "the prostitute," "the crowd," and many more are the material of which Whitman "weave[s] the song of myself." The spiritual behind the body is here the spirit of America behind the body of poetry. Whitman’s body of poetry is spiritual, soul-like, in that it is resurrected with each reading. He will persist as long as his desired subject matter persists. What he desires—female and male—shall continue; so shall he, therefore. It is the desire to speak of desire that impels his effort; it is desire that impels his subjectivity.

We cannot help but notice that as long as we do not confine ourselves to what culture defines as acceptable objects of desire, our desire can continue to define us in ever new and ongoing ways. If we are to be confined by culture, we are to be limited in scope and breadth and life. There is, for Whitman as for Fuller, no Lacanian "Other" that is empowered by acceptance of cultural definitions of respectable modes of desiring. If the human subject is to accept the cultural "Other" constructed by society, the human subject is confined to societal time frames which support that constructed presence. Hence, that subject is limited to a perspective, a dated existence, a limitation.
Whitman, without such constraints, is growing because he is feeding his intellect with the possibilities of his poetic endeavor. In what to me is a third portion of "Song of Myself," sections twenty through thirty, Whitman stands beside himself, as it were, and examines this self which purports to become one with his audience. There is an "I" of the soul, an "I" of the transcendental (eye)ball of Emerson, an "I" of the ecstatic "aye" which proclaims the worth of America, an "I" of the private self of the speaker.

I know I am solid and sound
To me the converging objects of the universe
perpetually flow,

. . .
I laugh at what you call dissolution,
And I know the amplitude of time.

. . .
I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of
the Soul,

. . .
I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a
man, ("Song of Myself" 47-48)

Walt Whitman's "I" is no longer personal: it is "a kosmos," through which flows "the current and index" of life, of what it means to "be." This is the Whitman who "speaks the pass-word primeval" and is aware of the role of his poetry: "My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,
/ With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and
volumes of worlds"; he will entwine within Leaves the very world, with "the dirt receding before [his] prophetic
screams" ("Song of Myself" 55). The spiritual is in the body, and the body of Whitman’s work is the spirit of his readers.

As the spirit of his readers, Whitman presents an apocalyptic vision which suggests the end of America in sections thirty-one to forty, what I see as the fourth portion of "Song of Myself." First he "out-gallop[s]" any "pace," becoming embodied in his poetry:

My ties and ballasts leave me, my elbows rest in sea-gaps,
I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents,
I am afoot with my vision. ("Song of Myself" 61)

As he comes "home with the silent and dark-cheek’d bush-boy" (64), as he turns "the bridegroom out of bed and stay[s] with the bride [him]self" (65), as [s]he watches them "fetch [her] man’s body up dripping and drowned" (66), Whitman the male in love with the male, the male in love with the female, the female in love with the male, says that he/she has "suffer’d, I was there" ("Song of Myself" 66). The poet is apocalyptic and sees the suffering of his audience. In desiring our bodies, whether sexually or mournfully, Whitman suffers with us.

Then this vatic voice turns ominous: "Would you hear of an old-time sea fight?" (69). We are asked a leading question that is not answered; we are only informed of a devastating naval encounter. Instead, Whitman images a reading public absorbed in hearing him, a public whose
anticipation becomes the emotive force behind his poetry. In the face of possible peril, Whitman becomes medium of American anxiety.

Such a desire to give voice to America leads to yet another definition of the poet's self. Ever more messianic he becomes. His voice is "orotund sweeping and final" (76) as if his linguistic experiencing of each and every American's life has empowered him. His lines are "omnivorous" and take in everything available; he unites all in his poetry. From this position he attacks those only interested in "feed[ing] the greed of the belly the brains liberally spooning" ("Song of Myself" 77) because they are the ones who do not think beyond the roles assigned to them. Whitman is egotistical, but his is an egotism that is all-encompassing, uniting all persons in an effort that extends beyond mere individual desire. Saying that he will "come again upon the earth," that he is "an acme of things accomplish'd, and . . . an encloser of things to be" ("Song" 80), he exhorts us to "travel" our own road of discovery and rest on his poetry as we do so travel. We are reading, it appears, a new bible which tells us to be awake to the differences of life and to accept "the dazzle of the light and of every moment of [our] life" ("Song" 84).
If we have read "Song of Myself" by partaking of every dazzling possibility of life, we return to our flesh and blood world changed because we have followed a hermeneutic circle leading from desiring the female as a male, to desiring the male as a female, to desiring the male as a male. Our desires have been objectified and consequently our subjectivity has been altered again and again. In so doing, Whitman has presented the emotional possibilities of partaking of life on terms that are not defined by culture; rather, he has led us to desire everything as a unit. Gender disappears through desire because desire leads to the subject eventually desiring the gendered position previously occupied by that subject.

This all-encompassing sense of desiring to include both female and male in an emotional and spiritual unity, this religiously intellectual sense of shifting gender, is juxtaposed, however, with the amative love of the female by the male in "Children of Adam" as Whitman nears the end of the first part of Leaves. He tells us in "From Pent-up Aching Rivers," that as "the female form [is] approaching," he is "pensive, love-flesh tremulous aching" (92), and we are hard pressed, at this point, to see Whitman's subjectivity as anything but heterosexual desire. In fact, he is the very phallus excited by that desire. Still, in "I Sing the Body Electric," he positions himself as a poet
interested in the body of the world, the bodies which make up the world: "the armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them" (93). He asserts that "the love of the body of man or woman balks account, the body itself balks account, / That of the male is perfect, and that of the female is perfect" (94). Such perfection rests not in specific genitalia which are "engendered" by culture to desire in a specific manner; rather, perfection is in the soul of all bodies. It is because Whitman can "loosen [him]self, pass freely" and be "at the mother's breast with the little child" and simultaneously "swim with the swimmers, wrestle with wrestlers, march in line with the firemen, and pause, listen, count" (95) that he sees perfection. What is flawless and whole is what is shared by all who desire regardless of biological sex.

That the poet is speaking for desire itself is important. Each being is a reduction of the whole, containing all that the whole does and displaying it through singularly individualized presences: "All is a procession, / The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion" ("I Sing the Body Electric" 98). For the atomist Whitman, each and every person is related to each and every other being and each and every other atom. The awareness of this is what is important: he exposes his readers to the spiritual experience of being aware of how
interrelated are all beings. The poem and the body and soul are all equal; in fact, they are the source and the consequence of the desire for each other:

O my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men and women, nor the likes of the parts of you, I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the soul, (and that they are the soul,) I believe the likes of you shall stand or fall with my poems, and that they are my poems, ("I Sing the Body Electric 100)

Toward the end of "Children of Adam," in "Spontaneous Me," Whitman reaches a poetic climax; his "poem drooping shy and unseen" is his poetry (103). Having loved "the body of the woman . . . the body of the man, the body of the earth" (104), Whitman is, it seems, ready to move on. He has been intense and erect, loving all: "The hubb'd sting of myself, stinging me as much as it ever can any one" (104) is followed by "the wholesome relief, repose, content, / And this bunch" of poems is "plucked" or collected from within Whitman. He has "done his work" and engendered upon humanity the vision of the heterosexual American; he has penetrated his readers and impregnated them with his ideas. And, while he includes males, it is obvious that the "pensive" and "painful" desire, the flushing woman and flushing man, and the "wholesome relief" is an act of linguistic coitus engaged in by the heterosexual subjectivity of Whitman.
Such heterosexual desire is followed by "Calamus," a group of poems most closely interested in "adhesiveness" or "manly attachment." "In Paths Untrodden" Whitman takes us into his gay sexuality: "Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself, yet contains all the rest" (113). While this claim for his poetic vision is obviously an expression of his homosexuality, I believe Whitman is presenting us with yet another delving into of the hermeneutic circle. "Calamus" presents us with yet another experience with which to juxtapose the heterosexual activity of "Children of Adam." "Calamus" is, as always with Whitman, a self-conscious presentation of language and self. His poems are "leaves ... tomb-leaves, body-leaves growing up above me above death" ("Scented Herbage of My Breast" 113). His poems, his leaves of herbage, will continue growing after his physical death because his book is a living collection of leaves which will grow, flower, die and be recycled in the imaginations of readers who shall continue to desire, who shall continue to be desired, who shall continue to find in Leaves the em(body)ment of a desire so fluid as to be the spirit of desiring. This "spirit," this desiring subjectivity which desires unity,

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16 This is not to say that only Whitman among all poets is self conscious. However, in Whitman’s case, the "self" of which he is conscious is a new American being to which he is consciously giving birth.
is important: there is no form of gendered love that is prioritized as Whitman approaches the end of the first part of *Leaves*, the part devoted primarily to the evolution of his fluidly gendered subjectivity:

underneath Socrates [I] clearly see, and
underneath Christ the divine I see,
The dear love of man for his comrade, the attraction of friend to friend,
Of the well-married husband and wife, of children and parents,
Of city for city and land for land. ("The Base of All Metaphysics" 121)

The poet, the flesh and blood Whitman is, as I see him, gay; however, it is desire of bodies in either form which leads to the spiritual. In "When I Heard at the Close of the Day," Whitman tenderly reveals what it is like to await a lover—a male lover. If we are to see this speaker as female—something Whitman invites us to do in "The Sleepers"—we are forced to ask why he refers to the arriving male as "my dear friend" because "dear" is an adjective Whitman elsewhere reserves for males. The adhesiveness of male love empowers this "Calamus" collection, as well. So, as these two gay lovers lie "in the stillness in the autumn moonbeams" we are reminded of the tension between personal sexuality and the social aspects of Whitman's "I" which he presents to the public. Although he is here engaging in an egalitarian hermeneutic endeavor, he is nonetheless somewhat constrained by his own desire for homosexual love. He cannot, in short, distance
himself from his biological desire, regardless how society
genders him, even here in this first part of *Leaves* where
he is engaged in developing a variably gendered
subjectivity to speak to and for America. That is, it
seems, what answers his question: "What Think you I Take My
Pen in Hand?" Whitman concludes his evolving of a
subjectivity devoted to embodying the desire of all
individuals as a gay poet whose voice echoes of homosexual
love:

> What think you I take my pen in hand to record?
> 
> ... [not splendor of the past or vaunted glory]
> But merely of two simple men I saw to-day on the
> pier in the midst of the crowd, parting the
> parting of dear friends,
> The one to remain hung on the other's neck and
> passionately kiss'd him,
> While the one to depart tightly prest the one to
> remain in his arms. (133)

Concluding, for the most part, his presentation of the
American subjectivity, Whitman moves to the second aspect
of *Leaves*: a recognition of his audience. "Salut Au Monde"
is a realization of the world as an influence upon his
poetic endeavor, upon his unique American poetic voice.
Standing aside himself, he calls to himself to take notice
of what his subjectivity is: he hears all the people and
the countries of the globe. Characterizing his audience,
he calls to "you" "Frenchwoman and Frenchman" as well as
"you sheiks," "all you each and everywhere whom [he]
specif[ies] not, but include[s] just the same" ("Salut Au
"Monde" 146-147). "Each of us [is] limitless" (147) because we are spiritually connected where "some divine rapport has equalized" the poet with all who exist, have existed, will exist. Saying that he sees and hears—and even is—all, Whitman sets forth a standard upon which and by which the American culture is to be henceforth constructed and gauged. In his exaltation he proffers a cultural critique of the society from which readers emigrate to join his hermeneutic experience: "Toward you all . . . I raise high the perpendicular hand . . . to remain after me in sight forever" ("Salut" 148).

What seems so ephemeral in "Salute Au Monde" is juxtaposed with what is symbolic in the physical setting of "Song of the Open Road." We follow "the long brown path before" us, the one also before Whitman. Upon this physical passageway are to be found the "objects that call from diffusion [Whitman's] meaning and give them shape" (150). Here it is the "rows of houses" and "gray stones" with which the poet engages hermeneutically. He encounters the commonplace, the everyday with which he is enthralled, just as we, his audience encounter his poetic treatment of that everyday. Yet, though a path travelled by the everyday citizens of Whitman's America "express[es the poet] better than [he] can [him]self," Whitman is "not afraid to leave" what is leading him. Can the builders of
the physical know whereto their effort leads them? Such is the situation of the open road: built by human effort upon a physical plane, the road yet symbolizes the spiritual. However, does the road know its destiny? Can the builders of such a physical object know the implications of their effort? It is up to the poet or any one of us willing to follow the path and garner what it offers; then we must venture forth and carry our knowledge into another sphere. The experience is greater than its record, the poem, which is our road into the hermeneutic offered to us by Whitman. Thereby we and the poet move beyond the pathways of road and poetry; we are present to ourselves in our consciousness of what unites us:

O public road, . . .
You express me better than I can express myself,
You shall be more to me than my poem.
. . .
From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits
and imaginary lines,
. . .
I am larger, better than I thought,
. . .
I will recruit for myself and you as I go.
. . .
I swear to you there are divine things more beautiful than words can tell.

Allons! we must not stop here. ("Song of the Open Road" 151-154)

This symbolism of actual varied physicalities is a path leading to spiritual knowledge; it succeeds the spiritual influx of world forces in "Salut Au Monde" which connects the American with the rest of the globe and shows
her or him to be an encompassing of that globe.

In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman considers his poetic voice in relation to his auditors. Here, the individual poet is "disintegrated, everyone disintegrated yet part of the scheme" (160). Whitman tells us that he has been, in his past, various sorts of "evil." He has played the part that still looks back on the actor or actress, The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we like, Or as small as we like, or both great and small" (163).

In so doing, Whitman is heedful of his Lacanian "I," his social image, upon which his consciousness now looks back. For he is about the work of constructing yet another, better, more socially conscious "I" at this time: "What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you--I laid in my stores in advance" [emphasis added] (163). He is now conscious of when he was once an actor or actress, when he was one gender or the other. Now, however, Whitman presents a more ideal "I" and invites us to join him in reflecting upon what was/is--but most of all on what can be:

We understand then do we not? What I promis'd without mentioning it, have you not accepted? What the study could not teach--what the preaching could not accomplish is accomplish'd, is it not? ("Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" 164)
In "Our Old Feuillage" Whitman exemplifies his claim made in "Song of the Answerer" that "the words of true poems give you more than poems, / They give you to form for yourself poems" (170). His audience is collected in foliage. Yet it is the poet "putting it at random in these songs" who "become[s] a part of that, whatever it is" (175). What it is is a single, variously gendered unity that encompasses, finally, audience and poet. What is left to do in these poems is to convince the internalized, socially constructed "Other" that it need not act as society's watchdog, as a Super Ego, if that society is a reflection of a unified consciousness. For it must be the desire of each of the individual minds that the whole be of one mind. It is in the mind of the poetically conscious that unity will be achieved:

Singing the song of These, my ever-united lands—
my body no more inevitably united, part to part, and made out of a thousand diverse contributions one identity, any more than my lands are inevitably united and made ONE IDENTITY;

These affording, in all their particulars, the old feuillage to me and to American, how can I do less than pass the clew of the union of them, to afford the like of you? Whoever you are! how can I but offer you divine leaves, that you also be eligible as I am? How can I but as here chanting, invite you for yourself to collect bouquets of the incomparable feuillage of these States? ("Our Old Feuillage" 176)
This consciousness of self in unison with a land that is likewise unified leads Whitman to implore the individual American to consider her or his relation to America. Whitman's poetic consciousness is aware of its role in society, and, viewing America as a unified identity, this poetic sensibility calls attention to the individual's connection with that society. The spiritual, non-physical, non-material, intangible notion of America which constructs the Lacanian "Other" is, in reality, capable of being joined with very individual desire. Leaving behind the physical image of America, desiring what is conceived by the individual mind(s), Whitman focuses desire within and without the individual. What the poet (any individual, hopefully) wants is an America where the individual desires a place that desires her or him. Society needs to be a place in which the whole is desired because it reflects a desire for the self: society is desired by the self because within society the self can desire it(self). Self becomes the it that all individual desiring subjectivities desire, and the it is Whitman's new American culture. The culture exists because it is desired; however, it is not the object desired since what is desired is self--self desire. Bodies come together and love and procreate and interact without physical identity, without gender:
O the joy of my soul leaning pois’d on itself,
receiving identity through materials and
loving them, observing characters and
absorbing them,
My soul vibrated back to me from them, from
sight, hearing, touch, reason, articulation,
comparison, memory, and the like,
The real life of my senses and flesh transcending
my senses and flesh,
My body done with materials, my sight done with
my material eyes. ("Song of Joys" 181)

All that is physical is the poem—and more. Poetry,
words, stand for Whitman’s social presence, his Lacanian
"I," which is also a signifier for what is divine. He is
an enterprise in emotive power. Words are not the end,
however; they are the path not only to what is desired but
to becoming what is desired. Whitman here treats of the
third aspect of his undertaking. He transcends his own
effort; he writes of America but transcends his subject in
his poem:

Air, soil, water, fire—those are words,
I myself am a word with them—my qualities
interpenetrate with theirs—my name is
nothing to them.

The truths of the earth continually wait, they
are not so conceal’d either,
They are calm, subtle, untransmissible by print,
("A Song of the Rolling Earth" 220)

What is contained in print is the body of Whitman’s effort;
however, as with the body of woman and man, the physical of
poetry is the container as well as the signifier for the
spiritual truth which informs all life. The poet can write
of truth, but his words are not themselves truth. They are
but objects of desire which must be desired, made love to, in order to partake of the spiritual beyond.

In "Sea Drift" Whitman embarks upon the fourth aspect or part of Leaves: a consideration of time. He considers his past:

    Oppress'd with myself that I have dared to open my mouth, 
    Aware now that amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me I have not once had the least idea who or what I am

    I perceive I have not really understood any thing, not a single object, and that no man ever can ("As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" 254).

Such a tone is quite a change for Whitman. He has been the voice of optimism and faith for America. His hope now lies in the fact that, despite the lilliputian aspect of the individual, each being is still part of the whole. "The powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse" ("O Me! O Life!" 272). If each is to be a part of the whole, there is the fact facing each of us then that we are reduced at the very time we are made part of some vast spiritual unity.

This view of the past which evidences an irony in being part of some Emersonian "Over-Soul" that diminishes as it elevates, is brought forward into the present in "Drum Taps." There is now an end to the "forty years [of] soldiers parading" ("First O Songs for a Prelude" 280). In their place is a "hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year"
("Eighteen Sixty-One" 283). Still, Whitman sees a hope in America’s desire for democracy. There is, he feels, something in the united war effort of Union America which is natural and therefore to be valued—man’s dauntlessness, man’s desire to define selfhood, to define what it means to be an American:

Hungering, hungering, hungering, for primal energies and Nature’s dauntlessness,
I waited the bursting forth of the pent fire—

. . .
I have lived to behold man burst forth and warlike America rise ("Rise O Days from Your Fathomless Deeps" 292)

As hawkish as this sounds, Whitman, amid the horrors of the Civil War, struggles to be his old optimistic self. What results, though, is a taste of Realism and a somewhat modern sensibility:

A sight in camp in the daybreak gray and dim,

. . .
Three forms I see on stretchers lying, brought out there untended lying,
Over each a blanked spread . . .

. . .
Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies. ("A Sight in Damp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim" 306–307)

Nonetheless, here where Whitman faces the effect of time in his fourth part of Leaves, he does not completely lose his faith in the spirituality made available by loving the physical body:

It shall be customary in the houses and streets to see manly affection,
The most dauntless and rude shall touch face to
face lightly,
The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers ("Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice" 316)

Same-sex desire, like heterosexual desire, because it feeds into all desire, will ameliorate the ills of nineteenth-century America. Whitman, as gay male, expresses his desire; in such desire he is elevated to a spiritual realm, a realm which is the hope of America. If desire is accepted in all its forms, in all individuals, it would be desiring itself that would be desired. What individuals desired would be desired--the slave's desire for freedom would be desired, too. Love itself is the equalizer--if society can but accept desire itself. Nothing can so "cohere" America as the consciousness of the self desiring that self is an expression of desire. When the object of desire is subsumed by the desiring subject, the self becomes a consciousness that is both sides of desire: self looks inside to see the act of desire and the object desired.

There is some hope for a future, then. Acceptance is all, according to Whitman, the American subjectivity: "I reject none, accept all, than reproduce all in my own forms" ("By Blue Ontario's Shore" 340). The American's attitude toward individual desire is crucial. Each must see an individual self projecting a desire, desiring an object (a new American society) which each shares with each
other. Hence there is an acceptance of each other’s desires. If each individual desires a culture that is accepting of all desire rather than desiring a culture which validates that specific desire, then Whitman’s desire will spread. It is at once an individual and a cultural undertaking:

> Whatever appears, whatever does not appear, we are beautiful or sinful in ourselves only.

> If we are lost, no victor else has destroy’d us, It is by ourselves we go down to eternal night. ("By Blue Ontario’s Shore" 341)

After considering the possibilities of the future, Whitman moves on to the last part or aspect of his text. He considers *Leaves* in perspective. In "Autumn Rivulets" Whitman reflects on sharing the act of desiring:

> In you whoe’er you are my book perusing, In I myself, in all the world, these currents flowing, All, all toward the mystic ocean tending. ("As Consequent, Etc." 357)

He sees himself as "effusing and fluid, a phantom curiously floating, now here absorb’d and arrested" by those who are engaged with his poems ("Sparkles from the Wheel" 390). He has a relationship to his readers, now, which he has worked to effect. He can thus pause and assume a touch of didacticism:

> Is reform needed? is it through you? The greater the reform needed, the greater the Personality you need to accomplish it.

> Do you not see how it would serve to have such a
body and soul that when you enter a crowd an atmosphere of desire and command enters with you . . . ?

. . . .

Rest not till you rivet and publish yourself of our own personality. ("To a Pupil" 390-391)

He is free to so speak since he has, believes, established a more spiritual relationship with his readers:

And that my soul embraces you this hour, and we affect each other without ever seeing each other, and never perhaps to see each other, is every bit as wonderful [as any wonder imaginable]." ("Who Learns My Lesson Complete?" 395)

Here, in closing, Whitman addresses the spiritual realm in which he has all along invested so much faith. He questions this spirituality, looking, perhaps, for the freedom to love unfettered by the culture's "Other," society's intrusive censorship of desire:

O Thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes,
Thou centre of them,
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,
Thou moral, spiritual fountain—affection's source—thou reservoir,
(O pensive soul of me—O thirst unsatisfied—waitest not there?
Waitest not haply for us somewhere there the Comrade perfect?) ("Passage to India" 419)

This perspective on his subjectivity, on his poetic career, is continued in "As I Walk These Broad Majestic Days": "What else is so real as mine? / . . . our visions, the visions of poets, the most solid announcements of any" (487):
I announce that the identity of these States is a single identity only,

I announce adhesiveness, I say it shall be limitless, unloosen'd,

Comerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man. ("So Long" 504)

Small the theme of my Chant, yet the greatest—namely, One's-Self—a simple separate person. That, for the use of the New World, I sing.

Man's physiology complete, from top to toe, I sing. Not physiognomy alone, nor brain alone, is worthy for the Muse;—I say the Form complete is worthier far. The female equally with the Male, I sing.

Nor cease at the theme of One's-Self. I speak the word of the modern, the word En-Masse. ("Small the Theme of My Chant" 525-526)

In that it is freighted with the recent presence of the semiotic residue of usage, "En-Masse" is like all words—modern and ancient. It is a signifier so expanded upon in Leaves that we see the signifier signified by what it originally signified. The desiring subject in search of unity desires an object which is united with the desiring subject in the spiritual realm. Eventually the "I" and the self desire the same thing, each other.

It seems such poetic endeavor adumbrates the work of Moon, Yingling, and Sedgewick whose criticism not only establishes the importance of gay studies, but also reveals the tensions within texts resulting from the contest between the social "Other" and the individual's desires.
Fuller, as we have seen, does not consider the (un)gendered spiritual realm aspired to by the ideal heterosexual union to be so all-encompassing as does Whitman. Melville, as we will discover, sees a fluidly gendered subjectivity less as a panacea for America than as a mode of integrating Ishmael into the foibles of those characters under his scrutiny.
CHAPTER IV
The Engendering of Ishmael

Unlike Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, Herman Melville does not devote the vast majority of *Moby-Dick* to the construction of a fluidly gendered subjectivity which, in bringing itself into being, brings into being a more egalitarian America. In fact, his presentation in *Redburn* (1849) and *White Jacket* (1850) of "godly innocents" whose acquaintance with "evil [comes from] exterior oppression (militarism, imperialism, capitalism),"\(^1\) leads him not to seek an integrative voice with which to narrate his next novel, *Moby-Dick*. Rather there are many voices echoed by Ahab and Ishmael and the crew.

Ahab can be heard to echo the philosophy of Manifest Destiny, to espouse extreme individualism. Creating his own set of moral and spiritual standards to live by, he hunts the oceans for the white whale. He will harpoon—penetrate—the whiteness of the whale and thereby regain what he lost: his autonomy. He must regain in some manner

all parts of himself if he is to be what he desires, a self-motivating, self-justifying entity. Hence, though the white whale may be seen as a nothingness which absorbs his passion or as the blinding brightness of a supreme power that thwarts him or as an obfuscating veil of evil that haunts him, Ahab's subjective conceptions objectify it, define it. His passion, his view of the world will accept no authority other than his own subjectivity, not even God's: "though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there's that in here that still remains indifferent." In Ahab, the Emersonian notion that each subject enjoys a personal relationship with God is carried to such an extreme that there remains no Christianity in transcendentalism. Jackson's frontier individuality is in him so exaggerated as to remove all considerations save those of the individual. In Ahab, Webster's imposing presence and Ciceronian rhetoric are so effective as to seduce the entire crew of the Pequod into following an enigmatic object.

Melville also challenges nineteenth-century American society by positing a ship, or ship-of-state, the Pequod, which is representative of a singular point of view in

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dedicated pursuit of one solitary object. Just as America was settling the prairies in the West, so too is the Pequod colonizing, hunting the sea in the East so that the blank slate of Moby-Dick might record--receive--the desires of civilized men. A singleness of purpose drives both country and ship.

Yet, by creating a character like Ahab who can be dismissed as mad, who is pejoratively portrayed as being at odds with the incompetent all-American Starbuck, Melville apparently gives his audience an "acceptable" opposition, one tending to create a clearly defined binarism where that which is anti-American remains exterior to the American psyche. So, too, might the errant Pequod be dismissed: it is, after all sailing away from the westward flow of America and into the East; its captain is looking not for his future but for his past.

In Moby-Dick, however, Melville does not, as in Redburn and White Jacket, allow what he feels to be threatening America to remain outside of and apart from the nineteenth-century American psyche. Instead, Melville challenges the point of view and the biases of that American psyche. He gives his narrator, Ishmael, a unique vision empowered by a very fluid notion of gender, one which is not easily perceived to be male or female. It is this fluidly engendered point of view that not only allows but leads Ishmael to narrate the conflict between Ahab and
Moby-Dick, between Ahab and the crew, between the Pequod and Moby-Dick. It is "Ishmael [who] has a vision of the Pequod as a red hell, a civilization rushing from all havens astern, consuming itself" (McWilliams 159). In short, Melville, no longer willing or able to envision evil as something exterior to the American psyche, creates Ishmael, an ambivalently gendered subjectivity, in order to critique his nineteenth-century American society simultaneously from both within and without. As the narrator of his story, Ishmael presents Ahab with varying degrees of approbation—just as he depicts others on the Pequod. Evincing stereotypical masculine and stereotypical feminine points of view and traits, Ishmael’s representation of Ahab is never static, never easily reduced to a representation of mere American excess.

Ishmael’s subjectivity, then, is not easily cast as a point of view antipodal to that of the self-centered Ahab.³ (Nor is his point of view clearly distanced from most of the characters.) He is, in truth, akin to the

³ See Donald E. Pease, "Moby-Dick and the Cold War," The American Renaissance Reconsidered, ed. Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 113-153. Note pages 147-153. Also see Richard Poirier, The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Languages of Contemporary Life, pages 10-11. Pease elaborates on Poirier’s conceptions and states that "Ishmael’s obsession depends on Ahab’s compulsion." Also, John P. McWilliams, Jr., in Hawthorne, Melville, and the American Character, tells us that "neither Ishmael nor Ahab was a whole man; neither represented the ideal American figure." See pages 156-174.
monomaniacal captain. His act of narrating is a concentrated effort, an all-pervading passion to attain his objective. Ishmael, like Ahab, is busy positioning his point of view, his subjectivity in light of ever-changing conditions. Like Ahab, Ishmael is, in effect, creating "a world elsewhere" where his individual biases and observations and actions will meet with approbation. Ishmael faces what is dolorous about the Pequod through his narration and interpretation of Ahab's action; Ahab faces what is deplorable about his life through his quest of Moby-Dick. Both tread the material decks of the whaler Pequod as she circles the globe. One is leaving the West in search of what is not there, what is missing; one is chasing what has intruded on his enjoyment of that West, what is too much with him. But they both are circling worlds of their own design, worlds where sails are filled by individual, subjective winds. It is the individual, subjective wind of Ishmael's opinions that creates the narrative world of Moby-Dick. However, unlike Ahab, Ishmael is possessed by a desire to locate the very center, the origin, the concrete basis of what he perceives. His desire leads him to disclose the destructive biases engendering the desires of Ahab and the crew and the compliance of the two in the quest for the white whale. Devoting fourteen chapters to his penchant for investigating concrete detail, he interrupts his narrative
of Ahab and the hunt to investigate the object of that
hunt, Moby Dick. While Ahab projects meaning on the
whale as an object, Ishmael looks for what desiring that
whale reveals about the desiring subject(s). In so doing,
he sees his own relationship to what his desire
objectifies. Ahab’s journey is outward, and doomed;
Ishmael’s is inward, and ensured. Although both characters
are in pursuit, Ahab’s point of view is written on the
tabula rasa of the whiteness of the whale while Ishmael’s
point of view is a re-writing of desire, an engendering of
subjectivity. His penchant for placing his narrating,
performing self in a world elsewhere results in the
narrative process of bringing into being a subjectivity
capable not only of commenting on Ahab’s foibles and of
sustaining itself within its own world, but a subjectivity
that evolves into a tenable point of view, the only tenable
point of view in the novel. Ishmael, in narrating, is
creating his own subjectivity, a subjectivity which is the
expression of a very fluid notion of gender. As he is

* There are at least fourteen chapters which Ishmael
devotes to the anatomy and history of the whale:
Affidavit," "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales," "Of the
Less Erroneous Pictures of Whales, and the True Pictures of
Whaling Scenes," "Of Whales in Paint; in Teeth; in Wood; in
Sheet Iron; in Stone; in Mountains; in Stars," "The Whale
as a Dish," "The Sperm Whale’s Head—contrasted View," "The
Right Whale’s Head—Contrasted View," "The Fountain," "The
Measurement of the Whale’s Skeleton," "The Fossil Whale,
"Does the Whale’s Magnitude Diminish?—Will He Perish?"
exposing Peter Coffin and Bildad to be cunning Yankee peddlers, showing Steelkilt to be a stubborn killer, displaying Ahab's monomaniacal passions to be extrapolations of what America values, Ishmael is also engage in becoming "his own self-made man." But he is a feminine male and a masculine female, as he adapts a perspective which is a cultural critique of nineteenth-century America.

"Call me Ishmael," then, is more than the first line of the novel. Ishmael, or "God hears," is the biblical son of Abraham and Hagar, the Egyptian slave of Abraham's wife Sarah. He, along with his mother, is forced to wander in the wilderness, always waiting for a kingdom of his own because he is perceived to be a detractor of Isaac, Abraham's other son. Such is the name the narrator selects, as he refers to himself in the third person, as he objectifies himself. He is a wanderer and an outcast. He removes himself voluntarily from the likes "of an old established family in the land, the Van Rensselaers, or Randolhs, or Hardicanutes" so that he might "put [his] hand into the tar pot" rather than continue "lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe" (MD 6). Ishmael removes himself from the American culture which heretofore has given him support and meaning. Bowing to "the Fates" and to "the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago" (MD 7),
Ishmael will go to sea as a common sailor so that he may obtain "the pure air of the forecastle deck." Respiring in his own atmosphere, Ishmael will not accept second-hand intellections. He will ship out from no port other than the one which saw the beginning of American whaling: "Nantucket was her great original . . . . Where else but from Nantucket did those aboriginal whalemen . . . first sally out?" (MD 8). He, like his predecessors, will originate something. In going out to sea, out into the unknown, Ishmael is starting at the origin of such ventures; yet, he spends his voyage questioning the object of such ventures. He journeys with the Pequod, but he journeys deeper into the mutual object of their quest; and he journeys deep within himself. He follows his companions, and he follows his philosophical inclinations.

Although a rare admixture of Emersonian transcendentalism, pagan resignation to circumstance, and Puritan predestination, Ishmael's individual viewpoint is even more singular: though not born of the biblical concubine, Hagar, he is none the less the issue of an "unacceptable" union involving but one sex and two different classes and races; one non-objectifying desire begets a different man. Ishmael's very subjectivity starts with the blurring of gender roles. Arriving at The Spouter-Inn in New Bedford, Ishmael must share a bed with another man: "you haint no objections to sharing a
harpooneer's blanket, have ye? I s'pose you are goin' a whalin', so you'd better get used to that sort of thing" (MD 14). Since he is assigning Ishmael a bed already occupied and charging him for it, this practice, we infer, must be common enough; however, Ishmael tells us "sailors no more sleep two in a bed at sea, than bachelor Kings do ashore" (MD 16). In fact, he notices the landlord's drollery which has "a sort of diabolically funny" aspect to it. What Ishmael is embarking on is, as he well knows and so informs us, an idiosyncracy of the landlord, Coffin.

At first, Ishmael attempts to bed down on a bench and warns the landlord that "criminal prosecution" would follow any harm to his person. Coffin soon moderates his humor and informs him that, though Queequeg is now out attempting to sell the last of "a lot of 'balmed New Zealand heads... he pays regular [and the bed has] plenty room for two to kick about in" (MD 19). Once induced to meet Queequeg, Ishmael is attracted to the savage: "For all his tattooings he was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal" (MD 24). In the morning, after their first night together, he finds himself embraced in the most "loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife.... Queequeg was hugging me" (MD 25). He tells us he feels "as though naught but death should part us twain" (MD 26). He does not mind being the object of a joke; being set apart is acceptable to him. In fact, such individuation now
seems attractive to Ishmael.

On his next night with Queequeg, separated from the jocose and imbibing world of seamen and innkeepers as well as from his former life of schoolmaster and Dutch ancestors, Ishmael soon finds himself with his forehead pressed against that of Queequeg, while the later embraces him around the waist and tells him "that henceforth [they] are married" (MD 51). Ishmael is aware that in his countrymen such a sudden intimacy would be shunned; yet, he notes that here "those old rules would not apply." He is becoming intimate with a savage who is "some twenty thousand miles from home" (MD 50). Such a state of affairs attracts Ishmael, and while spending the night in bed "chatting and napping at short intervals" with their legs "affectionately" intertwined, he reflects on the idea that "there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself" (MD 53). He had once harbored a sense of self that precluded the likes of Queequeg, that was actually defined by its distance from the likes of Queequeg; now he finds that love has weakened his "stiff prejudices." He had once felt that it would enlighten him to enjoy alone the air of the forecastle deck, to experience firsthand the exigencies of life; now he will venture on to Nantucket with Queequeg and, joining hands, they will "boldly dip into the Potluck of both worlds" (MD 57). The old Ishmael is no more; he is now the
offspring of his union with the "comely cannibal." He did not, finally, blanch at the suggestion of bedding down with another male—something he clearly tells us is unacceptable in society—because he is not so confined to his gender role that he must avoid the jests of the innkeeper. No, Ishmael separates himself from "acceptable" culture and thereby exposes himself to the value of an "aboriginal" or outside view of his culture. By forgoing what his society considers acceptable for males, Ishmael becomes like "a wife" to Queequeg, thereby producing during their nights together a melding of the savage and the civil. Both the savage viewpoint being extinguished by nineteenth-century America and the cultural one replacing it are engendered in Ishmael. Hence, Ishmael is, from this point on, less constrained by what is culturally validated since he is both within and without the culture. He is male like the sailors, but he is less concerned with the male role and is willing to accept the female role as well. His subjectivity, as a result, is part of and larger than that of the characters about whom he tells us.

Once he and Queequeg reach Nantucket, they board at Mrs. Hussey's "Try Pots," where, it appears, they choose to sleep together. No mention is made of either condition or requirement for continuing their conjugal practice. Still, "in bed [they] concoct [their] plans for tomorrow" (MD 68). Having selected the Pequod as the ship on which both of
them will sail, Ishmael returns to the inn and here, for the first time, mentions going "up to his room" to inquire as to Queequeg’s well-being [emphasis added] (MD 81-82). Nonetheless, Ishmael, in his thirteenth reference to sharing a bed with Queequeg, says he waits in bed for his savage partner to finish his Ramadan or worship service. Though they apparently have two separate rooms, Ishmael is waiting in Queequeg’s bed. And, when Queequeg joins him, they spend the night together, as on every previous night, exchanging philosophies and physical affection. Whether or not they share a bed during the remaining "day or two"—which seems most likely, given the fact that they have done so out of choice—Ishmael, the wanderer, is now a hybrid among his contemporaries: though of ancient American stock, he has become the issue of at least four nights with Queequeg. Two men—savage and civilized—make up this one issue, this one subjectivity about to embark on a philosophical voyage. There is a "marriage" and a "consummation": the two meet, sleep together, and forever after join forces, causing an intermingling of gender roles in Ishmael’s narrating subjectivity, which affects the perspective on the remaining narrative. It is in bed, where male and female identities blur, that these two subjectivities act as one and decide on the ship and the mission and direction of their lives. Since it is through his acceptance of a flexible interpretation of gender that
Ishmael differentiates him(her)self from his society and decides on a future, it cannot be ignored that such a path to individuation highlights the individual thereby engendered. He not only slept with another male, but he slept with a savage male, one outside the American culture. He not only accentuates his disunion with the Lacanian "Other" which eschews fluid gender roles; he accentuates his disunion with the social "Other" which eschews what is "other" to the American culture. Ishmael is of both sexes just as he is and is not of American culture. In brief, he is an ideal point of view from which to critique nineteenth-century American society.

Though Queequeg now accompanies him, Ishmael’s journey of intellection, a journey that is as much inward as it is "into the lone Atlantic," will be a solitary voyage. It was he who intellectualized the choice of foregoing traditional gender roles and slept with another man; it is he who has altered his relationship with his culture by replacing his accustomed gender role with a more fluid notion of gender which allows him to be part of all gendered points of view. He has become the self he intends.

Though complicated, what he intends is an act of narrating that, in the overall, is self-reflexive. Ishmael, in chapters such as "Cetology," "The Whiteness of the Whale," and others, seeks to know the very essence of
what he is pursuing, what he is objectifying. As all the rest on the Pequod are about to "be lost in [the] unshored, harborless immensities of the ocean, Ishmael is seeking facts." Yet while so engaged, he recognizes within himself an affinity with the whale: "we are all killers, on land and on sea; Bonapartes and Sharks included" (MD 143). He has started classifying whales and comes around to including mankind. All aboard the Pequod see the white whale as something, as an object signifying something of value to each of them. A consequence of this objectifying is the aphanisis of the whale as an autonomous being. The whale, first appearing as a clear entity, is, under the act of objectification, turned into something other than mere whale. The whiteness of the whale is inscribed as an object of desire(s). "Moby Dick," the name, comes to mean many things--none of which is "whale" as just whale. Whatever notion of separate being the white whale had, he lost it under the signifier "Moby Dick." The whale, as

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5 Julian Markels is completing a study of Moby-Dick in which he examines Ishmael's use of facts and figures. To many enjoyable discussions with Professor Markels, I owe some of my insights on this practice of the narrator.

whale, as an entity of whaleness, disappears under the meanings attached to "Moby Dick." For Ishmael, this is unacceptable; he tells the story of the hunt for the white whale—for what the white whale has become in the minds of his pursuers—but, he also tells the story of the object as an entity in and of itself. He is in the midst of a process, a process which is a book yet is "but the draught of a draught" (Md 145). For him to record what is within others as they confront the whale leads Ishmael to write anew his own subjectivity and its interaction with the whale. He sees the whale for what it is in its physical whaleness. The mystery of what the whale embodied in life, during the chase, becomes, for Ishmael, an object so dissected as to cause the objectifying subject, himself, to turn his gaze inward. In short, once a whale is killed and brought alongside, or during preparations for capturing a whale, Ishmael’s objectifying gaze displays a point of view that turns from physical minutiae to what such objects imply for his subjectivity. He is constantly looking at, then into the whale. All of this leads him inevitably back to his own thought about what the whale means to him as a subject. Ishmael, then, is on a journey of revision, a revision of himself and of what he objectifies—his subjectivity is his journey’s purpose. He wants to taste the uninterrupted air of experience and to leave behind the constraints of nineteenth-century American society. In so
doing, he goes to sea on a whaling ship, a vessel dedicated to killing a specific object, much like nineteenth-century America's dedication to conquering the prairies and the Indians and the oceans and all that can be objectified. Unlike Ahab or the crew, Ishmael considers not only the "object" of the voyage but what desiring that object entails. Once alongside the ship, the whale's elusive grandness, like many objects desired by a growing America, is reduced to separate entities each with a factual existence. To desire these minutiae as some exalted object requires that the desiring subject(s) project desire upon the object. Ishmael is, we notice, similar to Ahab and the crew; yet, in his compulsion, Ishmael (re)defines his subjectivity. He is not finished, as are the others, when a desired object is obtained. When the whale is "captured," Ishmael's desire is not satiated; rather, he desires to know more about the objectification involved in desiring. He desires to know of the relationship between his inner desire and the exterior object of that desire.

Such a project, however, is not akin to the Pantheist blending of the human mind with the physical world. In truth, Ishmael also warns us that it is dangerous when

thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Wickliff's sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over. . . . Over Descartian vortices you hover. (MQ 159)
He does not see God within the whale, nor does he see the universe of the sea and whale as the single reality. In fact, as Ishmael looks at the physical reality of sea and whale, his subjectivity alters. He does not blend with the object he perceives; rather he considers his relationship to it and the similarities he and other humans share with that object, the whale. By reducing the physical universe to its barest facts, Ishmael can examine how he and others relate to what is being objectified. Thereby, he shows us how the act of intentionally considering an object actually creates the point of view, the subjectivity doing the objectifying. Whereas the crew, and Ahab especially, are defined by their mission of merely reaching what object it is they desire (the whale), Ishmael is defined by his interest in the effects of so desiring. As a result we join with Ahab and the capitalistic enterprise of whaling and the search for the white whale and garner all the excitement coming to those on the Pequod.

We also see how such undertakings define and actually create the American character in less than ideal terms. Thanks to Ishmael we see the journey of the Pequod as equivalent to the American venture across the plains. "Ishmael describes sailors as pioneers, the whale's forehead as "The Prairie," and rolling billows as grassy Western glades" (McWilliams 157). We also note the passion which the characters invest in the capitalistic enterprise
of whaling. Furthermore, the journey becomes, for the narrator, Ishmael, as well as for the monomaniacal character, Ahab, a personal passion, an act of the American individual. Then, given Ishmael's ambivalent perspective on the action of the ship-of-state Pequod, we cannot easily distance ourselves from this "society" which so represents our America—we are enclosed within a cultural entity that closely represents America—and we are enclosed within some of the viewpoints from which Ishmael views that cultural entity, the Pequod. We cannot easily maintain faith in the biases of but one single subjectivity which has heretofore objectified in accordance with our desires.

For Ishmael, in "The Whiteness of the Whale," re-defining subjectivity is a needed corollary to objectifying. He commences with the outside view: "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me" (MD 188). For Ishmael, the color of the world is "but only laid on from without" (MD 195). What then is the white whale, Ishmael wonders, but "the symbol" of "the palsied universe" which is, in itself, a blank and shrouded prospect for us to delve into, knowing all the while that our very delving is an embellishing of reality. For every viewer of the whale, there is a new interpretation of whiteness. Whether the "Roman," the "Red Men of America," or "the native Indian of Peru," most observers see what they themselves project upon the whiteness—like Ahab.
Ishmael tells us that to look for meaning in the mere whiteness is to "gaze [ourselves] blind," a telling indictment of Ahab's monomaniacal desire to kill Moby-Dick as well as an indictment of the crew's willingness to follow one solitary conceit presented by one man. Unlike the rest, Ishmael reduces the object to its basic physicality and considers his relationship to it. Unlike the rest, he is aware of the effect on subjectivity of focusing his desires on some object. Consequently, we see the ship-of-state, the Pequod, bent upon a monomaniacal mission that is in itself the reason for its existence: desiring an object is reason enough for some subjects to continue desiring. One object allows for desire, which explains existence. Regardless of what America's desire for conquest and growth leads to, it defines nineteenth-century America.

In Moby-Dick, as in nineteenth-century America, desire is very much associated with gender: males must penetrate the blankness of the whale and the ocean and the unknown; only in delving into what is both desired and feared is desire to be satiated. Such gendered desire is always within any subjectivity—the desire that links the unconscious to sexuality (Four Fundamental Concepts 153-154). Still, such desire also needs a demand, an object. Given such an object, desire connects the unconscious sexuality to something—what is desired. Sexuality and
desire do more, however. They, like all intentional acts of desiring to obtain an object, create or elaborate on subjectivity—gender is defined as a bias or point of view. The desire connects sexuality to an object, which is a response with a sexual point of view, a gendered response. Soon after Ahab appears on deck for the first time, and Stubb dreams of being kicked by him, Ishmael recounts the history of studying the whale in "Cetology." Herein he notices the relationship he, and all other stereotypical males, have with the voracious inhabitants of the ocean: "we are all killers, on land and on sea; Bonapartes and Sharks included" (MD 143). Although at this point he is quite the stereotypical male, Ishmael next explains the means of commanding a whaler. In so doing, his notion of the efficacy of male officers depends on external wiles, tricks or deceptions which are such by the fact that they are not representative of what is inside:

   For be a man's intellectual superiority what it will, it can never assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments. (MD 147-148)

According to Ishmael, the most effective captain of a whaler is one who is a master of "external arts and entrenchments." But concomitant with this act is a mastery of internal desire. Ishmael lauds he who can present his desires in an altered or dressed-up manner. If desire is
gendered—as it is aboard the Pequod—then power resides in transvestism or in masking gendered desire. Still, Ishmael cannot perceive what empowers Ahab, who has no "outward majestical trappings and housings" by which to judge. It seems that Ishmael was about to judge the efficacy of the captain of a whaler by that captain's ability to mask gendered desire—it seems that such is the standard of measuring those men who are the most like "killers, on land and on sea; Bonapartes and Sharks included." On ships and in America Ishmael exposes what seems to be a clearly defined projection of desire to be, in effect, fluidly gendered. Stereotypical masculine aggressiveness is masking stereotypical feminine passivity and vice versa, it would appear. What, then, does Ahab lose by evincing only his innermost desire without masking? If he is "honest" in his expression of desire, and thereby less effective as a leader, Ishmael's realization of the effectiveness of "external arts and entrenchments" calls into question the cultural uses of fluid notions of gender.

In "The Mat-Maker," however, Ishmael works with a most stereotypical feminine passivity at "passing and repassing the filling or woof of marline between the long yarns of the warp" as if (he?), drawing material from the distaff side of humanity in order to preserve (his?) role of faithful wife, "were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away" (MD 214). Queequeg, in a very masculine
posture, again and again "slid his heavy oaken sword between the threads" of Ishmael’s work. Ishmael works at the loom, weaving his own destiny, and "the impulsive, indifferent sword" of the savage forever alters it. Chance, in penetrating the threads of Penelope, of the female Fates, and of Ishmael, alters all, "has the last featuring blow at events" (MD 215). Ishmael awaits being penetrated by chance.

But no sooner does Ishmael establish (him)self as embodying feminine passivity, than he is moved by the excitement of the first lowering. He is no longer on the Pequod awaiting the return of the men as is his wont; instead, Ishmael is with the men in Starbuck’s boat accompanying Queequeg as another male in pursuit of the whale. Then, having shared with his fellow males near death by ramming, Ishmael tells us he is in a "sort of wayward mood . . . [which] comes over a man in a time of extreme tribulation . . . There is nothing like the perils of whaling to breed this free and easy sort of genial, desperado philosophy" (MD 226). Once quite feminine, now Ishmael is quite masculine. It is no accident, either, that these two differently gendered expressions are juxtaposed. It is not fortuity that has Ishmael present her/himself as the stereotypical feminine weaver associated with the home (Pequod), and as the stereotypical masculine hunter associated with the chase. Ishmael leaves nothing
to chance when it comes to engendering himself.

It is chance, though, that allows the Pequod to happen upon The Town-Ho so that, in the course of a very sociable gam, Ishmael comes eventually to hear of a story passed on by the crew of The Town-Ho, and to add to it "this darker thread." He retells the story of The Town-Ho, hard pressed to stay afloat due to a leak below the water line, which led, eventually, to an altercation between the sailor, Steelkilt, and the chief mate, Radney, who ordered him to perform the unmanly task of sweeping down the decks—ostensibly because he overheard Steelkilt belittle him earlier. After a brief imprisonment for striking Radney, Steelkilt gained his freedom and drifted into the mists of legend. Ishmael, in telling this tale, makes careful note of the fact that defense of stereotypical masculinity started this fracas. Steelkilt is a "Canaller," a sailor on the Erie canal; such men are "abundantly and picturesquely wicked"; aboard their barges, they "indolently float" and "ripen their apricot thighs upon the sunny deck," but ashore they turn vicious and "all this effeminacy is dashed" (MD 249) [emphasis added]. Radney, however, is from Nantucket and has "nurse[d] at his maternal sea" (Md 244). It is unbelievable that Ishmael is unaware that his background on the Canallers is at odds with his story: it is masculinity that is at stake, and this occurs on board the ship. Rather than do boys' work,
Steelkilt will break the law and strike Radney. No browning of apricot thighs concerns either of these men; they are stereotypically masculine. After Steelkilt strikes his first blow at Radney, no other blows are landed by him. His masculine pose is then honored by the passivity of those he accosts. "Striding up and down" the barricade of large casks, he convinces the captain to let his men descend into the forecastle. Then, when his companions turn him over to the crew, he again "hissez[s] out something inaudible to all but the captain," and is allowed to resume his duties. Although he is going to kill Radney during the night watch, Moby Dick is sighted and no violence ensues. When the captain leaves his ship in search of a new crew, it is again a threat from Steelkilt that goes unchallenged, allowing time for the mutineers to escape. Although his masculinity leads him to fight, Steelkilt is victorious thereafter by not resorting to physical violence. Had he so resorted he and his men would surely have lost: there were enough sailors on The Town-Ho to overpower the Canallers--when Steelkilt last threatens the captain, he is alone in the captain's boat. He supports his masculine aggression with what could be called stereotypical feminine threats, posturing, and, above all, passivity or lack of physical action. In truth, only once does Steelkilt display male physical aggression on a ship: the whaler. Afterwards, he avoids going ashore by pleading
to stay on the whaler, by rowing the whale boat after Moby Dick, by stealing "a large double war-canoe," and by signing on a French ship. And all this time he is the aggressive leader of a successful mutiny because he avoids further confrontation. His every action in the tale is either in defense of his masculinity or a consequence of that defense; yet, he is successful because he is not challenged after once asserting a masculinity that appears less than able to reinforce what it asserts. He could be shot or confined at various times, but he is honored or respected for his masculine posture. It is a posture, however, that depends upon a stereotypical response to femininity: passive acceptance of the female spirit. Whether or not his later use of feminine passivity is ensured by his previous use of masculine aggressivity, it cannot be ignored that nothing prevents his being killed by the captain except for a stereotypical masculine honoring of a stereotypical feminine passivity. The masculine response to Steelkilt's lack of further physical aggression is a stereotypically feminine passivity: masculinity requires honoring the feminine by acting more feminine than masculine.

Ishmael, it must be remembered, is telling us the story as the crew of the Pequod have it from Tashtego, who first heard it from "three confederate white seaman." It is a story that we, as readers, share only with the common
seamen below decks. In listening to this narrative of fluidly gendered action and desire for action, we are aware that those in charge of the ship-of-state Pequod are likewise posturing stereotypical masculinity and depending upon stereotypical femininity to protect their masculine postures. Ishmael tells us that Steelkilt's very masculine actions on ship are an eventuality of his being a Canaller—one who is supposed to be effeminate on ship. Furthermore, Ishmael shows us a defense of masculinity on ship that is successful because of stereotypical treatment of femininity. In short, Ishmael shows us that stereotypically gendered actions depend upon other stereotypically gendered responses. We are left pondering Ahab's bravado and how closely related it is to a type of femininity he would never admit to possessing. His masculinity is masculine only because it is positioned next to what it is not. Thanks to Ishmael, we cannot help but see gendered stereotypes deconstruct.

Leaving for a moment his exemplification of the interrelatedness he sees in gender, Ishmael returns, ostensibly, to the object of the Pequod's mission—Moby-Dick. It is the "skin of the whale" that still vexes him: "The question is, what and where is the skin of the whale?" (MD 305). In life, the whale's skin belies its true nature, appearing to be "all over obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array" (MD
But "from the unmarred dead body of the whale you can scrape off . . . an infinitely thin, transparent substance, somewhat resembling . . . isinglass" (MD 305). It is this material that Ishmael employs to read through and magnify his texts on whales. What he perceives to be the whale is but a clear coating; all the marks and substance lie below; yet, this coating tends to magnify the whale. What Ishmael looks at he does not see: he sees what is beneath or within. What first presents itself is deeper than it seems. Either somewhere within Moby-Dick is a white hue which cannot be long gazed on if it is the brightness of God, or a white nothingness which cannot be definitively interpreted. Moby-Dick is covered in a whiteness which is the brightness of God or the nothingness of absence. Either Moby-Dick is at heart so bright with potential power, or so lacking in anything that he cannot be fathomed, or he is covered with these possibilities. Both still obfuscate the selfness of the whale. Ishmael can see into the whale and meet a resisting object, or he can see but the thin covering and meet a resisting object. Only the point of view of the subject desiring to know the object is left to determine meaning; but, as Ishmael shows us, no single point of view yields anything more definite than a perception, anything more definite than a subjectivity. This disquisition of Ishmael’s, while it may appear to be but a digression devoted to whales, is a
telling illustration of how easily the surface of a living creature can mislead those who perceive its actions: what might appear to be one thing (masculinity/femininity) is undergirded by another thing (femininity/masculinity).

This exterior of the whale brings all the crew together, though. Another whale having been killed and brought alongside, Ishmael tells us, in "The Monkey-Rope," how the blubber lying just below the isinglass-like skin, which so interests him, is removed. It requires someone to step out on the nearly submerged leviathan and cut a hole into the blubber in which is then inserted the hook so the strip can be hoisted up as it is cut away. For this initial operation, Queequeg gets on the whale’s back and Ishmael holds on to him with a lifeline tying the two men together which the sailors call the monkey rope: "for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded" (MD 320). Once again, Ishmael "conceives" of a new will and metaphysical entity that is the union of two men. It is "the precise situation of every mortal that breathes" (MD 320). He knows that he--like all of us--has but "the management of one end of" the umbilical-like connection between human subjects. He reacts to and has an effect on Queequeg from his point of view at his end of the union. Still, his intention and Queequeg’s must both have the same object for this merging of individuality. It is a shared conception of the situation, a similar point of view, a
unifying of desire, that engenders their new kinship.

Because Ishmael is interested in--actually revels in--the relationship between him and Queequeg, the two of them are effective:

So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then, that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two. (MD 320)

Where Ahab's stereotypically masculine posture is thwarted again and again, Ishmael's abandonment of socially defined and sanctioned gender roles facilitates success. In fact, since Ishmael not only saves Queequeg but is willingly attached to him, it can be asserted that mutable gender roles and mutable expressions of desire actually protect life. We cannot help but see how ineffective is clearly defined desire in obtaining an objective when we see the monomaniacal expressions of desire evinced by the American ship-of-state Pequod and the American individualism of Ahab in comparison to Ishmael's fluidly defined desire.

Ishmael does not cease proving the efficacy of mutably defined gender here, however. He also tells us of the melding of gender in the sperm whale's head. As in his story concerning the Canallers, he perceives another example of the interrelationship between femininity and masculinity. He refers to the head of the whale as "an almost wholly vertical plane" of "enormous boneless mass" which contains "the most delicate oil" (MD 337). For
Ishmael, there is an "apparent effeminacy" in the passivity of this whale's brow (MD 337). Within the head lies, in addition to oil, "mystical lung-celled honeycombs" which perhaps "have some hitherto unknown and unsuspected connexion with the outer air" (MD 337). He ponders "the irresistibleness of [the whale head's] might, to which the most impalpable and destructive of all elements contributes" (MD 337). He associates femininity with the bulk of the whale because it is not ostentatiously violent, because it is a tabula rasa where experience can be recorded rather than instigated, because it is enabled by passive honeycombs of air. There is, in this air, also a "force," a most destructive element; however, it is one that is itself acted upon, pushed into violence by pressure not of its own making. As with the Canallers, Ishmael here mixes stereotypical feminine passivity with stereotypical masculine aggressiveness. The effeminacy is apparent; the destructive force is real. So, what appears feminine is masculine; masculine and feminine are again mixed. It is difficult, if not impossible, to miss the fact that this fluidly engendered whale is what everyone is chasing—unsuccessfully. And, in the end, it is the fluidly engendered whale, along with Ishmael who is similarly engendered, that survives, not the monomaniacal ship and captain.
Not all on the ship are so rigidly gendered as Ahab, though. In "Cisterns and Buckets," when Tashtego is bailing out the precious spermaceti oil, he falls into the whale’s head. The femininely passive head encases Tashtego in the oily depths. Queequeg, however, cuts into the whale’s underside and reaches in, pulling out the man, head first. Queequeg, in effect, helps the feminine head of masculine power give birth to Tashtego:

upon first thrusting in for him, a leg was presented; but well knowing that that was not as it ought to be . . . he . . . had wrought a somerset upon the Indian; so that with the next trial, he came forth in the good old way—head foremost. (MD 343)

To Ishmael’s mind, "midwifery should be taught in the same course with fencing, boxing, riding and rowing" (MD 344). After all, the man is born from the feminine passivity of the head which is actually masculine when in struggle with man and ship. Such action, though apparently masculine, is, as we know, undergirded by feminine strength. The stereotypically masculine realm of the head gives birth to the unlearned, savage man with the help of another man. Man must intervene to be born; he must go into the head, into consciousness, where male and female perceptions of self reside and drag forth the new "man." From the forehead, where "you feel the Deity," where "not one distinct feature is revealed," where the whale’s "great genius is declared in his doing nothing particular to prove
it," a man is born. Out of passivity comes male action. When the male Queequeg enters the feminine domain, the man is born, saved. As Ahab's view becomes ever more narrowly dedicated to one object, Ishmael's view is enriched by his consciousness of the interrelatedness of gender roles.

It is not only the whale's head and exterior that provide opportunity for Ishmael to hold forth on gender and the hazy distinctions between feminine and masculine. In "The Nut," likening the whale skull to the human, he asserts that if you were to "place this reversed [whale] skull (scaled down to the human magnitude) among a plate of men's skulls . . . you would involuntarily confound it with them" (MF 349). He goes on to add, however, that a phrenological examination of the whale's skull would lead to the assumption that "this man had no self-esteem, and no veneration" (MF 349). According to phrenology, in which Ishmael seems to believe, the man's skull is of a feminine inclination and desires not to assert the stereotypically male role of seeking esteem and veneration from others. Since we are to take such a skull for any man's, it seems logical to conclude that all men's skulls are likewise inherently feminine. Yet, the "exalted potency" of the whale derives from this structure. The battering ram of turgid potency that is the whale's head is buttressed by feminine diffidence. Again, what is stereotypical feminine rectitude and self-effacement empowers what is
stereotypical masculine "exalted potency." Ishmael extends his reliance on phrenology in stating "that much of a man's character will be found betokened in his backbone" (MD 349):

A thin joist of a spine never yet upheld a full and noble soul. I rejoice in my spine, as in the firm audacious staff of that flag which I fling half out to the world. (MD 349)

The whale's "firmness or indomitableness" he attributes in part to the backbone and spinal cord which are largest and strongest from the head through to the hump. Then, six chapters later, when he resumes his anatomical investigation, he notes that the tail, which "begin[s] at that point of the trunk where it tapers to about the girth of man" (MD 375), has "vast local power." Here, power does not "tend to cripple the graceful flexion" of the tail: "in everything imposingly beautiful, strength has much to do with the magic" (MD 376). In describing the power of such a graceful organ, Ishmael compares the "robustness" of "god the Father in human form" with "the soft, curled, hermaphroditical Italian pictures" of Jesus that exude only "feminine . . . submission and endurance" which contain "the peculiar practical virtues of his teaching" (MD 376). What is perceived as timorous self-effacement in the skull of the whale/man connects with the masculine vertebrae undergirding the protruding hump. All of which connects to the graceful effeminacy of the tail. What he lauds, he
engenders anew since neither masculine nor feminine attributes stand alone, and both masculine and feminine attributes lead to attributes of the opposite gender. Only in Ahab and the patriarchal penchant of the Pequod is there clearly defined masculine assertiveness and desire to plough the unknown, yet-unmarked surfaces of the world. However, the "potency" of the ambiguously gendered whale is far greater than the "impotency" of the clearly gendered Ahab.

But it is when Ishmael is himself connected with the hermaphroditic whale that he most earnestly addresses gender. While squeezing the congealed lumps of sperm back into liquid, he is "mollified." He wants to meld with others on the physical level:

Come: let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other...

I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed. . . . I am ready to squeeze case eternally. (MD 416)

Although spermaceti is not the fecundating fluid of the whale, Ishmael refers to it as the life-carrying masculine fluid, sperm. He sees it bring new life by providing a meeting place. For Ishmael, the sperm, as he calls it, is not here acting as that which penetrates the female; here, the sperm is the feminine host in which new life unites. As men join together within the host sperm, he calls on
both genders to so meld: "let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness" (MD 416). What is the female milk and the male sperm will both contain all of mankind; hence, female and male will share constituents, be similar. What appears to be female will be male inside; what appears to be male will be female inside.

Such is likewise the case with "the grandissimus" or the penis of the whale. It is noted by Ishmael that the mincer, who cuts up blubber for the try pots, actually dons the dried sheath of the penis for protection. The symbol of phallic power, the very heart of stereotypical masculinity, is itself penetrated by a man. By assuming the female role, the male member is useful in new ways: "this investiture alone will adequately protect [the mincer]" (MD 420).

It is not inside any object that safety resides, however. Ishmael has, throughout his narrative, considered the effect of his relationship to, his point of view on what he objectifies. Now, sailing on in search of the white whale with Ahab, he tells us to delve within ourselves, to search for the truth there.

There is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again . . . even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar" (MD 425)
There is a truth within, and the subjectivity willing to turn its point of view upon itself is a subjectivity that soars. Such a subjectivity is not given to Queequeg in Ishmael’s tale. Although he is "a wondrous work in one volume," he is a text which he "himself could read, though his own live heart beat against" the tattooing—the enigma—that constitutes him (MD 480-481). Such a subjectivity is not given to Ahab in Ishmael’s tale, either. Although his fate is linked to Parsee’s, although his life is dependent on the metaphysical conjuring of the savage who interprets his dreams, his is no self-reflexive, self-defining subjectivity. Perceiving himself as "the Fates’ lieutenant," Ahab directs his passion, his monomania, always outward. As with the Pequod, he is caught in a maelstrom:

And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight. (MD 572)

This is not the fate of Ishmael, who, all through his narrative, in a steady process, constructs, engenders a subjectivity, a point of view that is without a keel or a bias, that is self-reflexive, that is a more fluid form of gender. He brings into question the purity of the act and the rawness of the behavior traditionally associated with specific sex roles; he connects Lacan’s Real Order, which
is the domain of that "pure act and raw behavior," to the barrier of language in a new and confusing manner: as he narrates, he objectifies not only his tale but the point of view from which it is told. In short, Ishmael reflects on what a desired subjectivity should be; he shows that an un-gendered "position" is preferable. The barrier of the Symbolic Order, of language, which curtails the always already there passion of the Real Order sexuality, is, in Ishmael's hands, a tool for questioning stereotypical gendering of points of view, of subjectivity. We are connected to language by culturally inscribed images; instead, we are forced to engender new images to fit a protean sense of gender.

Although fortune's hand can be seen in the survival of Ishmael, in the end, it cannot be ignored that he floats away in a coffin without a keel, in a vessel very unlike the assertive Pequod. Having allowed the "him" and "her" of selfhood to meld together or die away in importance during his narrative, he is free from the static resistance of one position for his desire. He, unlike his fellow crew members, is not clearly objectified by his desire. He is not signified as an unyielding, monomaniacal subjectivity,

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such as Ahab or any of the outward-focusing crew of the Pequod. Had he been, his desire would signify, represent him, and he would fail when his singular projection of desire failed. With Ahab's death there is an ostensible judgment passed on the unchecked greed and expansionism and self-interest of America; there is nothing left for readers save Ishmael who climbs into the coffin given up by the vortex. What kills everyone saves Ishmael because his point of view, his subjectivity is fluid and not rigidly defined. Hence, neither shark nor sea-hawk is interested in him as an object; he is engendered anew, un-threatening, without a subjectivity which can be objectified and discarded. He has engendered a new subjectivity from which to view America, and his success challenges nineteenth-century America's values and nearly all for which it stands. In the very logocentric, phallocentric, masculine culture of nineteenth-century America, Ishmael finds meaning and support within a subjectivity that is fluidly engendered, and we see him survive what destroys everything else, what Melville feels is destroying America and the American psyche, a refusal to look inside the desiring American subjectivity. So, too, is Ishmael supported by his not being at any specific time a clear union of what is stereotypically feminine with what is stereotypically masculine. If such were the case, Ishmael would but keep alive the distinctions of gender and thereby be in the
position of the rest of the crew of the *Pequod*.
CHAPTER V

Emily Dickinson’s Solipsistic Transcendentalism

Margaret Fuller, concerned with the unequal status of women, desires a fourth level of partnership in which men and women are linked through their reciprocal concern for each other’s spiritual and intellectual ideal—they are conjoined by a shared desire which elevates to the spiritual level their mutual concern. Walt Whitman, devoted to advancing the notion of the egalitarian American, desires new language for America in which the desires of women and men of all races and sexual orientations are joined to form one voice and one desire—they are the all-encompassing American subjectivity. Herman Melville, worried about nineteenth-century America’s greed and self-interest, desires to explore these ills from vantage points that are stereotypically masculine and stereotypically feminine—Ishmael is simultaneously within and without those he observes.

Emily Dickinson, however, presents no all-encompassing soul, nor does she posit what Fuller calls a "self-centred," soul, a soul first aware of its individuality, then dedicated to ensuring that a "woman . . . would never
be absorbed by any relation" (W 162). No, in Dickinson’s transcendental poems, those poems which evince a speaking subjectivity positioned between the extremities of what we know about the physical and the spiritual, she avoids gender, transcends it. By turning to those poems in which she positions a consciousness above the abyss between what we know of life on earth and what we might hope for after life, it is possible to see Dickinson’s transcendentalism move beyond gender.

True, in some poems, Dickinson speaks with many different women’s voices:

"she assume[s] with ease an array of shifting personae: the abandoned woman (#47); the loving wife (#246); the fantasist of erotic ecstasy (#249); the acerbic satirist of Conventional women (#401); the expectant bride on the eve of her wedding (#461); the sullen rejecter of a lover (#640)."1

But, while there are more poems than these mentioned by Reynolds which obviously connect issues of gender to nineteenth-century feminine roles, among Dickinson’s 1775 poems, such overtly gendered statements are decidedly rare. Actually, Reynolds himself goes so far as to note that "the large majority of her poems have no apparent gender-specific meaning whatsoever" (420). Regardless, he claims that what Dickinson does is "address women’s issues; she

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perfects women's style" (420).

There is, however, more to Dickinson than a poet perfecting a style, more than a poet whose speaking subjectivity merely shifts roles often enough to evade being culturally or stereotypically gendered. In those many poems where she treats of a consciousness poised over the abyss between death and immortality she reveals her ungendered subjectivity. But unlike her transcendental contemporaries, she implicitly transcends the locus of both biological sex and any subsequent cultural engendering. Dickinson reveals a subjectivity defined solely by its desire to know itself as a consciousness. Poised as it is between the extremes of what is known, this subjectivity is loose. Unlike Whitman whose Atomism allows his speaker to view "the smallest sprout [as proof that] there is really no death" ("Song of Myself" 34), Dickinson is not connecting her transcendentalism to any physical point from which "all goes onward and outward" ("Song" 35). Instead, she floats between points of reference, not even anchored in multiple-gender desires as is Ishmael. The only referent for Dickinson’s self-conscious speaker is the consciousness of that speaker. As such, Dickinson’s speaking subjectivity is proof that in taking transcendentalism to its possible limits, the efficacy of transcendentalism as a tool of social criticism is
diminished. All that remains is a solipsistic dead end which highlights the subjectivity so engaged with itself, even when that subjectivity exalts in itself:

Adrift! A little boat adrift!

. . .

So Sailors say - on yesterday -
Just as the dusk was brown
One little boat gave up its strife
And gurgled down and down.

So angels say - on yesterday -
Just as the dawn was red
One little boat - o'erspent with gales -
Retrimmed its masts - redecked its sails -
And shot - exultant on!²

Accepting that Dickinson's interest is beyond the gendered subject interacting in society, we cannot see her as a social critic in the vein of Fuller or Whitman or Melville. In fact, as early as 1847, when she is but seventeen, Dickinson writes to her brother Austin and reveals a distinct disinterest in the social sphere:

Wont you please to tell me when you answer my letter who the candidate for President is? I have been trying to find out ever since I came here & have not yet succeeded. I dont know anything more about affairs in the world, than if I was in a trance . . . Has the Mexican war terminated yet & and how? Are we beat? Do you

² Emily Dickinson, The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955). All further references to Dickinson's poetry will be from this one-volume text and be cited parenthetically with CP and Johnson's number.
Thirty-seven years later Dickinson appears not to have modified her appraisal of politics. In a letter to Mrs. J.G. Holland, with whom she shares the most "enduring" friendship of her life (L III 945), she states what is obviously of utmost importance to her and contrasts its significance with politicians:

The Leaves are flying high away, and the Heart flies with them, though were that wondrous Firm alight, is not "an open secret -" What a curious Lie that phrase is! I see it of Politicians - Before I write to you again, we shall have had a new Czar - Is the sister a Patriot? "George Washington was the Father of his Country" - "George Who?" (L III 849)

Dickinson even seems to dislike using her poetry to represent herself or her life. In a July 1862 letter to T.W. Higginson, she states that "when I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse - it does not mean - me - but a supposed person" (L II 412).

This "removal" of herself needs to be carefully understood, however. Like other women writers of nineteenth-century America, Dickinson obviously writes as if she is her audience, as if she will hoard her poems.

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She writes as if in "the portfolio tradition."

a means of preserving the secret self in the face of such growing technological exposure. . . .
What marked the unpublished portfolio as unique was its very eclecticism and nature as a repository or source book whose sketches could be worked up into more finished products when the occasion demanded. Until that time—if it ever came—the portfolio was meant to be a closely guarded and thoroughly "sealed" volume.*

According to St. Armand, Dickinson’s culture, the social milieu that is nineteenth-century America, is

a new age of popular journalism, made possible largely by innovations in print technology, [which] rapidly transformed the private and the domestic into common public property. It did this in order to make personal contact with its readers, creating general mythologies that few, including Emily Dickinson, could ignore. (5)

It is this "new age," apparently, which seems somehow foreign to her in her letter to T.W. Higginson on 7 June 1862: "I smile when you suggest that I delay "to publish"—that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to fin—" (L II 408).

What is not foreign to her thought, however, is the literature of the day. Her relationship with nineteenth-century America is complicated. Indeed, in the midst of a melodramatic mimicking of the literary fashion of the day, Dickinson tells her uncle, Joel Warren Norcross, on 11 January 1850 of her apprehensiveness regarding nineteenth-
Harm is one of those things that I always mean to keep clear of - but somehow my intentions and me dont chime as they ought - and people will get hit with stones that I throw at my neighbor's dogs - not only hit - that is the least of the whole - but they insist on blaming me instead of the stones . . . it certainly is as much as one's neck is worth to live in so stupid a world - and it makes one grow weary. (L I 79-80)

Her obvious awareness of the hyperbole of popular literature is further evidenced in February 1850 when she commences a letter to George H. Gould with a recitation of sensationalist chatter: "Magnum bonum, 'harum scarum,' zounds et zounds, et war alarum, man reformam, life perfectum, mundum changum, all things flarum?" (L I 91). However, while she concludes this letter in a melodramatic and almost nonsensical mode, she does make clear her unease with society:

But the world is sleeping in ignorance and error, sir, and we must be crowing cocks, and singing larks, and a rising sun to awake her; or else we'll pull society up by the roots, and plant it in a different place. We'll build Alms-houses, and transcendental State prisons, and scaffolds (L I 92)

Her ambivalent relationship to what is troubling in society is also evidenced in Dickinson's references to the newspaper. She is privy to and comments on what is contained in the news of the day: "One glimpse of The Republican makes me break things again," she tells Dr. and Mrs. J.G. Holland. "I read in it every night," she adds.
Her sister "Vinnie was disappointed to-night that there were no more accidents"; however, Dickinson wonders "who writes those funny accidents?" (L I 264).

There is for Dickinson more concern with the popular fiction and journalistic style than with the subject matter treated by those styles. She is, in this, quite at variance with Fuller and Whitman and Melville. Where Fuller engages in a loose and conversational style akin to Thoreau's, Dickinson's style is sparse. Where Whitman engages in a bawdy and direct "barbaric yawp," Dickinson's style is evasive. Where Melville engages in a verbalizing of gendered desire, Dickinson verbalizes an idiosyncratic self-consciousness.

While I see her as mostly concerned with the language current in her society, I do not assert that Dickinson fails to take notice of other issues. In truth, she delivers a rather ringing condemnation of much that is popular in her contemporary culture:

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The Popular Heart is a Cannon first -
Subsequent a Drum -
Bells for an Auxiliary
And an Afterward of Rum -

Not a tomorrow to know its name
Nor a past to stare -
Ditches for Realms and a Trip to Jail
For a souvenir - (CP #1226)
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Along with this rather obvious denigration of society is Dickinson's deliberate rejection of stereotypically female
roles. To her school friend, Abiah Root, she voices a dislike—even fear—of such roles: "My kitchen I think I called it, God forbid that it was, or shall be my own - God keep me from what they call households, except that bright one of "faith!" (L I 99). Even her sister-in-law-to-be, Susan Gilbert, she warns that "to the wife, Susie, sometimes the wife forgotten, our lives perhaps seem dearer than all others in the world" (L I 210).

Still, Dickinson is more desirous, I feel, of knowing her consciousness. While I am not implying—obviously—that she is aware of Lacan, I do feel it is worthwhile to see Dickinson as consciously aware that meaning in and of language is rooted in the social realm that troubles her. It seems almost as if she purposely sets out to reposition the unconscious impressions or cliches which inform language use—what Lacan calls imagoes. By avoiding as much as possible the social effect on language—transcending the realm of the mirror image, focusing desire for poetic meaning between social images which are located where cultural standards are unconsciously inscribed—Dickinson can use language to create new images. The Lacanian mirror stage, that event closely aligned with—in

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fact the producer of—the imaginary order,® gives rise to a relationship between the sense of self as subjectivity and the social "I" mirroring what others perceive of that self. Within this relationship are the unconscious images or imagoes which Lacan asserts affect interaction with other people. In fine, there is an always already filter in place through which the human subject must constantly direct desire. That filter for Dickinson is evidenced in what lies below and informs the trivial and sensational ideas engendered by the popular use of language. To avoid this filter, she will create intellections which will represent the subjectivity that represents her "true" self, her Real Order desire.

Jane Gallop, however, says that "the symbolic order" or Dickinson's poetry, in this case, "can be reached only by not trying to avoid the imaginary, by knowingly being in the imaginary," the location of unconscious images (60). Dickinson, then, does something very interesting. Her desiring to be in the void, her imagining such a perspective for her speaking subjectivity outside the gendered subject/object realm represented by the mirror stage, drastically alters this Lacanian dictum. As we have seen, her relationship with her mirror image, the manner in

which nineteenth-century American society "sees" her, results in her dislike of that society. She dislikes, as seems apparent at this point, to be placed in the position of having her social image be anything which is delimited by the prescriptions of society: she is at first amused by the politics and sensationalism but comes to dislike them—as she does the roles assigned to women. So, Dickinson directs her desire away from any and all images arising out of the mirror stage. Writing about—and I would assert on—the abyss, she works through her poetry to create new imagoes which are themselves objects of desire. Instead of the Lacanian imagoes, which are filters for and limitations of language, Dickinson uses her poetry to transcend what society reflects. She is writing on an abyss, an abyss that is purposely straddling possibility. While it is an abyss that is defined by worldly imagoes and spiritually Christian imagoes, it is between these that Dickinson directs her desire. Without any mirror-stage referent, she creates through the use of the Symbolic Order—poetry—a new relationship with the Imaginary Order. She gives us, if not new unconscious images, at least the desire for them.

In so doing, though, Dickinson becomes a far different critic of nineteenth-century America. She becomes, perhaps unwittingly, a critic of the various transcendental
philosophies which empower other nineteenth-century American writers such as Emerson, and even writers like Fuller, Whitman, and Melville who are critiquing American society. Her critique, unlike Fuller's, Whitman's, or Melville's, commences with the terminal state between the end of life and the beginning of immortality. Her letters seem to bear out this interest. On 28 February 1855 she tells Susan Gilbert that "this is not forever, you know, this mortal life of our's" (L II 316). On 18 March 1855 she tells Mrs. J.G. Holland, "thank God there is a world, and that the friends we love dwell forever and ever in a house above" (L II 319). On 20 January 1856 she writes again to Mrs. Holland saying that "we shall sit in a parlor 'not made with hands' unless we are very careful!" (L II 323). In late April 1856, in a letter to John L. Graves, she remarks that "to live, and die, and mount again in triumphant body, and next time, try the upper air - is no schoolboy's theme!" (L II 328). Early August 1856 finds her writing to Mrs. Holland, informing her that "I'm half tempted to take my seat in that Paradise of which the good man writes, and begin forever and ever now, so wondrous does it seem" (L II 329). Later in 1856 she tells John Graves that "I lift the lid to my box of Phantoms, and lay another in, unto the Resurrection - Then will I gather in Paradise, the blossoms fallen here, and on the shores of
the sea of Light, seek my missing sands" (L II 330).

In such spiritual contemplativeness, however, there is no affinity with traditional Christianity for Dickinson. As she tells Abiah Root on 28 March 1846, long before the above letters were written, she has come to terms with traditional religion. She cannot bring herself to subscribe as do those around her:

I feel that I am sailing upon the brink of an awful precipice, from which I cannot escape & over which I fear my tiny boat will soon glide if I do not receive help from above. There is now a revival in College & many hearts have given way to the claims of God. What if it should extend to the village church & your friends A. & E. feel its influence. Would that it might be so. [emphasis added] (L I 31)

On 16 May 1848, she tells Abiah Root of her "regret" at not having become a Christian. However, it is two years since the above letter, and this is at least the second opportunity for her. She did not embrace traditional religion in the Spring of 1846; she does not embrace it now in 1848, a fact which colors her purported "regret":

I regret that last term, when that golden opportunity was mine, that I did not give up and become a Christian. It is now too late, so my friends tell me, so my offended conscience whispers, but it is hard for me to give up the world. [emphasis added] (L I 67)

Consequently, almost a year hence, Dickinson tells this same Abiah Root that

you are growing wiser than I am, and nipping in the bud fancies which I let blossom - perchance to bear no fruit, or if plucked, I may find it
bitter. The shore safer, Abiah, but I love to buffet the sea - I can count the bitter wrecks here in these pleasant waters, and hear the murmuring winds, but oh, I love the danger! You are learning control and firmness. Christ Jesus will love you more. I'm afraid he don't love me any!" (L I 104)

Accordingly, we can, with relative assuredness, presume that Emily Dickinson’s metaphysical penchant is not orthodoxy Christian. Her spiritual quest, her desire for what is between the physical and the unknown is a turning away from both the world and traditional Christianity. As a consequence, in positioning her speaking subjectivity between the physical and the Christian, in seeking to be conscious of consciousness, Dickinson becomes so transcendental as to call into question the efficacy of transcendentalism as a means to improving society. Her social criticism is, in effect, criticism of the social criticism of her peers—Fuller, Whitman, and Melville. She carries transcendentalism to a position that seems to remove it from the sphere of social criticism, that seems to place it in the realm that Emerson feared. As F.O. Matthiessen states in American Renaissance, Emerson "lament[ed], over and again, that transcendental New England was too imaginative and intellectual . . . He d[oes] not. . . . conceive his content as being 'out of space--out of time'" (11). In short, "he d[oes] not want his idealism to be divorced from the material facts of his
age" (Matthiessen 11). What Emerson does want, and what Fuller and Whitman and Melville in varying degrees also want, is a recognition that human subjects are inherently linked to God because a transcendent spirit informs all the universe, humanity included ("The Over-Soul" CW II 159, 160). According to Emerson "there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so is there no bar or wall in the soul where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins" ("The Over-Soul" CW II 161). For Emerson this does not remove the human subject from the world: "the soul to itself, and the man in whom it is shed abroad, cannot wander from the present, which is infinite, to a future, which would be finite" (168). Here, as in his investigation of "the transparent eyeball" in Nature, Emerson conflates the seer with what is seen. "All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject" (Matthiessen 31). The human subject, in perceiving transcendentally some object in nature, becomes one with that object and thereby transcends the mere physical realm of subject and object. Herein lie the culturally improving possibilities of transcendentalism for Fuller, Whitman, and Melville. As noted earlier, these

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7 In the third paragraph of "The Over-Soul" Emerson discusses this transcendent spirit which informs nature. He sees the Over-Soul as empowering humanity to see itself in "masquerade."
three position the desiring subject in a relationship with other similar subjects, extending transcendentalism beyond the "me and the not me" of Emerson. These three move to an androgynous realm where two "me's" desire and there is yet no objectifying; there is instead a melding or joining of genders which focuses desire on a common object located within what we might call Emerson's "Over-Soul." Society is thereby portrayed ideally as a location where subjects become one with other gendered subjects, and societal ills are remedied.

For Dickinson, however, transcendentalism leads to a position outside the nineteenth-century American culture over which Fuller and Whitman and Melville and Emerson fret. Dickinson removes herself from society's politics and sensationalism, but not as Gilbert and Gubar claim in an act of "conver[sion] to [a] secret sect of art." Dickinson's first move is not just a removal from society; her first move is socially critical because it indicates an awareness of society's effect on how she will be perceived. To write as she desires, she transcends society; employing transcendentalism further removes her from society because

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*Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 648. Gilbert and Gubar say Dickinson "clung obstinately and silently to that "Lunacy of Light" Aurora Leigh had taught her to envision" and thereby cast her as writing in a very obvious feminist tradition.*
she carries it to such an extreme that it ceases to be an
effective tool for social criticism. This is not to argue
with Gilbert and Gubar who perceive Dickinson mentioning
Elizabeth Barret Browning when she says "I think I was
enchanted / When first a sombre Girl - / I read that
Foreign Lady -" (CP #593). However, the ending of that
poem is more than what Gilbert and Gubar make of it, which
is that Dickinson's "conversion was subtle, indefinable and
Romantically mad" (648). The poem was written in 1862, and
Dickinson is well aware of where she stands with regard to
transcendentalism and social issues:

I could not have defined the change -
Conversion of the Mind
Like Sanctifying in the Soul -
Is witnessed - not explained -

'Twas a Divine Insanity -
The Danger to be Sane
Should I again experience -
'Tis Antidote to turn -

To Tomes of solid Witchcraft -
Magicians be asleep -
But Magic - hath an Element
Like Deity - to keep - (CP #593)

She says that she could not at some time past have
described the change which she underwent; however, at this
point in which she is writing, she most certainly can
better describe it. She has changed from a school girl
disinterested in the trappings of American political
posturing and in the fortunes of America's wars. She has
become a harbinger of the poetry of the early twentieth
century: her speaking subjectivity possess a very modern sensibility. She is, after all, breaking with tradition; her texts most certainly call attention to themselves. But of even greater importance is the sense that her speaker is her own frame of reference in her alienated state of facing an unknown future.

This frame of reference comes more and more to constitute her poetry. In her letters to Abiah Root, her former classmate, Dickinson, as early as 1850, appears to give up on accepting a close relationship with traditional Christianity. Her relationship to poetry, though, is quite another matter; in fact, her closeness to and dependence on poetry supplants traditional religion:

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I reckon - when I count at all -
First - Poets - Then the Sun -
Then Summer - Then the Heaven of God -
And then - the List is done -

But, looking back - the First so seems
To Comprehend the Whole -
The Others look a needless Show -
So I write - Poets - All - (CP #569)
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She is not elevating the poet herself to the level of God. She is elevating the poetic endeavor to that level: "The Poets light but Lamps - / Themselves - go out - / The Wicks they stimulate - / If vital Light / Inhere as do the Suns - " (CP #883). It is the conscious effort of the poet that can carry humanity to new awareness. There is a necessary directing of poetic desire which effects the elevation of
man.

While Emerson likewise values the poet as a force capable of elevating the human condition, there is, finally, a great difference between him and Dickinson. In "The Poet," Emerson says that the birth of a poet is the principal event in chronology. Man, never so often deceived, still watches for the arrival of a brother who can hold him steady to a truth until he has made it his own. With what joy I begin to read a poem, which I confide in as an inspiration! And now my chains are broken; I shall mount above these clouds and opaque airs in which I live . . . and from the heaven of truth I shall see and comprehend my relations. That will reconcile me to life (CW III 7-8)

Emerson sees this poet "leav[ing] the world [to] know the muse only"; he still envisions such a poet as "close hid with nature" and having only "outlets into celestial space" [emphasis added] (23-24). Emerson, like Fuller and Whitman and Melville, sees the transcendental poet as using natural facts and occurrences as signs of spiritual presence. What is in humanity makes it worth the struggle to salvage and elevate.

Dickinson, too, is sensitive to the plight of the human subject. But her concern is with the inevitability of the end of life in a natural world. The world to which Fuller and Whitman and Melville address themselves is not the focus of Dickinson's transcendental philosophy. There are, certainly, poems which speak to death from a
perspective within the natural world: "The absent - mystic creature - / That but for love of us - / Had gone to sleep -" (CP #255). However, Dickinson's greatest desire is directed toward other less positive possibilities. She accepts a mourning presence in the natural world after the departure of life; yet, what lies ahead is less certain, less assuring:

If I'm lost - now
That I was found -

That in my awkward - gazing - face -
The Angels - softly peered -
And touched me with their fleeces,
Almost as if they cared -
I'm banished - now - you know it -
How foreign that can be -
You'll know - Sir - when the Savior's face
Turns so - away from you - [emphasis added] (CP #256)

There is a lack of traditional faith in a Christian salvation:

Read - Sweet - how others - strove -
Till we - are stouter -
What they - renounced -
Till we - are less afraid -
How many times they - bore the faithful witness -
Till we - are helped -
**As if a Kingdom - cared!** [emphasis added] (CP #260)

What is left, after the natural world, after traditional Christianity, is the poetry which we read to instill in ourselves a sense of security. Like Emerson's poet, some writer encourages us, elevates us. But with Dickinson we are to act **as if** there were a kingdom that
cared—somewhere! Unlike the Emersonian poet, Dickinson's speaker transports us, in a manner that is nonetheless transcendent, to an abyss, an abyss outside of any gendered natural world with which we are acquainted, outside any Christian afterlife in which we might hope.

Emerson's poet, by way of "thought makes everything fit for use. . . . What would be base, or even obscene, to the obscene, becomes illustrious, spoken in a new connexion of thought" ("The Poet" CW III 11). So too for Dickinson, who makes poetry out of the most unpretentious and unsophisticated subjects. She tells T.W. Higginson on 25 April 1862 that "while my thought is undressed - I can make the distinction, but when I put them in the Gown - they look alike, and numb" (L 404). Both rely on the intuition and on conscience; both hold to an ideal; both desire to transcend the limits of the senses and of logic in order to receive higher truths. But for Dickinson transcending evinces a consciousness or subjectivity which is extremely individualistic. Her speaking subjectivity, in her transcendent poems, transcends the physical, true; however, this subjectivity is not looking at a nature outside of herself. She is focused on, desiring to know the consciousness that defines her subjectivity. She is aware of her self as an entity apart from any natural past and any spiritual future. Her present is not the
Emersonian present which contains all; hers is a present which contains the awareness that she has, in truth, actually transcended the Over-Soul which connects the natural world and the spiritual world. She is, at her most transcendental, hovering in the abyss created by her own transcendental self-reflexiveness. What is considered traditional inspiration, Romantic or Christian hope, oppresses her:

There's a certain Slant of light,  
. . .  
That oppresses, like the Heft  
Of Cathedral Tunes -

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us -  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference,  
Where the Meanings, are -

None may teach it - Any -  
'Tis the Seal Despair -  
An imperial affliction  
Sent us of the Air -

When it comes, the Landscape listens - (CP #258)

Although her present is sealed where there is no salvation; although her self-awareness is of an inscrutable end, Dickinson's speaker is enlightened and is thereby hopeful, full of hope since she has this moment of insight. It is this insight which is the ultimate transcending of limits. There is no gendered existence, no physical constraints, no society. Instead of standing with her head in the blithe air and becoming one with what she perceives around her as does Emerson, Dickinson hovers over an abyss
without unconscious images or associations for her readers. She subverts the Lacanian notion that language is made accessible only through the use of these unconscious images by preventing us from relying on established, well-known worldly or spiritual associations. What she does provide is a view of transcendentalism carried to such an extreme that only the individual created in the act of transcending remains.

It is, though, a fleeting act, which leads Dickinson to her modern sensibility. Whatever Dickinson learns seems to be interred; her consciousness is learning and growing, but it is itself doomed as it hits again and again the physical limits of the grave. Nonetheless, she finishes "Knowing." This is the end, an end that is edifying; however, there is that ominous word, "then -" which presents a sense of alienation and despair. In the face of that uncertain future, Dickinson’s poem—as a good modern poem should—posits itself as a means of keeping the speaking subjectivity alive. The text is itself an answer.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through -

... ...

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
... ...

...
And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing - then -(CP #280)

So, while it is in part correct to see "at the heart
of [Dickinson's] preoccupation with death . . . an
experience of social powerlessness," it is far more
fruitful to see her as a poet who has moved beyond the
physical aspects of death into an ungendered realm where
only consciousness aware of itself is the point. She
"realizes that her imaginative quest into the unknown is an
uncertain setting out, perhaps already a failed one: only
perception can aid her, and it is the eye's errand--this
poem's 'eye' of generalized intuitive seeing."

Whether my bark went down at sea -
Whether she met with gales -
Whether to isles enchanted
She bent her docile sails -

By what mystic mooring
She is held today -
This is the errand of the eye
Out upon the Bay. (CP #52)

Where her eye is cast and where her bark sails is into
a maelstrom, into the vortex of nineteenth-century
transcendentalism and twentieth-century modernism. For in
following her desire to understand the consciousness that

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9 Vivian R. Pollak, Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender

10 Greg Johnson, Emily Dickinson: Perception and the
Poet's Quest (The University of Alabama Press, 1985) 15.
defines her subjectivity, Dickinson’s speaker reaches a level of understanding only to then realize that that understanding is itself another beginning:

'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch,  
That nearer, every Day,  
Kept narrowing its boiling Wheel  
Until the Agony

Toyed coolly with the final inch  
Of your delirious Hem - (CP #414)

This delirium carries the speaker to an ever keener sense of self, to an ever more transcendent experience of self knowledge. Yet, with each level of awareness comes the disillusionment that attends the speaker, or any "you" who so transcends, in withdrawing from death and from life, in leaving the corporeal and the spiritual for the consciousness of consciousness. If such a state of transcendentalism is "a Dream" then either the remembering of God or the chance that the natural Fiend lets go undercuts the act of transcending. The speaker is left wondering if it is more of an anguish "to perish, or to live?" (CP #414).

Dickinson is changing her mirror image, her social "I." What she is creating in her poems is no recluse, however. Instead of ensconcing herself in "The Homestead" in Amherst, Dickinson is venturing into the gulf that hitherto has delimited conscious action, consciousness itself:
I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air -
Between the Heaves of Storm -(CP #465)

She is in the emptiness between two forces; she is leaving, but in so doing, she is beginning. Time does little but confuse the matter, since to consider it is confusing. Mourning is done; however, the subject who is dead is conscious of its position between body and future. "The Eyes around - had wrung them dry - / And Breaths were gathering firm." All that is firm here, though, is the poem which we are reading. The text is all that is firm as we/it/the mourners wait "for the Onset - when the King / Be witnessed - in the Room." But the king does not appear; there is nought but an abyss over which or in which or from which the speaking subjectivity addresses us. The speaker has "willed my Keepsakes - Signed away / What portion of me be / Assignable - and then it was / There interposed a Fly." There is no spiritual illumination; nor is there a lament which still connects the subject to its lost physical sphere. For a moment the speaker has transcended all limitations and has become that upon which it focuses its desire.

To stretch self awareness to its ultimate is to become a self aware of self being aware of self. This awareness, though, is fleeting because the speaker does not "see" far into the future to "become" anything other than a
consciousness conscious of its position between the physical and the unknown. It is the physical which exerts here its force:

With Blue - uncertain stumbling Buzz -
Between the light - and me -
And then the Windows filed - and then
I could not see to see - (CP #465)

Still, to arrive in this position, the position of the anguished modern subjectivity, from the idealistic transcendentalist subjectivity is not without reward since, for Dickinson, consciousness is the ultimate reality or truth; it contains all else. Consciousness is equal to the God of Abiah Root, for only in consciousness can the concept of God exist so that he be known as "God." The intellectual and the imaginative aspect of transcendentalism, that aspect which Emerson most feared, allows Dickinson’s speaker its greatest insight. It is the human consciousness that orders the divine, at least to some extent, at least to the only extent available to consciousness. Thus knowledge is gained; thus knowledge is ultimate:

The Brain - is wide than the Sky -
For - put them side by side -
The one the other will contain
With ease - and You - beside -

... 

The Brain is just the weight of God -
For - Heft them - Pound for Pound -
And they will differ - if they do -
As Syllable from Sound - (CP #632)
The difference between syllable and sound is equal to the difference between the brain and God, and the lines suggest there is no difference. In the utterance is the creation of the thought, just as in the brain is the concept of God. Dickinson has reached the ultimate level of transcendentalism, one which Emerson feared. She is aware that the human mind, because it is aware of God, brings God into existence for itself. Thus, if the human mind transcends every "object" except itself, it is left with itself for subject and object; it becomes what Emerson asks: one with itself. Time and space are transcended; only the words of the poet remain as a trace of the poet creating (it)self, the subjectivity whose point of view and biases and desires are internalized into one consciousness separate from all else: "Behind Me - dips Eternity - / Before Me - Immortality - / Myself - the Term between" (CP #721). The speaker is now only within language; the poem is its realm; gender is of no consequence since there is no "other" or "Other" with which to deal, upon whom to project desire. Emerson's concern for the present is now contained within the consciousness of the speaker. Even the synesthesia of the poem is contained within the speaker's mind or consciousness: the sense of time and space evoke an image of consciousness. Time and space are the poetic mind; the poetic mind is both time and space:
'Tis Miracle before Me - then -
'Tis Miracle behind - between -
A Crescent in the Sea -
With Midnight to the North of her -
And Midnight to the South of Her -
And Maelstrom - in the Sky - (CP #721)

Unlike Fuller's narrator who seeks an ideal union for both genders, unlike Whitman's voice which seeks a new egalitarian American subjectivity, unlike Melville's Ishmael who seeks a perspective both within and without his shipmates, Dickinson's speaker creates a world, knowingly, intentionally, only within the poems that subjectivity narrates. It is the refinement of the transcendental ethos; it is also the embodiment of the twentieth-century modern sensibility. Thus Dickinson's speaker embodies the realization that Emerson's concern for the future of transcendentalism was well founded: transcendentalism is a principle, however disparately applied, that leads eventually to removal from society.

Dickinson's speaker also shows us, pace Lacan, that language is not only accessible through the unconscious images we carry in our mind. Dickinson creates a new imaginary realm for us to employ in accessing her language. She does not merely posit the use of poetry against the images on which her readers already unconsciously rely. To do so would be to give an imaginary reading of her poetry. What she does, knowingly or not, is to position readers over the abyss where only nullity "exist." It is here that
readers are forced to come to grips with their imaginary order, their mental images and cliches, in order to engage her poems. In so doing, Dickinson uses, in Lacanian terms, the Symbolic Order prior to the Imaginary Order so that the Imaginary can then inform the Symbolic. In short, she intentionalizes a desired location that can only be "inhabited" by a subjectivity willing to forego everything except the consciousness that "it" has foregone everything except consciousness.

So, even though she is not physically present in her own or in our later-day culture, Dickinson’s consciousness has a broad circumference:

At Half past Three, a single Bird
Unto a silent Sky
Propounded but a single term
Of cautious melody.

At Half past Four, Experiment
Had subjugated test
And lo, Her silver Principle
Supplanted all the rest.

At Half past Seven, Element
Nor Implement, be seen -
And Place was where the Presence was
Circumference between. (OP # 1084)

But her circumference is, as she tells us, contained within her presence, a presence present only to self consciousness. What she encircles, then, is her own awareness of encircling. She removes herself from the society she might encircle by her self-conscious act of defining her subjectivity as that which is encircled.
That the Romantic Period in nineteenth-century America is considered an era of philosophic introspection and social awareness is hardly fresh information. In fact, we so laud the Transcendentalists for their concern with and dedication to improving the individual, and thereby American society, that we academics have often tended to see this group as exclusively representing American literature and thought in the second third of the century. It is only recently that this opinion seems to be under revision, due in part to the critical attention now being paid to women’s literature and slave narratives.

However, as I hope to have displayed, my more extensive gender reevaluation is likewise important for our understanding of the Transcendentalists since the likes of Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, and Herman Melville engage in a social criticism that is based on transcendentalism, but one that problematizes transcendentalism. By employing narrators or speaking subjectivities who desire what is spiritual, what is outside the subject/object cycle of gendered desire, these three transcend the ills of
corporeal society and posit an ideal subjectivity as a remedial alternative to nineteenth-century American culture. For Fuller, this subjectivity is a consequence of desiring a spiritual, non-gender-specific union for men and women. For Whitman, this subjectivity desires to express the desires of all of America. For Melville, this subjectivity is implicated in shifts between the gendered viewpoints and desires of those about whom he tells us. In these three writers we can see speakers whose subjectivities are more empowered than anything apparently possible in the physical culture where social inscribing transpires. In short, they develop a fluid notion of gender as a desired alternative to everyday nineteenth-century America.

Not only do Fuller, Whitman, and Melville posit subjectivities who are ambiguously gendered as an alternative or corrective. These three, in so judging their society, actually expose what we now believe to be inescapable thanks to Lacan and Freud and psychology in general: that desire objectifies. For these writers, transcendentalism provides an alternative. If subjects can transcend the physical, can desire something else for themselves, then it follows that desire can be shared by different subjects. Desire can become something by which to join others; it need not be something to objectify
others. This perception that desire can be utilized without objectifying is especially apparent in the work of Emily Dickinson. In a great number of her poems, those most reflective of transcendental philosophy, she desires to be conscious of consciousness, to know the self being aware of self. For her, this is being a being.

In so transcending, however, Dickinson carries transcendentalism to an extreme which removes it from any interaction with society. No longer does the poet stand in the nineteenth century and still mentally transcend. For Dickinson’s speaker is so self-reflective that its desire reveals a subjectivity comprised only of self consciousness.

In creating her speaker, Dickinson also qualifies Lacan. She, like Fuller, Whitman, and Melville, proves that desire can be expressed without objectifying. To this she also adds her qualification of Lacan’s belief that language must be approached or employed by first relying on unconscious images. Dickinson, to a greater extent than Fuller, Whitman, and Melville, tests this belief by intentionally positioning her speaker between all known points of reference, leaving only the self aware that it is only a self separated from its cultural referents.
All of which identifies, I believe, an interesting aspect of the American psyche. Such works as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet A. Jacobs, although seriously devoted to the individual in America, are by no means equivalent to the social critiques of Fuller, Whitman, or Melville. The appalling condition of their characters is never ameliorated by the poetic endeavor of finding truth in any act of transcending the actual and physical. Yes, Stowe and Jacobs imply a faith in a Christian God, and such is surely a belief in a truth outside corporeal society. However, the individual is elevated because of his or her relationship with that God. For the speaker of Fuller or Whitman or Melville, however, the individual is personally capable of tuning in to the spiritual realm without the mediation of any organized belief. The individual alone is divine; the individual shares in the sphere of God.

Fuller sees this individual relationship as deriving from the dual forces of males and females who come together without insisting on gender roles. The spiritual realm is a locus where desire is shared by a heterosexual couple. The male and female do not objectify each other, and they desire not what is in Lacan’s socially constructed "Other." Instead, Fuller can be seen as revising Lacan’s notion that desire must objectify an "other."
Whitman, too, envisions an individual relationship with the spiritual. But for him such a spiritual relationship is the site of the subjectivity which gives voice to All America.

Melville uses this spiritual position as a viewpoint from which to critique the American psyche itself. By transcending the strictly physical, Melville can have Ishmael shift genders and become a subjectivity without a specifically gendered desire.

Dickinson also effects a speaking subjectivity with no specific gender. However, her subjectivity is so individualistic as to remove itself from any gender. Desire becomes a desire to know self. Awareness is a means of effecting individuality. What the individual desires, values, is individuality aware of its state of individuality. In the face of an evermore oppressive society, the individual removes to itself. Now I do not mean to gloss Dickinson’s amazing creative achievement as some exercise in creating the stoic American individual. However, an unavoidable consequence of the work of Fuller, Whitman, Melville—as Dickinson shows us—is a realization that the uniquely American penchant for improving society through the improvement of the individual tends toward the creation of a stoic American individual solipsistically involved with itself. In valorizing the possibilities of
the individual, transcendentalism creates a dialectic of self in which the self is trapped in an ever-spiraling state of self-defining reality. At the very time that transcendentalism offers a critique of physical culture by holding out the value of the individual as a discrete entity, it entraps that individual in an enterprise fated to end in a solipsistic effort of introspection.

Such introspection is, as Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson show us, an activity prevalent in American literature. Our academic interest in such romanticism thereby comes to define American literature. Canon formation is itself such validation of the introspective individual. I want to suggest that what is contained within the American, the American individual, the entrepreneur, the astronaut, the cowboy, even Hollywood's "Dirty Harry," is this self-consciousness, this awareness that American society is too strictly delimited. The ultimate transcendental individual is not only removed from subject/object desire; it is forever, by (self)definition, conscious of its being not anything else. The ultimate transcendental individual establishes its existence by defining itself as that of which it is conscious, that which its consciousness encircles. In order to be aware of all that it contains, the ultimate transcendental subjectivity must know what it excludes. Although if it is
not conscious of something, that something is not part of the transcendental subjectivity and would appear to be easily excluded. However, to encircle is simultaneously to exclude; to contain as an entity is to have borders. Borders, by definition, are between a "Me" and a "Not-Me." Our vision of ourselves as unique requires that we desire our own American "self." We are united in our sense of being aligned with destiny. We see American as having an individual relationship with some spiritual realm/God which validates us. It seems our heroes are such ultimate transcendental figures as those who avoid or subvert in some manner the cultural snare of objectifying desire and the social constructs of language.

The American self, however, as popularized by the overarching culture, is a construct of gendered desire, a construct based on Lacanian notions of accepted, socially validated images which support our language and norms. What Fuller proposes to improve the heterosexual union, what Whitman develops to represent all Americans, what Melville employs to critique the American psyche, becomes, as Dickinson shows us, a pure idealized subjectivity which does not depend on the desires of "others." Along with the American hero, who appears to share Dickinson's self-awareness and self-sufficiency, the transcendentalist becomes the suffering modern sensibility whose voice is
drowned by the crowds cheering for the hero who is, perhaps along with the idealist transcendentalist, only an object of desire.
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