



Louisa May Alcott's Familial Feminism in Transcendental Wild Oats

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Louisa May Alcott's Familial Feminism in *Transcendental Wild Oats*

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Abstract

Louisa's accounting of the Fruitlands experience in *Transcendental Wild Oats* speaks to the full power of Woman as one half of Man-- a "twin exponent to a divine thought" (Fuller 5) --through a wizened, tempered voice expressive of the entirety of her life's influences. Louisa May Alcott journals her family's seven-month experience with such a commune known as Fruitlands in her novella, *Transcendental Wild Oats*. Fruitlands' failure is shown to be a direct result of the untried philosophies of a leader who "said many wise things, and did many foolish ones" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 166). Timon Lion. Mr. Alcott, as portrayed through Brother Abel Lamb, is the naive idealist led around by Lion, and Mrs. Alcott, as portrayed through Sister Hope Lamb, is the realist-- protector of innocents and idealism. *Transcendental Wild Oats*, then, is not Louisa working out resentments toward Bronson's deluded idealism; it is a testament to the example set by her mother in making a way for family under the direst of circumstances.

Dedication

To Mama, the loving woman who kept her family's dreams afloat, bellies full, and hearts full of love. Anywhere you are is home.

To Chloe, God's blessing of a daughter who brought out the best in me—and honors me with the nickname “Bonfire Momma.”

To David, the one.

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Thank you all for setting me up for success, not just in this project but in every course which followed. It's not just gratitude beyond words I hold, but also respect and admiration seldom commanded by others.

Table of Contents

Dedication	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Chapter I. Woman Secures the Reaping of <i>Transcendental Wild Oats</i>	7
Chapter II. Growing Up Ms. Alcott	17
Chapter III. Fourier's Guide to Utopian Phalanxes	34
Chapter IV. Men and Women in the Kitchen	44
Chapter V. Having it all: The New Wave of Oppression	51
References	61

Chapter I.

Woman Secures the Reaping of *Transcendental Wild Oats*

Escaping the relentless competition and monotonous occupation of modern society is the fantasy on which fairy tales are made. New England Transcendentalists of the nineteenth century sought to give the soul of man a purpose which would make work fulfilling. Some went a step further in founding small societies where competition would yield to collaboration and contribution. Louisa May Alcott journals her family's seven-month experience with such a commune known as Fruitlands in her novella, *Transcendental Wild Oats*. Fruitlands' failure is shown to be a direct result of the untried philosophies of leader, Timon Lion, who "said many wise things, and did many foolish ones" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 166). Mr. Alcott, as portrayed through Brother Abel Lamb, is the naive idealist led around by Lion. Mrs. Alcott, as portrayed through Sister Hope Lamb, is the realist—protector of innocents and idealism. *Transcendental Wild Oats*, then, is not Louisa working out resentments toward Bronson's deluded idealism; it is a testament to the example set by her mother in making a way for family under the direst of circumstances.

A "doctrine of Transcendentalism," as described by Ralph Waldo Emerson, is to foster and abide by the internal law of the soul— "the substantive, independent existence of the soul of man, the reality of conscience, the religious sense, the inner light, of man's religious affections, his knowledge of right and truth, his sense of duty" (Emerson, *Transcendentalism* 12). Under this doctrine, mankind should define itself by the full complexity of attributes which go far

beyond occupational function. Emerson laments the relegation of Man¹ to little more than a vocational title so that “the state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters” (Emerson, “American Scholar” 6). We must overcome the state where we are nothing more than “a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man” through realizing “the true dignity of [our] ministry” (6). Should the focus of our occupation, vocation, or lot in life be merely on the task of said occupation as opposed to the greater purpose these tasks serve, then “the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship” (6); the young maiden, a conquest; the mother, a womb. However, in the right state “the delegated intellect, is Man Thinking” (6); the young maiden, girl wondering, dreaming, frolicking, endearing, learning, blooming, alluring; the mother, woman generating, reproducing, hunting, gathering, feeding, disciplining, encouraging, supporting, persevering, protecting, singing, dancing, loving, teaching, and thinking.

These attributes should be cultivated, refined, and honed to build a self in touch with the omnipresent “Over-soul,” a concept central to Transcendentalism. Fitting with this mission would be the communities envisioned by Charles Fourier—a French child born in 1772 of “revolutionary upheaval” who sought to build “a society guaranteeing class harmony through scientific organization”² (Guarneri 159). According to Fourier, the transcendently evolved self is attained by fostering and contributing those gifts with which each individual is equipped to enrich and support the community. For Transcendental feminists of the late nineteenth century, this meant extending the development of self beyond the domicile. In the utopian experiments

¹ “Man” and “Woman” are capitalized by both Fuller and Emerson when speaking of each gender in entirety.

associated with New England Transcendentalism, men and women worked together in the collective effort to pioneer a new egalitarian social order in harmony with nature, in tune with the Over-soul, and conducive to humans contributing individual gifts born to them—as opposed to serving in roles defined by “an economic system based on the anarchy of free enterprise” (Guarneri 159).

While Fourier’s blueprint “aimed to reshape a conflict-ridden and disordered society into a new world of harmony and order” (161), Fruitlands, and other intentional communities like it, failed to address female interests. The “gifts” of women most employed in these communities were remnants of the very skillset a great many feminists of the first wave of feminism sought to redefine, expand upon, or escape altogether. The consociate communities conceptualized by Fourier, were inspired by ideological hopes for “a society guaranteeing class harmony through Scientific organization” built on the clouds of soul-filling activities and mutually beneficial service (Guarneri 5). Despite Fourier’s objective “to give [woman] the needed means of self-help, that she might dignify and unfold her life for her own happiness, and that of society” (Fuller 73), some of the more unpleasant daily household duties such as cooking, cleaning, mending, washing of the community children were left out of the planning template of the process for some communities—Fruitlands specifically. As a result, these communities limited Woman’s³ potential contribution to the community. These would-be Transcendental utopian havens were to be the model for a new ideal, but their potential for success was undermined by the failure of their founders to capitalize on the full cadre of capabilities women possessed.

The woman in the twenty-first century holds many more opportunities to achieve success as she defines it, thanks in no small part to Margaret Fuller’s advocacy in the *Woman in the*

³ “Woman” as used by Margaret Fuller to represent the whole of womankind in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*

Nineteenth Century. This feminist manifesto began as Fuller's editorials in the New England "Dial," then published in full book form. As a close compatriot of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Fuller both agreed with the tenets of the Transcendentalist movement and found areas to extend upon these tenets to more effectively address women's concerns.

As the Transcendentalist movement took hold in New England, American idealists began to focus on cultivating one's best self by fostering the intellect and living in close communion with the Over-soul (Emerson, "Over-soul" 138).⁴ Louisa's parents, Bronson and Abigail "Abba" Alcott, were members of New England's circle of "Seekers."⁵ Through this association, Louisa herself was heavily influenced by the Transcendentalist doctrine of Emerson, Fuller's feminist charge against the "sad lot" of Woman (Fuller 93), and the grounded stability provided by Mom while Dad built "castles in the air" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 156). As a short-term resident of an American communal utopia founded in part by her father, she witnessed her mother achieve this stability under America's free-market economy. Louisa's accounting of this experience in *Transcendental Wild Oats* speaks to the full power of Woman as one half of Man—a "twin exponent to a divine thought" (Fuller 5). Hers is a wisened, tempered voice expressive of the entirety of her life's influences. Sister Hope Lamb in *Transcendental Wild Oats* is the literary mouthpiece for Louisa May Alcott's fully developed feminist argument as it is based on the full picture of her mother's example steeped in a lifetime of Louisa's own experiences.

Louisa May Alcott was a child of the New England Transcendentalist movement and, as Laura Dassow Walls presents her, a cosmopolitan visionary (Walls 129) with a voice reflective

⁴ Emerson's definition of that "Unity" the energy of which comprises the energy of all living things, past and present. *Essays and English Traits* p. 138

⁵ Term used to describe the leading members of the Transcendentalist community such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Henry David Thoreau.

of personal, political, and philosophical influences transcending a single movement. Alcott took the strengths where she could get it. She built, in her stories, her own framework for an ideal domestic global community. At Fruitlands, Louisa experienced first-hand the ideals which “helped create for [Bronson’s] girls a youth marked by persistent poverty, anxiety, [and] ostracism” (Mills 1). And though Fruitlands’ failure left the Alcott family in debt, Louisa’s writing rescued the family from ruin—an example set by Abigail May who would be the muse for Marmee of *Little Women* and the model for Sister Hope Lamb in *Transcendental Wild Oats*. Just as Jo would model the example set by mother Marmee and make of it her own brand of “a complete life” (Fuller 104), so would Louisa May do the same with mother Abigail “Abba” May.

Louisa, hailed as a champion in the first wave of feminism, used her gifts to become successful in the male-dominated free enterprise system her father sought to escape in the “seven-month debacle” (Mills 3) of the Fruitlands utopian experiment. Her story does not condemn men for a lack of action, nor does it seek to criticize misogyny so much as it seeks to celebrate the strength of the feminine spirit and the ability of that spirit to adapt to any demand. That spirit comes through in Louisa’s semi-autobiographical tales where she consistently treats both the hapless, ideological father and the strong, pragmatic mother with high regard and great affection.

Through her writings, Louisa means to model “‘actualist,’ real American families” (Walls 117) where the passive father is not lampooned or maligned but made forgivably absent in the “social and literary attitude” of “actualism” (116). In *Transcendental Wild Oats* a “witty morality tale pits the foolish improvidence of male idealism against the wiser management of female pragmatism” (113). The father’s absence and empty idealism leaves space for Louisa to

assert her own “utopian vision...enacted...by practical and compassionate women [which] saves her father’s ideals while correcting absurdities and imbalances” (Walls 116).

The narrator’s description of each member in Fruitlands’ “motley load” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 147) allow readers to derive their own impression of each. Especially impressive is the introduction of Sister Hope with an image of her maternal multitasking. She is an “energetic-looking woman, with a benevolent brow, satirical mouth, and eyes brimful of hope and courage” (147). Within the first page, it is made readily apparent that Sister Hope is a woman who actively seeks the welfare of its members. Sister Hope, Mrs. Alcott’s “Wild Oats” avatar, represents a kind of mama-magic. She labors endlessly for the “provisions [dancing] about at her feet” while adjusting equipment, tending to baby, and providing “treasures” of entertainment for two “chatting” little girls (147). All the while, the “serene man with the serene child upon his knee” is passively enjoying the ride, obviously content in his philosophizing and daydreaming, as the “small horse” drives the wagon “all his own way” (147). Established in this introduction is the view of a mother figure as a family leader with the situational awareness and pragmatic nature conducive to meeting the needs of her family.

This introduction foreshadows the eventual saving of the family by the actions of the mother as it describes the community’s “radical European ideals...domesticated...into close-knit, nurturing, mother-centered [families] which [Louisa] turned outward to reshape the world” (Walls 115). In *Transcendental Wild Oats*, Louisa bridges many of the conventions of the domestic novel with her own more progressive “cosmopolitical” ideals (Walls 115). “High thoughts” and housewifery are not mutually exclusive for Louisa but “irrefutably linked” in her objective to “integrate conquest and power into a peaceful global domesticity” (Dolan 42, 53;) Walls 111).

Each of Louisa's novels and short stories give us glimpses into her feminist beliefs, but none show them the way *Transcendental Wild Oats* shows them. Timon Lion and Abel Lamb are afforded the freedom to roam haplessly in free-will and a fluid philosophical catechism ruled by circumstance. Though Lion and Lamb rarely consider the hardships and needs of Sister Hope, that lack of consideration reflects Louisa's own theory about women's potential liberation from male control. As Louisa notes elsewhere, peaceful subversion as opposed to prideful confrontation frees a character like Sister Hope from Lion's oversight. In the time and space afforded Sister Hope by Lion's neglect, Sister Hope creates a domestic commons built on feminine, rather than utopian, principles. Though certainly not ideal by any current standards of equality or freedom, Louisa seems to suggest that Sister Lamb's status as the "unconverted" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 150) shields her from the male-dominated social structure ruled by a frivolous fool in a position of esteem who exploits the naive and unworldly.

The power dynamic between Lion, Lamb, and Hope can be seen in Louisa's choice of names for each character. Timon, if taking his name as an allusion to Shakespeare's portrayal of "Timon of Athens," wastes the kingdom built upon the finances of his subjects by frivolously spending the nation's wealth and ignoring wiser council. The name is further intensified by a surname based on a predatory species. If Abel alludes to the Biblical younger brother of Cain, his surname makes him doubly prey to Lion. Hope acts as the intangible force which brings positive outcomes and acts as Abba Father in the mercy, forgiveness, unconditional love, and power shown throughout the story. Sleight of hand has the reader watching these men dictate the circumstances under which the residents exist, awaiting the impending fruits of their own faulty decision-making, while Hope/Abba secures the well-being and eventual salvation of the innocents who would fall prey to the rule of the Lion.

In the opening discussion, Timon Lion proclaims how the community's needs will be met, and it is Sister Hope who directly addresses the chief shareholder with questions and concerns. Throughout, Abel Lamb merely interjects with a childlike enthusiasm, "his face shining with the light and joy of the splendid dreams and high ideals hovering before him" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 155). In the exposition of the opening pages, Timon explains the austere expectations for procurement of food, clothing, enrichment and work. In the first seven pages of this section, Abel speaks only nine lines, all of which are merely to expand upon what Timon was saying at the time. Later, Abel gets an entire half page of monologue explicating Timon's "being not doing" school of "divine growth." In a rhetorical call-and-response "rhapsody" (156) Abel Lamb explains how one "[does] not rely so much on scientific reasoning or physiological skill as on the spirit's dictates" in "these steps of reform" (155). At no point in the story, does Lamb challenge or question his consociate Svengali. That's his wife's job.

Sister Lamb questions Lion's and Lamb's authority diplomatically. When her gentle attempts to guide these "promising boys on a new sort of lark" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 154) are rebuffed, Sister Hope does not debate or publicly proclaim her plans. Lion and Lamb are left to flail as they choose. In the end, however, Timon sells all he has, pays his debts, and finds another home. When he invites the remaining family to stay in his dilapidated house, Sister Hope reminds him of the sacrifices made for "this wild scheme" (168). In a coup de grâce, the "indomitable woman" (167) stands up for her husband who was "too tender to bear the usage of this world" (162). Both parties understand that no justice will ever be found in Timon's leadership or his ideals. In the quiet, pre-winter aftermath, Hope continues to fight as Lamb "lay down upon his bed...soul and body...dumbly struggling together" (170).

For Sister Lamb, marriage is a model for love, successful child-rearing, and as Louisa believed, subversion of oppressive social constructs. She finds a way to make her gifts work within the framework of the larger community. Unlike the defiant anti-heroes of Louisa's sensational thrillers who do indeed subvert male dominance, Sister Lamb achieves her goals within the domestic sphere. As shown earlier, these victories are won by capitalizing on the flawed vices of men like Lion. Submission is replaced by service. In *Little Women* too, Jo and Marmee marry for love, rearing children who will build upon the value of service in ways that further resist traditional paternalism, chauvinism, and domestic autocratic rule.

The empowerment shown by the maternal figure in *Transcendental Wild Oats* is glossed over by some of today's feminist critics. In her article "'A Motley Load': Reweighing Humor's Burden in Louisa May Alcott's *Transcendental Wild Oats*," Angela Mills discusses "the ineluctable celebration of feminine power in comparison with masculine impotence" (Mills 3). She focuses on the humorous treatment of male impotence in Fruitlands. But reading *Transcendental Wild Oats* as a "satiric mock history" (Pfaelzer 96), as Mills prescribes, the focus becomes "the ludicrous self-marginalization from normal, functional society" (Mills 3) as opposed to the power of the female who takes control of her existence. When looking closely at the covert operations of Abba, we see the family community saved by a woman who did not wait for legislative or social change to be allowed the space to support her family. In a male-centered society where women "held limited options" (Cavanaugh) in occupation, Abba assumes the role of the patriarch and secures shelter along with the financial means for sustained security. When analyzing Louisa's tales, the focus must shift from Bronson to Abigail.

When focusing on the strengths of the Alcott family, Abigail May becomes a maternal figure of immense power, agency, temperance, perseverance, and integrity. This puts a far more

celebratory spin on the commentary Louisa makes about woman's place in society. It is commentary heavily steeped in the teaching of Miss Margaret Fuller. The moral domestics have a noble father out fighting the war which would end the evil of slavery; the sensational thrillers have heroines out fighting the oppressive Victorian expectations of women. In both, we see women, subverting, dismissing or overcoming superficial measures of upstanding ladyship which limit potential for independent prosperity. The woman does not wait for society to change, neither does she change for society, but holds true to herself as she fights for the wellbeing of that which she holds most dear.

Chapter II.

Growing Up Ms. Alcott

The autobiographical elements underlying Louisa's tales provide some of the most compelling reflections of her feminist position. Well-beaten is the binary analysis which pits the moral March saga against the body of sensational thrillers to find the center of Louisa's psyche. Most compelling is the duality exhibited in the creativity of an artist who established herself as an iconic author of tales tailored to tots as well as sensational stories spun for thrill-seeking adults. Rena Sanderson, Professor Emerita of English at Boise State University, poses that this "binary critical...alignment is convenient but possibly reductive" (Sanderson 52) in that works situated between two polar extremes are dismissed—works such as *Transcendental Wild Oats*. They tend to focus either on her sentimental "domestics" or on her sensational "gothic thrillers" and rarely mention *Transcendental Wild Oats* in their quest to find the central inspiration for her distinct brand of feminism. Louisa's "gothic thrillers" reveal the perspectives of a young woman newly wisened to the ways of the real world outside the shelter of the family home. The domestic novels celebrate the lessons learned in that family home which would empower Louisa to succeed in the real world. The authentically autobiographical *Transcendental Wild Oats* brings these together as a kind of ode to her mother. Abba was a working mother who kept the family on stable ground so that father could educate the minds and imaginations of the children. In this tale, we see roles dictated by the strengths of the individual all selflessly fulfilled for the good of the intimate family unit, as well as the larger surrounding community.

With *Hospital Sketches* Louisa begins realizing significant literary success and for the next six years would publish the sensational tales which Louisa would describe as “gothic thrillers.” Jane Van Buren Ph. D, Assistant Dean and faculty member at The Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis argues in her article, “Louisa May Alcott: A Study in Persona and Idealization,” that this creative duality is a “response to the complexity of her ambivalent psyche” (Van Buren 289). The part of Louisa’s psyche which would create the March family trilogy expresses the “sympathy with her good moral-mother self and directed at children” while the part of her psyche which would produce the “pseudo-Gothic tale,” expresses “her destructive aspects, as well as ...rebellion against and collaboration with her inner tyrants” (Van Buren 289). While Van Buren’s psychoanalysis successfully explores the extremes of the selfless superego of the domestic novels and the destructive id of the sensational stories, the third element of the psyche, the ego, goes unconsidered as expressed through *Transcendental Wild Oats*.

The breadth of Louisa’s experience is expressed in *Transcendental Wild Oats* in a way which infuses elements of the various literary movements converging during the Victorian Era—Realism, Romanticism, dark Romanticism, and Gothicism. Louisa first realized commercial literary success when writing about the grittier experiences of life outside the safety of her family unit—during wartime. First-hand experience with the horrors of war, the honor of men-at-arms, and the terror of a potentially fatal illness such as typhoid gifted Louisa with wisdom at the sacrifice of a bit of her naiveté and unfettered idealism. Any psychological ambivalence observed by Van Buren can easily be attributed to the predictable evolution from innocence to wisdom born of experience—seeing the best of man and worst of man, facing one’s own fears, watching a world at peace during childhood descend into war in adulthood, with home in her heart through it all.

Realism, social realism specifically, sought to change the harsh realities of the life for the working class. Social realism was just that—an authentic glimpse into the daily labor, tragedies, and simple joys of people exploited by the gentry of the Industrial Revolution. Social realists aimed through their art to bring about change in the oppressive conditions endured by the workers who made the new urban prosperity possible for the let-them-eat-cake *classe nouveau*. Even though Louisa did tailor the March family trilogy to children, there is a gritty realism in its immersion of the child's psyche into the uncertainty of their own father's existence during a war with which her readership was closely acquainted. When read to its ultimate conclusion, Jo's journey closes with a tragic circumstance derivative of dark romanticism and Gothicism. One of her "Jo's Boys" Dan is ultimately undone by his willingness to champion for the weak. The redeemed wild boy is still sacrificed for the good of another despite his reform. The loss of Dan is tragic and unjust, but he is only one of twelve Plumfield alumni. For one tragic outcome, the eighty-nine percent of the children reared and educated in the Plumfield School thrive in their chosen paths—boy and girl alike.

Romanticism, in its focus on "imagination, emotion, and freedom" appealed to the sect of authors who also focused on subjectivity, individualism, and the love and worship of nature—a sect including the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne (Morner). While the optimism of Emerson fits flush in the genre of romanticism, the works of Hawthorne are more representative of Dark Romanticism—a more pessimistic version of Romanticism which "emphasizes human fallibility and sin" ("Dark Romanticism"). The dark romantics also "focus on self-destruction, judgement, punishment, as well as the psychological effects of guilt and sin" ("Dark Romanticism")—attributes all present in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and works by Herman Melville and Emily Dickinson. Edgar Allen Poe, while associated with dark

romanticism, is credited with taking American romanticism into the territory of American gothic, “which involves sheer terror, personal torment, graphic morbidity, and the supernatural” (“Dark Romanticism”). Louisa’s early works such as *A Marble Woman*, *Behind a Mask*, and *A Modern Mephistopheles* possess elements of each of the subgenres of the romantic period.

At the same time, all three of these works considered Louisa’s gothic thrillers defy the conventions of the dark romanticism and Gothicism with her optimistic outcomes of resolution, romance, and/or redemption. Those who might be undone by their own vice in the truly gothic tales as told by Poe are given the chance to transcend a would-be tragic flaw. On the same romantic spectrum, realism does accurately depict the darker side of the human experience, but it is not all cynicism and morbidity—the virtues of the faithful and hard-working are also brought to light.

As theorized by the original psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, the id, ego, and superego coexist in different preponderances in the human psyche. So too did the Romanticism of nuclear family, the Dark Romanticism of reality, and Gothic glimpses into the worst of man coexist in the psyche of Louisa May Alcott. In 1852, at the age of twenty, Louisa published her poem “Sunlight” under the youthfully fanciful and feminine pseudonym, Flora Fairfield. She published her first collection of short stories in 1854 (Phillips, “A Chronology” 660). Not long afterwards, Louisa would serve as a nurse for the Union army during the Civil War. In 1861, she contracted typhoid fever, and her experience as both “patient and nurse inspired the novel” (Norwood) *Hospital Sketches* in 1863. *Hospital Sketches* is as personally telling as *Transcendental Wild Oats*, but lacks the decade of experience which would temper her perspectives. While writing her tales of realism, Louisa simultaneously dabbled in dark romanticism and Gothicism—genres dominated by the likes of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe, respectively. So that she

could covertly succeed in these male-dominated genres, Louisa May published her gothic thrillers under the pseudonym A.M Barnard. These thrillers begin to reveal a compartmentalization of two selves: an independent, freethinking writer and a dutiful, domesticated daughter.

In the perpetual discussion of the ambiguities underlying the autobiographical elements of Louisa's stories, these tales have been theorized as Alcott's catharsis—whether it be sexual or social catharsis is a question yet to be answered by current feminist critiques. What Alcott does achieve, however, is a cathartic liberation from the norms of Victorian society, in general. In her article, "Louisa May Alcott's Father(s) and *The Marble Woman*," Rosemary Franklin intimates that *A Marble Woman* is a literary catharsis revealing Louisa's want to escape a sexually dysfunctional relationship with her father. But this reading oversimplifies the complexities of Louisa's feminist argument with a theory exploiting obvious psychoanalytical targets. Franklin's analysis is based upon the idea that Bronson is represented by both inescapable dark male figures in *The Marble Woman*. Franklin further asserts that the romantic love realized by the seemingly helpless heroine is analogous to Stockholm Syndrome.

However, when considering the characteristics of Gothic Literature, the morbidly complex idea of a father wantonly domineering his daughter is merely a "mystery [which] turn(s) out to have natural, if complicated, explanations" ("Dark Romanticism"). Louisa leaves the reader to suppose romantic inklings on the part of the haunting figure through mere intimations of endearment—intimations which prove appropriately paternal when Germain explicitly proclaims his fatherly tie to the heroine. The dark domineering presence who acted as father, fell in love with and submitted to the one over whom he once held power. The young heroine redeems the stone heart of her once ill-intended steward, and both marble hearts are made flesh

with the realization of requited love. While Occam's razor is the preferred approach to empirical evaluation, to look at an art form brimming with metaphors and supernatural imagery with the objective of accepting the simplest answer is to miss the most revealing expressions of the subconscious.

Additionally, Franklin overlooks the most important element of Louisa's autobiography: the fact that Louisa and Abigail both kept the family afloat while the patriarch pursued his ideals. Freudian readings discount a very simple reality: Louisa was an adult woman in a time when women were not allowed to acknowledge or express sexual desire or enjoyment. It is true that gothic potboilers provided catharsis for frustrated women like Louisa May, but to attribute the whole of her frustrations to the relationship with her father paints her as a perpetually young girl with limited power.

In *A Marble Woman*, Louisa vicariously exists as the woman brimming with the enthralling budding beauty of burgeoning womanhood and the power to accept or reject the affections of the father. Louisa postures herself as the lead in *A Marble Woman*, Cecilia Bazil Stein, who holds the affections of two men who play significant and mysterious roles in her life. Rosemary Franklin proposes these two figures are both fathers vying for her affection. However, if taking Louisa's own recollections into consideration, we would see one figure as father and the other as the vicarious realization of love with a childhood crush.

The first man is Bazil Yorke who was spurned by his young love, whose daughter becomes his ward. Bitter about the obligation, Yorke did not take in little Cecil with the intentions of offering fatherly love but of retribution for his heart hardened by the spurn of Cecil's mother. Yorke seeks revenge by ensuring that the child never realizes romantic love for herself. Five years after Yorke takes on Little Cecil as ward, she grows into a "slender, deep eyed

girl...un youthful in the quiet grace of her motions, the sweet seriousness of her expression, but as beautiful as the Psyche and almost as cold” (Alcott, *Marble Woman* 104). All the while, a ghost of a man haunts the estate calling Little Cecil “my darling” while occasionally holding and kissing her.

Franklin’s psychoanalytical reading of this story puts Bronson Alcott in the role of both the ward and his mysterious guest. She argues that the young woman pursued by two dark men in a position of paternal influence are evocative of a sexually dysfunctional relationship between Louisa and her father Bronson. This reading overcomplicates the relationship of the two dark male romantic figures and takes a salaciously Oedipal turn with its analysis. When looking closely at the direction of jealousy, comfort, and adoration between Cecilia, Basil Yorke, and Germain, what becomes apparent is the affectionate dynamic among the three. A young woman beloved by her steward, a daughter loved by an unknown father, and the two longtime comrades who love the same woman in two completely different ways.

A.M. Barnard (Louisa May) cunningly exploits the latent lascivious leanings of the oppressed Victorian readership in obscuring the identity of the haunting figure. By paying particularly close attention to the flow of jealousy, one begins to see that the role of father is played by Germain. Basil, made murderously jealous by Cecil’s closest friend Alfie, finds zero threat in Germain, the man with whom Little Cecil has a natural chemistry. Additionally, Germain’s ease and affectionate smile while watching Cecil play with “poor Alfie,” reveal an affection more on the side of the plutonic or paternal pride in its absence of jealousy. In holding true to the autobiographical elements of Louisa May Alcott’s entire catalogue of work, this older man who Cecil loves romantically from first sight at twelve years of age is none other than Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Louisa shares with readers of her recollections that her “sentimental period began at fifteen when [she] fell into writing Romances” with the discovery of Goethe’s “Correspondence with a Child” in Emerson’s library—which “at once fired [Louisa] with desire to be a second Bettine, making [her] father’s friend [her] Goethe” (“Recollections” 431). Long after the fancies of the fifteen-year-old Louisa and the love letters to her crush were burned, “Goethe remained [her] favorite author, Emerson remained [her] beloved ‘master’” (431) and the window serenades and love letters she directed at Emerson in her youthful amour would be written into *A Marble Woman*. Louisa exercises the freedom to live out romantic fantasies, while her father watches approvingly, and shows through this gothic romance that love built on virtue can straighten a bitter heart hell-bent on retribution—and soften that heart for redemption.

Yorke had no paternal ambitions; he merely desired to shackle a young spirit with Victorian rules for proper female presentation and cage her away from love. His actions demonstrate how repressive Victorian rules inhibit authentic courtship. The romantic pairing of Basil and Cecilia is almost smothered by Cecilia’s adherence to the customs of Victorian womanhood. Basil and Cecilia each continually wound each other in efforts to incite the passionate response forbidden by Victorian standards of decorum. Only when he realizes he might lose Cecil does Basil shamelessly plead for the chance to win her affections. He promises to “work and wait for years, [and] will be [Cecil’s] servant and not [her] master” (Alcott, *Marble Woman* 193). Happily-ever-after comes for these lovers only when the Victorian values are forsaken.

In Louisa’s gothic thrillers, she plays games with mysterious figures to thrill the reader and to live out romances otherwise impossible to sustain in the real world. Escaping paternalism is another one of her themes—not the need to escape the Oedipal grip of Bronson, but the need

to escape social paternalism more generally. Despite this theme, Bronson supported Louisa's writing career, partly because there was more to it than criticism of men. There was respect for love that transcended physical attraction—*caritas*. Just as Bazil Yorke in *A Marble Woman* relinquishes his role of "Master" to please his beloved Cecilia, so too does the independent tomboyish Jo of *Little Women* want the toes of her beloved Professor Bhaer to be toasty and for that warmth to grow beyond the socks themselves.

A similar social commentary is made by Elizabeth Schewe when she discusses "Domestic Conspiracy: Class Conflict and Performance in Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask*." The disenfranchised female of Louisa's stories defeats the Victorian caste system by performing outwardly in strict compliance with the "sentimental view of 'true womanhood and femininity'" (Schewe 578). These were attributes of the female character believed by Victorian men to be biologically instilled and, therefore, justified by unequal treatment of women, not just as a sex but as a class. Schewe views *Behind a Mask* as a work which "redefines domestic space as a site of class conflict, a stage on which American anxieties about feminine virtue and class mobility are acted out" (580).

Jean Muir, the dark heroine of *Behind a Mask*, pushes the idea of sexual liberation conveyed in *A Marble Woman* beyond the limits of Louisa's time. Muir is a divorced confidence woman and a washed-up actress who studies her targets carefully. One such target is an aristocratic British family Muir knows will secure financial stability. Muir then ingratiates herself into the trust of these characters. She secures a position as governess, wins the sisterly trust of other females in the household, seduces the eligible bachelors, incites a feud for her hand in a marriage, and defies the conventions of the Victorian aristocratic social strata. While Muir

exercises her own agency, her prize is a mercenary marriage won through deceit, abuse of affections, and breeding of bitterness and cynicism.

Margaret Fuller's influence on Louisa reveals itself in her treatment of the typical aristocratic family as a comedy of manners. For Fuller these comedies revealed the gross "deprivation of man, and [most] despicable frivolity of thought and aim in woman," (Fuller 82). Louisa makes a mark of "the hard-hearted cold folly" of the landed gentry and shows that "crime is hopeful" by comparison as Muir crosses classes using the "power remaining in [her] mental constitution" (Fuller 82).

Louisa goes beyond Fuller by focusing her attack on the importance placed on the over-valuation of aesthetics in determining the quality of the individual. This sly attack on those "occupied by worship of beauty" (Fuller 80), shows the ease with which ill-intended coquettes with "the heart of an old coxcomb" (Fuller 79) might delude Victorian aesthetes. Muir comes to the family as a fully cultivated governess who portrays for each family member their most valued elements of femininity. Behind Muir's carefully cultivated facade of glowing beauty and high-born breeding, is a "weary, hard, bitter...gloomy woman" (Alcott, *Behind a Mask* 12). The sly subversion exercised by Muir parallels the means to Sister Lamb's ends, but Sister Lamb's subversive means protect, encourage, and save. Sister Lamb's motivations are more aligned with Margaret Fuller's definition of Woman empowered.

With *Behind a Mask*, Alcott turns Victorian sensibilities shared by American men against their very source. Muir's successful self-casting as aristocratic wife allegorically condemns the system which would've condemned Muir to a life of poverty or ill-repute. Muir does defeat a socially oppressive system, but her motivations and actions suspend her in a state of otherness. She falls short of the selflessness modeled by Sister Lamb. Muir wins a silent victory in a war

which benefits only herself and sets no precedent to potentially benefit others. Hers is strength without service.

As discussed in the first section of this study, Sister Lamb redefines the importance of service. Her actions are a testament to the full complexity of women's abilities to rival the social patriarchy. Sister Lamb models the femininity of modernity in fusing the authentic "sentimental...womanhood" Muir plays with the modern paradigm of empowered womanhood—that which saves the vulnerable parties without male intervention, making *Transcendental Wild Oats* a more complete feminist argument than *Behind a Mask*.

Louisa was courted by a younger man just as she was winning financial prosperity. But instead of choosing a life with him as a wife, she chose to remain a bachelorette. Her choice reflected her mistrust of a social system that stripped women of their sovereignty. Rena Sanderson spent her career analyzing representations of women in American literature. Her article, "A *Modern Mephistopheles*: Louisa May Alcott's Exorcism of Patriarchy," explores another "work of the author's maturity" (Sanderson 41), the *künstlerroman*--a *bildungsroman* wherein the "hero arrogantly rejects commonplace life" (41). In her article, "A *Modern Mephistopheles*: Louisa May Alcott's Exorcism of Patriarchy," Sanderson draws a parallel between Alcott's rejection of companionship with a man by whom she was truly loved to certain conceits of gothic literature.

In "A *Modern Mephistopheles*: Louisa May Alcott's Exorcism of Patriarchy" Rena Sanderson speaks of stifled creativity under the oppressive influence of expectations held by both society and her father. Victorian values held by her audience provided a highly restrictive framework which resulted in the "moral pap" (Sanderson 41) she both resented and grew weary of creating. While commercially successful, the artist had more to express about the real world

after forty-five years of gaining life experience and its resultant wisdom (Sanderson 51). By this time in Alcott's life, she had assumed the role of Abba in her own clan, once the Abba of Fruitlands had grown too weak to lead the family charge. Sanderson states that the central character of *A Modern Mephistopheles*, Gladys—the victim-turned-heroine—assumes the prescribed female's role in *Mephistopheles* and turns it on its head by choosing to sacrifice herself and ultimately becoming the savior of the tale. This self-sacrifice was modeled by Louisa's mother and parallels the intent, motivations, and actions of "Sister Lamb" in *TWO*. Alcott served this role for her siblings and parents by 1877, when she was actively supporting the growing feminist movement, writing *A Modern Mephistopheles*, and losing the physical ability to create her art due to the chronic illness which lingered from Louisa's earlier bout with typhoid. This sacrifice for the good of her professional career and financial stability of her family brought full circle the statements made by Bronson about Louisa and Abigail being so much alike.

Five short years after first publishing her poetry and potboilers, Louisa would be charged with writing "a girls' story" by Mr. Niles, publisher at the Roberts Brothers firm (Stern 434). *Little Women* was Louisa's opportunity to share what was unorthodox in her family with a sentimentalized spin on poverty. This resonated with big and little girls alike. In "Her Daily Bread: Food and Labor in Louisa May Alcott," Kathryn Dolan brings a sociological reading to the story. She highlights the running theme of bread and its ability to hold the family community together through hard times. This reading accentuates the power of the classical female role but does not discuss the larger social implications of the heroine's assumption of the masculine role in the father figure's absence. Dolan poses a valid argument that "throughout her career, Alcott aims for a cosmopolitan view of humanity in which women can find rewarding lives" (Dolan

41). However, by limiting the “[focus] on household skills like baking bread to do so” (41), she undermines the potential power statement Louisa makes through a progressively modern cosmopolitical gender-transcendent feminist type.

That progressive ideal shapes much of the March trilogy of *Little Women*, *Little Men*, and *Jo’s Boys*. The trilogy spans thirteen years of March life and seventeen years of Louisa’s. *Little Women* and *Little Men*, written between 1868 and 1872 (Alcott, *Little Women* 661), bridge Louisa’s early sensational stories and the biographical March narratives. The autobiographical *Transcendental Wild Oats* would be published a year later, illustrating Louisa’s final literary emancipation, with its heroine a balance of her various feminist arguments up to this point: the self-preserving, defiant anti-heroes of the Gothic Thrillers; the sentimentally feminine maternal role; the woman of honor whose means to her ends do not suspend her in a state of otherness; and the timeless feminist woman of agency who is not bound by any rule of man which would serve as an obstacle to her objective. In the final chapter of the March family trilogy, Jo takes up the mantle of Marmee as matriarchal flagship for the familial alumni of Plumfield Academy.

Little Women, *Little Men*, *Jo’s Boys*—Louisa’s “domestics” —show the progression of Louisa’s feminist ideals from service to caritas. The argument centered on the study of Jo’s life journey effectively conveys the value of contributions made to society through the care of the family. However, these discount the archetype for gender-transcending heroism established by the matriarch—especially in the case of *Transcendental Wild Oats*. These also discount the part of Alcott which would write gritty gothic thrillers and unfiltered explorations into the challenges faced by women in the new setting of industry and urban commerce. Alcott viewed her gothic thrillers—the “potboilers” —as a literary guilty pleasure for both herself as a writer and to her readers as they appealed to the more salacious sensibilities which make such literature an easy

sell. *Transcendental Wild Oats*, a tale written in the last third of Alcott's life, shows that these theories of catharsis under a nom de plume are all supporting components of Alcott's evolution as a woman—and a writer.

Little Men followed up three years after the conclusion of *Little Women*. Jo and Frederick are partners in love, household management, and boarding school administration. In the Plumfield boarding school run by Jo and Frederick Bhaer, children are afforded the freedom to explore their passions, just as Louisa was in the Alcott household. Within the same learning institution, boys and girls could choose to cultivate business acumen as well as the culinary skills which build the bonds of a familial community. Through this picture of Jo managing her own “motley load” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 148) with maternal affection and professional discipline, we see the influence of Abba/Marmee/Sister Hope. Through Jo, Louisa lends so much more validity to the role of an educated, strategic, and hard-nosed alpha female.

Jo's Boys 1880-1886 (Alcott, *Little Women* 662) takes place ten years after *Little Men*, concluding the March family trilogy through the now-grown third generation raised at Plumfield. In the body of alumni, we see the children realize their dreams in the arts, in medicine, or through the return to family business. In this singular institution of Plumfield, Jo has managed to allow the spirit of Daisy to symbolize the domestic side of Alcott's feminist argument. And Nan makes it in the world as a doctor. In Jo's world, Marmee's lessons manifest in the matriculation of the twelve children of Plumfield and the vindication of her father's educational ideologies which Louisa would see become “all the fashion” (Alcott 429) in “Recollections of My Childhood.” In the world of Louisa's making, the March family shares love, encourages dreams, and supports flight. The matriarch maintains a haven from “what is called ‘the world,’ froth and scum as it mostly is on the social cauldron” (Fuller 80).

Louisa's evolving construction of service and *caritas* in her March stories are refined by her experience in the Fruitlands experiment. In "Honeybees and Discontented Workers: A Critique of Labor in Louisa May Alcott," Sarah Lahey asserts that the Fruitlands experiment showed Alcott that "a certain amount of attention to worldly goods was necessary to survival; philosophy and spiritual deliberations were excellent fodder for the mind but not the stomach" (Lahey 149). The Fruitlands experiment also showed Louisa that worldly goods could be secured by the head woman of the family and action born of an indomitable will could overcome the limitations imposed by an oppressive system. Abba of *Transcendental Wild Oats* is a figure through which Louisa "[m]anipulate[s] the layered meaning of bread, going beyond gingerbread, to contribute to her feminist argument" (Dolan 41). Even lacking essential ingredients, Abba makes bread and mends Abel Lamb's broken spirit simultaneously.

For some feminist critics, Abba's multitasking comes across as a kind of sideshow. In "'A Motley Load': Reweighing Humor's Burden in Louisa May Alcott's *Transcendental Wild Oats*," Angela Mills argues that the madness of Abba's workload mirrors the father's buffoonery. In that comparison, Louisa's maternal hero is lost. But compared to the father's ordinary male arrogance, Abba's efforts should be seen as extraordinary, not ridiculous. Abba makes magic of limited resources and manages to line up the means to financial stability while fostering the soul of the noble idealist. Lamb is watched over, supported, and ultimately saved by the mother who subversively assumes the male role of acquiring financial stability in the new world of commerce. Louisa, in her own life, saves her family as her mother once did with her own ability, as it were, to make bread.

Triumphs like these are consistent across Louisa's female protagonists, whether their representation be gothic, romantic, or purely sentimental. And they speak to female readers in a

cosmopolitan way, which is to say, across divisions of family, class, and nationality. In "The Cosmopolitical Project of Louisa May Alcott," Laura Dassow Walls challenges the common practice of analyzing either the domestic novels or the potboilers in attempts to get to the bedrock of Alcott's belief system. Walls explores the full anthology and shows how both family members and the intimate circle of family friends are cast and recast in all of her works to "play out" unresolved issues with parents, herself, and the rapidly changing society in which she lived. Walls argues that "nationalist anxieties and cosmopolitan ideas wind through all her works" and that each singular piece of work is a contribution to "a long debate over how to domesticate the dangerous energies of cosmopolitan skepticism without surrendering its hopes for social solidarity" (110).

The grit and worldliness of Louisa's alpha female characters are often sanitized by feminist critics. And analysis focused on the liberation from the father is often favored over the power of the mother. Following and analyzing the timeline of Louisa May Alcott's life show a girl raised in an egalitarian home which modeled a selfless serving love on the part of parents and children alike and parental duties were based upon what served the family unit best. The approach to academic pursuits and education in the ways of the world empowered their daughter to independently achieve financial success—first as an insurgent in the male-dominated field of American Gothic literature and then as a leading lady of the sentimental works for children big and small. Through *Little Women*, "the Marches wrote her story" (Stern 169) in the romantic reenactment of Louisa's life truths—and solidified the prosperity she would selflessly share with parents, siblings, and eventually the niece Louisa would come to raise. When Abba's health was on the decline Louisa was becoming the new alpha female and primary breadwinner of the Alcott clan—Bronson was still working toward a dream and publishing works, but Louisa

became the ballast to her father's balloon in place of her faithful mother. Louisa in self-proclaimed singlehood, chose to follow the example of her parents. Louisa put the gifts, talents, and lessons in her possession to the service of her family. Through her literature, Louisa sets her family as an example of the empowering aspects of selfless love for the individual, their beloved, and the community to which they contribute.

Chapter III.

Fourier's Guide to Utopian Phalanxes

The unregulated industrialization and free enterprise system of nineteenth century France was fraught with fraud, abuse and exploitation. In response, champions for labor rights began to emerge. Among the forebears of this line of champions was Charles Fourier. After his disillusioning career “as a traveling salesman and commercial employee” in which he witnessed and worked against “frauds of commerce,” Fourier sought to “bring order and justice to humanity” through a communal haven of his design (Guarneri 159). Fourier's palatial Phalanxes, which mimicked early monarchical feudalism, proved daunting and ignored the historical precedent of the gradual evolution. As Fourier's utopian vision set the expectations for “palatial living...so absurdly high, Fourierists were too easily disappointed with struggling little communities” (Boyer 162) to maintain the morale necessary to overcome the initial struggles.

Fourier believed “that an entire system based on the anarchy of free competition was wrong” and therefore what was needed was a “society guaranteeing class harmony through scientific organization” (Guarneri 159). To more easily and swiftly rid the world of “evils of competitive civilization,” Fourier designed a blueprint for a “meticulously planned cooperative community called a phalanx, which would gather persons of all classes and characters” (159-160). These phalanxes would be built on a generous plot on a countryside, not too far removed from society and consist of all the “workshops, fields, and cultural institutions that provided a varied and fulfilling existence for every resident” (160). Fourier's vision would require “exactly 1,620 men, women and children” in a “Versailles-like palace” set on a “beautiful tract of 6,000

acres, with abundant gardens, carefully tended orchards, and inviting forests” (Guarneri 162, 164). This would be a non-sectarian community where members would choose through “the simple force of attraction...[the] specialized work groups gratifying [their]every interest” so as to engage in such “contented labor [which] would produce so much that consumption and leisure, not production, would be their main preoccupation” (162). The blueprint was sensational—but too grandiose for the immediate application in France.

In America, however, the model on which utopian communities were built was derived from Fourier's acolyte Albert Brisbane. Much like Transcendentalism was the germ for the bloom of feminism, so was the vision of a Fourierist phalanx the seed of its North American derivative. The North American phalanx took an all-encompassing approach to gathering the best practices of democratic communities already developed for a more pragmatic model of a new consociate community—an “amendment...to the ‘instant community’ idea” (Boyer 162). Brisbane would appropriate Fourier’s blueprint and more closely align it with American sensibilities. In the rush to mass market this new way of life, some of the principles from which Fourier built these plans were directly contradicted by America’s preference for individual ownership and prosperity. Ironically, to begin building the community which would be the haven from the “evils of competitive civilization” Brisbane began raising capital through “land speculation” (Guarneri 159-160).

The mentality of Albert Brisbane is written into the motivations of Brother Timon Lion in his ambition to see this experimental community “pay off” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 161). Timon was the primary shareholder in Fruitlands and did expect, somehow, that this community freed from the bonds of free enterprise would still “pay off.” However, the lack of any democratic process marked an inconsistency. These attempts at “heaven on Earth” were not the embodiment of a

free democratic society practicing equity in social standing, influence, and opportunities for enrichment. They were communities of like-minded thinkers who were free to commune in the way the group thought best. Brother Lion offers the upsides to the community and a hint at the insidious clinging to the same oppressive social construct he seeks to escape when he states, “Our plan contemplates all such disciplines, cultures, and habits as evidently conduce to the purifying of inmates” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 149). The leader’s use of the word “inmates” to describe the voluntary, contributing members to a fledgling society belies the purported mission of this “free” community.

Indeed, the sales pitch for utopia as delivered by Master Lion paints an idyllic picture for souls rendered restless and seeking respite from an urban hell born of capitalism’s competitive rat-race. Lion plans to “rise at dawn, begin the day by bathing, followed by music, and then a chaste repast of fruit and bread” (154) holding to Fourier’s ideal that the haven of his design “would be both personally fulfilling and socially harmonious” (Boyer 163). With this approach to time management of utopian operations there is a marked absence of attention to tasks such as procurement of bread and the cultivation of the fields expected to yield fruit, implying that once again, it’ll be left to “bounteous Providence” to handle all the devilish details which might undermine the foundation of their “castles in the clouds.” In the exchange between Sister Hope and Dictator Lion when discussing his suggested delegation of duties, it is Lion’s self-appointment of “being, not doing” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 155) which makes Lion’s intentions clear. Sister Hope and her husband serve as unwitting benefactors to Lion’s sedentary “divine growth” (155), becoming subordinates and financial backers of Lion’s design. In addition to eschewing his fair portion of “wilful activity” (155), Lion further appoints himself as director and planner of said wilful activities—activities with which he has had limited knowledge and experience.

Timon Lion went all in on this new “heaven on earth” idea. Those communities which did not “die early deaths” (Guarneri 171) began small and gave a reasonable amount of time for incremental growth, adaptation, and surpluses to be amassed. The Oneida community, which “lasted thirty-three years...evolved gradually from experience rather than from a preconceived blueprint” (171). Refusing to compromise on his ambition for an almost spontaneously-generated grand community, Fourier paid only “fleeting attention to such transitional projects,” even though it was in “gradualist institutions...that the impact of American Fourierism endured” (Boyer 162) — a mindset also held by Timon Lion. While Timon speaks of gradual growth when he “anticipate[s] no hasty or numerous addition to their numbers,” he holds to the expectation that “plenteous orchards” will independently “adorn the pastures...of this prospective Eden” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 149). Just as a few days of spading “garden and field...lessened their ardor amazingly” (158) for shielding beasts from their burdens, so did the conviction to selectively choose community members—another common mistake to the short-lived experimental communities.

Life in the nineteenth-century labor force left much to be desired for working class men as much as women. In wanting to escape oppressive supervision and work conditions, “adulteration of products,” and unfair wages, “large numbers of formerly self-employed carpenters, printers, masons, and shoemakers” (Guarneri 169) gravitated to these new North American Phalanxes. These urban-dwellers proved little more than dilettantes in underestimating the monumental undertaking of a commune completely removed from the free-market distributors of food and functional fashion. Timon Lion proves himself chief among dilettantes in his immodest self-assessment that prevents him from seeing the issue of building a rural community with a workforce comprising plenty of artisans and seamstresses, but “not enough

farmers” (Guarneri 169). Even in the scaled-down American phalanxes, the need for active, duty-paying, labor-contributing members made for a less than selective admissions process. “[In] many cases a useful skill or some capital to invest was the only requirement” (Guarneri 169) so that “scores of the conceited...the selfish...the pugnacious...[and] the idle’ were permitted to join” (Greeley 154).

While all of these missionaries and their gifts would be useful and welcome, *Transcendental Wild Oats* illustrates the pitfalls of a haven for refugees of the Industrial Revolution. Most lacked knowledge about agriculture. The Americanization of utopias as represented in *Transcendental Wild Oats* reduces the communal labor force of 1635 people to twelve. 6,000 acres of beautifully tended gardens and orchards become two acres farmed by men who plant the wrong crops for land and season. An egalitarian community where men and women should find labor suited to their own passion becomes a facsimile of free-market communities where “sex roles were dominated by nineteenth-century stereotypes” (Guarneri 169). This disconnect is where Sister Lamb becomes the hero when her own experience is dismissed by Lord Lion. She embarks on covert operations that save her family, leaving Timon to learn a hard lesson when he returns from a long stay with the Shaker community nearby.

The underestimation of agricultural demands, alongside an overestimation in knowledge and abilities to meet these demands, leads to the monumental mistake of three different planters sowing three different grain seeds in the same field. These gentlemen find humor in the situation and decide to withhold this important fact from the rest of the community, just to see “what would come of it” (159). They are never alarmed by the possibility of imminent famine. “These brethren, who said many wise things and did many foolish ones” (166) compounded their fundamental failure through the prideful act of hiding a fatal mistake from the community. This

move further hinders viable solutions by way of collective creative problem-solving. The paternalism of Fruitlands' leader(s) meant certain doom for the well-intended attempt at a community surpassing antebellum America in its pursuit of freedom.

These North American Phalanxes adopted a "model constitution" and "stressed...the American ideals of self-government, personal freedom, equity, and social progress" (Boyer 164). They also promoted the community "joint-stock shares" (163). The yang to this yin was the insidious influence of male-dominated power structure in which "sex roles were governed by nineteenth-century stereotypes" (Boyer 169), as opposed to innate talents, abilities, and passions Fourier said should dictate duties.

Margaret Fuller, when advocating for women's interests, did not venture to escape marriage or domestic duties entirely, but merely wanted to supplant the master-servant model of marriage with one of an equitable, mutually enriching partnership in which man and woman are "twin exponents of a divine thought" (Fuller 5). At the time, the standard family dynamic was one where a wife "followed wheresoever her husband led" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 163). Such is the case of Sister Hope, aka Mrs. Alcott, following the idealistic Abel Lamb wheresoever he leads, even when led by the livestock. Louisa illustrates the inherent flaws of the chromosomal prerequisite for family leadership with Abel Lamb's illogical interjection that, on the path to social reformation in utopia "we do not rely so much on scientific reasoning or physiological skill as on the spirit's dictates" (155). Here, Lamb is defending Lion against the practical inquiries of Mrs. Lamb. Timon Lion's utopian plans were for a purpose too high to be critiqued: "Here Timon Lion, aka Charles Lane, intended to found a colony of Latter Day Saints, who under his patriarchal sway, should regenerate the world and glorify his name forever" (150). Of

course, the authoritarian nature of that mission undermined the very idea of a fully egalitarian community.

Louisa, instead of setting Abel and Hope against each other as foils, sets them both against Timon. As established earlier, Timon seeks both a favorable return for his investment that will “glorify his name forever” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 150). Abel, on the other hand, acts with “a soul full of purest aspirations [and] most unselfish desires” (162). Hope and Abel hold “desires for a life devoted to God” (162) and a home in “a Paradise, where Beauty, Virtue, Justice, and Love might live happily together” (150). In the pursuit of these ideals, Abel is aligned not only with Transcendentalism but with the ideals described specifically by Fuller. Further aligning Abel with Fuller’s progressive vision for women is his contribution to Hope’s daily chores through teaching the children “with whole head and heart” (162). Abel and Hope both “plan and sacrifice,” and Abel preach[es] and prophesie[s]” in his mission to support the divine growth of the twelve consociate family members. In the span of the day which takes Abel away from the partnership of Hope, Louisa provides further development of positive male characters through Moses White and Forest Absalom as foils to Timon Lion.

Looking at the names Louisa chose to represent each of the real-life players in her Fruitlands family dramedy reveals two characters who are not protected by Abba, but serve as her helpers. Sister Hope mothers the twelve permanent consociate family members—and any eclectic passers-through—while Moses White and Forest Absalom counteract incompetence and insufficient labor resulting from Timon’s commandments. Moses White, with his “silver hair and flowing beard” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 161) and his “white cotton raiment” fits the aesthetic of Moses after his commune with God in the burning bush. Moses reflects both wisdom and purity in a “venerable...and somewhat bridal appearance” (151). Moses prevents “many a mishap by his

thrift and Yankee shrewdness” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 161) in the field and has oxen at the ready when the brethren learn a community harvest cannot be sewn with spades alone. Brought to mind with the bridal aspect to the appearance of Moses is the preponderance of the masculine and feminine which manifests in various ratios in each person.

Moses seems to be one with his land and the creatures God provides to sustain him. Fuller states that as Power (masculine) begets Beauty (feminine), Man’s development goes through both feminine and masculine phases of growth. Fuller further states that these preponderances will manifest in various ratios in each individual so that some masculine beings might express more Beauty than Power (Abel), and some feminine beings more Power than Beauty (Hope).

Forest Absalom represents harmony with nature in his first name and an innate piety in his surname. “Absalom” reads as “Father of peace” and the third son of the Biblical David. He exercises a “Pythagorean silence” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 161), exudes masculine beauty in “his fine dark locks,” and “works like a beaver” for his own “divine growth.” These attributes make all the more ridiculous Timon Lion’s unrelenting speech unmatched by his very little engagement in “wilful activity” (155). Forest represents the ideal masculinity as defined by Margaret Fuller in channeling his brute power to “help the overworked Sister Hope” (161) with what misogynists see as women’s work. This strong silent gentleman aids Hope in “heavy washes . . . kneading endless batches of bread, watching over the children, and doing the many tasks left undone by the brethren” (161). Louisa once more models an ideal version of masculinity in Forest Absalom to offset the oppressive masculinity of Timon Lion. In this “excellent example of brotherly love, justice and fidelity,” (161) Louisa vindicates her father’s ideals by attributing them to a character she states lives an “upright life” (161).

In a truly ideal world for a homemaker, planning is conducted ahead of time to secure tools and provisions necessary for daily living and to structure the day so as to meet all physical demands in a timely fashion. As hunger and slumber are a predictable daily occurrence, like the wail of an infant, they are too important to be ignored or rescheduled for later conversation. After a very few questions as to the what and how of Fruitlands' daily sustenance, Hope is met with the retort, "Such trivial questions will be discussed at a more fitting time" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 152-153). Brother Timon's "sharp" response to Sister Hope's question about the maintenance of dining wares while the newly gathered consociate sodality dines fumblingly on "two plates, a tin pan, and one mug" (152) conveys resentment for Hope's doubts. For those being charged with catering meals for twelve on a reasonable schedule, proactive discussion is paramount to preparedness. It would be foolhardy to wait to until a need arises to discuss it. The "elders" procrastinate when it comes to such matters, making declarations rather than solving practical problems.

Sister Hope finds herself overruled by Lion and his divinely inspired philosophies. While the consociate family of eleven dines on service for two, "the elders welcome [this] hardship with the enthusiasm of new pioneers." This meager dining experience is the first manifestation of their "having cast the forms and vanities of a depraved world behind them" (152). "Forms" and "vanities" implies that even practical tools like pots, pans, and dishes are superfluous in the "ideal world" visualized by the "elders." The underlying misogyny is clear.

In the traditional model of familial power dynamic, matrimony is the requisite which gives man the role of "leader," regardless of knowledge, skill, or wisdom. If honoring the vows made to God when mutually committing to a lifelong partnership, the knowledge, skill, and wisdom of the woman are honored by the husband. While this is the ideal, it is not always the

case. This principle is illustrated upon first sight of the consociate family's commune—a rural fixer-upper. “‘There is our new abode,’ announces the enthusiast, smiling with satisfaction undamped by the drops dripping from his hat brim” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 150). Abel Lamb, the family leader, undaunted by the open wagon ride in the rain, is equally unphased by the unworn path of mud which the caravan must “trudge” through in order to make their way to a run-down fledgling phalanx. To the family leader’s cheery exclamation of “Utopia Ho!!”, the pragmatic voice of his practical wife observes “a little difficult of access” (150) as she “[endeavors] to keep various household gods from going overboard with every lurch of the laden ark” (150). The contrast between these two statements establishes the disparity in pragmatic awareness between the family leader and his devoted wife. Additionally, this contrast illustrates the stalwart nature of Woman and foreshadows the resultant power dynamic of pragmatic subversion over fragile idealism—that dynamic which ultimately saves the microcosmic family unit of the crumbling Fruitlands.

Chapter IV.

Men and Women in the Kitchen

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Sarah Margaret Fuller progressively speaks of the “two-fold growth of man, masculine and feminine” (99) when discussing the harmonious union between man and woman which results in “Angelic Ministry” (73). Fuller states that a balance is struck between “Energy & Harmony; Power & Beauty; Intellect & Love” by man and woman together. Each man and woman is born with a preponderance to either masculine or feminine expressions, though “there are exceptions in great number, such as men of far more beauty than power, and the reverse” (99). This allows for a relationship defined by the members involved and just so long as the marriage is “equitable and noble,” then it is good. In said marriage, the idealist would yield to the pragmatist when shifting from big picture to the details therein. If expertise were required, the one with lesser knowledge would defer to the one with more extensive knowledge. The result would be harmonious accord. In the works of Louisa May Alcott, this divine balance within the home forges strength within the family unit which preserves the community.

Transcendentalism was highly progressive in its mission to elevate the soul, cultivate the intellect, and promote individuality. However, as women began to explore Transcendentalist philosophy, they discerned a lack of interest in women. No one drew attention to this disparity more than Margaret Fuller who “initiated the cultural feminist tradition” (Donovan 32) in Transcendental circles. Fuller was the first to systematically apply a feminist’s values to individualism and self-development, for women (Wayne 45). She was the only female to address

the paternalism of the Transcendentalist movement and was hailed by Emerson as perhaps the best example of female genius that America had to offer, as truly “an exception to her sex” (Wayne 19).

Emerson’s stands out, given an otherwise poor record of honoring the opposite sex as equals to men in intellect, creativity, or social merit. While “it was [his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson] who shaped his formative views on nature, spirituality, and the soul, and who encouraged his independence of thought” (Wayne 19), Emerson rarely acknowledged the source of these views. Instead, he often judged women by their marital status. They were either unmarried “Muses” or unavailable “wives” (Wayne 19). Since so many deferred to Emerson’s direction, women’s interests were often ignored. The resulting void served as an opportunity for Fuller’s influence.

Fuller appropriated Transcendentalism’s focus on the “relationship between self and society, between an inward-focused emphasis on self-education and an outward-focused commitment to reform” (Wayne 42) and used it to disassociate women from the popular idea of “republican motherhood.” While Fuller viewed domestic training as oppressive, the “service” provided by women to their families could be divided equitably with their husbands for a more just household economy. In the ideal “religious marriage” as theorized by Fuller herself, equal and fair companionship, intellectual engagement, and spiritual enmeshment would help both individuals, male and female, face life’s obstacles with greater strength.

Louisa saw the heart of a cosmopolitan community in a closely knit family. She derived an ideology from the power exhibited by the Alcott alpha female, Abigail May. Louisa’s “domestic feminism” (Dolan 54) brings together Fuller’s Transcendental masculine/feminine principle and a personal belief in the *caritas* of family. In Louisa’s semi-autobiographical tales

for “young girls,” an ideal picture of a family working together for prosperity and stability shows how the gifts of each individual, male and female, might be used for mutual advantage.

Throughout the Alcott family’s life-journey, the children were given unrestricted freedom to explore their world and acquire knowledge. But Bronson’s decisions often resulted in financial insecurity. In these situations, “Abba was forced to feed her family by whatever means available” -- not out of feminist principles but out of necessity. Abba cheerfully nurtured her family by cooking, educating, and fulfilling whatever individual need might arise. Louisa even viewed her mother’s cooking as an “[increase] [in] the kingdom of heaven” (Dolan 40.) The kitchen could be space for feminist agency and an academy, in the classic sense, for multiple generations as they congregated to eat.

That kitchen space and the challenges Abba faced in keeping her family nourished are unromantically portrayed in *TWO*. After doubting the permanence of this new home, Hope is greeted with the reality of her “office” — “a large, dilapidated kitchen, containing an old stove and the peculiar stores out of which food was to be evolved for her little family of eleven” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 156). After listing the kitchen inventory, Louisa compliments Abba/Sister Hope on her “ten years’ experience of vegetarian vagaries [which] had been good training for this new freak” (157). She manages to fulfill her duties, while maintaining a sense of humor. The matriarch’s humor is a force against the seriousness of the patriarch in Alcott’s story.

Because of Abba, the Alcott girls “crossed many important boundaries” (Blackford 42). Understanding how men “have denied [Woman] the facilities for obtaining a thorough education” (“Declaration of Sentiments”), Abba provided for her daughters’ self-education-- “a range of resources” (Phillips 241). She “shared with her daughters her love of reading . . . her lively interest in social issues” (Phillips 241), and her dedication to “abolition and women’s

rights” as a “fiercely pragmatic reformer” (Dolan 42). Although Mrs. Alcott was a “helper” to her husband, she cultivated those skills that would strengthen the family without having to depend on her husband.

Angela Mills in “Motley Load” contends that Abba “helped fracture the real-life Fruitlands [with her] resistance . . . to the dissolution of her immediate family into the larger grouping” as this “would have freed Bronson from ‘narrower’ loyalties” (14). For Bronson, that “narrow” loyalty meant the education of his own children over the success of the commune itself. But the demands of the community only proved an obstacle to that “narrow” loyalty, as lack of sustenance, failed farming, inadequate winter clothing meant both he and his children would have to deprioritize education. For Abba, this wasn’t an acceptable option. The children would have to come first.

If obeying the man was the norm, despite the danger that norm might pose to the rest of the family, Abba had no problem declaring an abnormal sentiment. And she wasn’t the only one. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in the “Declaration of Sentiments,” addressed the social norms which oppressed women as a model that could be replaced by both women *and* men. As a matter of fact, in a model of an egalitarian contribution to child-rearing, Bronson did not deny his girls the “facilities for obtaining a thorough education,” but instead provided it with his wife as his partner. Louisa’s letters further defend Bronson as a positive and not at all oppressive force in the lives of his family. In Louisa’s “Recollections of My Childhood,” a father put to practice with his girls the plans for developing the individual as delineated in both Emersonian Transcendentalism and Fourier’s Utopian Dream. And in many ways, he did so to a far more successful end than that of Fruitlands. Louisa recalls the mutual respect between the father-turned-teacher “who was always sure of four little pupils who firmly believed in their teacher”

(Alcott, "Recollections" 428). Bronson held his daughters to the highest standards of intellectual development in the "arithmetic, grammar...reading, comprehension, history and geography" while sweetening the day with "stories read to [them] with such skill which made the duller charming and useful" (429).

Outside of official school hours, the children were not only encouraged to play and stage plays but to facilitate "conversations about the state of [their] little consciences and the conduct of their childish lives" (429). Bronson also did not expect them to put on the pretenses of Victorian etiquette when significant guests would visit the Alcott home. Even Margaret Fuller, when asking Bronson to see his "model children," was greeted with a procession of rambunctious youths playing princess and barking dogs while hauling a sister in a wheelbarrow in a chorus of giggles which ends in a toppling over at Fuller's feet. Louisa's mom wryly heralds their entrance with "Here are the model children, Miss Fuller" (431). Bronson's own letters show playfulness too. He did comment on the wildness of both his wife and daughter. Louisa was so much like her mother—"a devil" (Mills 5), in Bronson's words. But in Louisa's letters, Bronson is never accused of censoring the thinking or speaking of his wild ones. Instead, we see a girl who never outgrew "castle-building...and scribbling" (428). When applying these recollections to the reading of Louisa's sensational works, the image of a dominating father is eliminated.

Margaret Fuller began voicing the need for a role beyond that of "helper of man," but she too diminished the nobility and power of this role in only seeing the potential for subjugation in the role of wife and mother. In *Little Women*, Louisa's willful heroine, Jo, involuntarily submits in soft harmony to a song of home sung "heartily and well" by her beloved. Alcott illustrates God's model of man and woman in Mutual submission to love's call. In her subdued hum, Jo

confesses “she did know the land, and would joyfully depart thither, whenever he liked” (Alcott, *Little Women* 480).

The first meetings at Fruitlands occur during the most beautiful part of the New England summer. The community declares its “garments are to be linen,” which sounds reasonable until the qualifying addendum “till we learn to raise our own cotton or some substitute for woolen fabrics” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 153). If these rookie farmers do not yet have the wherewithal to sow, reap, and spin cotton, then it stands to reason that linen will be difficult to procure.

As brother Abel (aka Bronson Alcott) philosophizes over the WHY of his utopia, “blissfully basking in the imaginary future as warm and brilliant as the generous fire before him,” (153) Sister Hope manages the physically exhausting HOW of housewifery. Even the essentials were of little interest to the men. When asked about shoes, Timon Lion, “who liked extreme measures” replied that this too would be discussed at such time as an “innocent substitute for leather” can be manufactured from “bark, wood or some [invented] durable fabric” (153). True devotees to the cause would have to go barefooted.

While Louisa refers to Sister Hope as “rebellious” (153), it’s with a sense of reverence toward her maternal instinct and facetiousness toward those who would consider that instinct rebellious. She leaves the self-congratulatory founders of the “consociate family” to their business so that she might “[lead] her flock to a temporary fold” (156). With men in clouds and only women in fields, the consociate novices remain vulnerable to “an easterly storm...coming up” certain to ruin “the yellow stacks” (166-67). With the meager harvest waiting to be secured, the final important chore of safeguarding the harvest was put off by “some call of the Over soul [which] wafted all the men away” (166-67). Sister Hope knows the storm is coming and gathers her children. She builds a grain-saving sleigh with sheets and baskets. The resourcefulness of

“the indomitable woman” saves the grain from the rain and “saves food for her young” (167).

Sister Hope keeps a cool head and vows that her children will be exempt from enduring the consequences of these philosophies. She never engages in conflict with the leaders of the community but promotes harmony and stability by listening closely and acting subversively.

Shortly after this incident, Fruitlands folds and Brother Lion bails. As Abel falls into a depression “at the bursting of his bubble” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 167), Sister Hope gathers all remaining resources for trade, finds gainful employment for man and wife, and secures an affordable new place for the family to live. Abel is given room to grieve at the death of his ideal while Sister Hope silently and supportively tends to the impending needs. No commentary is made on the state of his manhood, no criticisms are made of her taking the helm in his moment of weakness. Instead, Louisa witnessed between her parents “in that little room [what] is not to be recorded except in the hearts of those who suffered much for love’s sake” (172). Louisa saw in the unconditional love and supportive strength of her mother toward “an eloquent significance to her who knew [her father] as no other human being did” (170).

Alcott balances the voice of Transcendental feminism with the possibility of a voluntary mutual submission between husband and wife. Sister Hope does indeed submit to the will of her husband as the “ballast to his balloon” but never surrenders her children or her power to provide. “The new commander, with recovered courage, [says] to her husband, ‘Leave all to God and me.’ He has done his part, now I will do mine” (172), thus providing the reader with an alternate utopia.

Chapter V.

Having it all: The New Wave of Oppression

The ethos of third and fourth wave feminism is that first wave feminism resigns itself to domestic chains. The rearing of children is outsourced to daycare workers while mothers and fathers work to push the bottom line of anonymous shareholders. Empowered is she who strives to make it in the workforce once dominated by men. Proud Woman should be of the strides made in the interests of equal opportunities to equal work for equal pay. Unsung, however, are the heroes who choose to maximize resources so that child-rearing is free and self-driven. Unfair is to discount the harmonious, egalitarian, divine commitment advocated for by Margaret Fuller in the nineteenth century. Margaret Fuller's model of marriage elevates both man woman in its allowance for each to realize the roles to which innate proclivities direct them. Following suit, Abba was a working woman in the nineteenth century—an example followed by her daughter—while the love of her life sought to teach and spread the tenets of Transcendentalism to a society full of repressed souls. Marmee March admits to the frustrations of life in poverty and the longing for a husband absent through war, yet assures her daughter through assertions and example that the love she feels for husband and children outweighs the inevitable trials of life. Marmee keeps the home secure, her girls content, and her neighbors within the light of her Christian love. Sister Hope shows the world how her mother and father did not follow any gender-based role assignment, but worked in balletic sync-steps to fulfill the needs of the family members they love in whatever capacity circumstances and capabilities dictate.

The woman in the twenty-first century is not only free to work outside of the home but is urged to do so. In most modern debates, husband and children are seen as inhibiting agents to a woman's fulfillment. When discussing family life as represented in the works of Louisa May Alcott, the most common perspectives view marriage and family as products of resignation to an inevitable obligation and the martyrdom of the woman's spirit. The heart of Louisa May Alcott's feminist commentary lies in the reality that Abba loved her Bronson, and that *caritas* kept Abba passionately engaged with home, husband, and family.

First wave feminism sought equality and a voice. Second wave feminism sought freedom of choice in life's work and reproduction. The catalyst to the revived revolution for women's rights was the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by journalist Betty Friedan in 1964, as baby boomers began to come into their own and ask "is this all?" A period of unemployment from her career as a journalist resulted in full-time employment as a housewife. It was after this experience that Friedan sought to expose the "problem that has no name" (Friedan 9) hoping to give women a choice as to whether they served their communities as a "domestic goddess"⁶ or as a workforce wonder woman.

In the opening chapter of *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan defines the problem with no name which was essentially, a backsliding of the feminist movement during the post-World War II era. Heroes returned, babies boomed, and a modern paradigm of the ideal woman was built which began to slowly exclude all of the "independence and opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for" (Friedan 9). During the fifteen years following the war, Friedan asserts that woman was indoctrinated to believe that pitiful were the "neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women

⁶ Idiomatic term meant to serve as a more desirable reference as "housewife" gained a pejorative connotation after the second wave of feminism. Has been used by various comedians and writers so that credit for this informal term cannot be accurately attributed.

“who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents” (9). As the “truly feminine women” had no want for “careers, higher education, political rights” (9), acquiring a husband became the focus of the fifties female as early as she could dream. Careers outside the home and higher education were sought merely for mercenary purposes. Jobs with favorable male to female ratios became the objective, as opposed to a long-term career. Higher education was purely for the “MRS. Degree” or the “Ph.T (Putting Husband Through)” as evidenced by the decline of “women attending college in comparison to men from 47% in 1920 to 35% in 1958,” the surge in teen engagement, and the drop of the “average marriage age for women...to 20” (10).

Mercenary matrimony replaced the old model of republican motherhood for which feminisms forebears fought to overcome. These social developments did indeed pose a threat to the progress made for the rights of women during the first wave, however, Friedan seemingly condemns the institutions of marriage and motherhood in general, without considering those women who legitimately fell in love with a man, became a singular unit with her beloved, and reared the children she happily bore—not through social coercion or programmed acquiescence, but through the natural progression of love between a man and a woman who found something uniquely special in each other. As the decades rolled on, “Friedan’s legacy had been reclaimed by a younger generation of feminists calling themselves a third wave” (Fermaglich xix) who expanded on the rhetoric of Betty Friedan condemning motherhood as an unfavorable fate for womankind.

At the outset of the twenty-first century, the dignity and respectability of being a full-time mother was further diminished as “philosopher Linda Hirschman...invoked Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* to criticize the growing numbers of educated women who chose to stay home with their children rather than working” (Fermaglich xix). Feminism had moved further from

Margaret Fuller's hope that "women will...lay it to heart to ascertain what is for them the liberty of the law" (Fuller 5). To critics like Hirschman, nurturing family full-time was not "real work" nor worthy of respect equal to that of work performed outside of the home.

As discussed in the previous section, many first wave feminists, like Louisa herself, believed that empowerment could still be realized at home. Both wife and husband could head the family. However, the evolution of feminism over the course of its four phases changed both the definition and precepts of the original feminism so that the empowerment illustrated by both Louisa and her mother, Abba, receive almost no attention. Unfortunately, as the battle to leave the home waged on, women who "valued their roles as mothers and housewives interpreted Friedan's message as one that threatened their stability, devalued their labor, and disrespected their intelligence" (Fermaglich xviii). But not all feminists agreed with Friedan. Many of her contemporaries, "such as Catherine East, Kay Clarenbach, and Pauli Murray," looked to the first wave of feminism" to guide their decades' long work "on women's issues in liberal, labor, and civil rights organizations" (Fermaglich xvi).

Friedan's feminist vision also neglected to include "women of color" as well as "white working-class and poor women" who did not have the "luxury of identifying themselves as housewives" (Fermaglich xvii). Those feminists who would include all colors, creeds, and classes in their quest for an egalitarian society looked back to the First Ladies of Feminism. Their progressive ideals corrected "the very fault of marriage, and of the present relation between the sexes." Fuller's idea "that the woman does belong to the man, instead of forming a whole with him" (Fuller 103) aligns with the doctrine of the granddaughters of that first feminist revolution.

Generations of girls and women born and raised during the tide of second wave feminism will be quick to view Abigail as a martyr condemned to “the [same] degradation [as] a large portion of women into the sold and polluted slaves of men” (Fuller 78). Friedan’s discussion of the plight befalling American women in the mid-twentieth century revived Woman’s yearning for “a [more] complete life in its kind” (104). Friedan acknowledged the misapprehension that being maid, nanny, and on-call sex pot for the Mr. was all a woman needed for fulfillment. Friedan’s perspective, though, postulates that the pejoratively named “Happy Housewife Heroine” (24) can only become so after “exorcising [the Mephistopheles] of the forbidden career dream...the devil inside...the dream of independence, the discontent of spirit” out of fear for losing “the love of husband and child” (35).

For some, this may be, but where Friedan diverges from Fuller’s feminism is the implication that becoming a wife and mother could be the steppingstone to Love and Truth between men and women. For many the idea of falling in love forever with another soul who sees and believes the best in them makes for a fulfilling life. It’s a life of creation, a life devoted to the protection of one’s progeny. For Louisa, the dreams of a young girl’s heart do not manifest in games of material goods and staging social coups but in finding love that either extends parental love or fulfills neglected longing.

Margaret Fuller’s feminism advocates for independence, while endorsing a most romantic and efficient model for marriage. To love is human, to fall in love with “a man, in short, in whom brute nature is entirely subject to the impulses of the better self” (Fuller 80) is to be “Man and woman sharing an angelic ministry” (Fuller 73). As the mother of American Feminism, Fuller also advocated for the opportunity to solidify one’s independent identity and integrity before enmeshing the self with the soul’s second half.

Fuller instructed the maiden of virtue to “live, *first* for God’s sake” thereby ensuring “she will not make a perfect man her god, and thus sink to idolatry” (Fuller 103). Marmee, a.k.a Abba, follows suit in telling Jo that if she “would learn to feel the strength and tenderness of [her] heavenly father...the more [she] loves and trusts him, the nearer she will feel to him, and the less [she] will depend on human power and wisdom” (Alcott, *Little Women* 70). First, she must build an identity based upon some higher purpose. Then, “if she finds what she needs in man embodied, she will know how to love, and be worthy of being loved” (Fuller 103). Should the journey of a woman’s individual growth be stopped short for the “fancies of infatuation,” then high is the risk that she’ll inevitably be forced to “stifle such aspirations within her secret heart and fit herself, as well as she can, for a life of resignations and consolations” (Fuller 93).

Louisa’s biographer, Madeline B. Stern, tracks her journey to that higher purpose. Louisa was expected to produce child-friendly literature, she did not pander to her readers with the fairy tale wedding and the implication that finding love provides immunity to life’s inevitable trials. Through Marmee and Mr. March, we see a marriage enduring poverty, sickness, distance, and war. Still, under Fuller’s model of a “noble and equal” marriage, this phase may not be the fancy-free romance that “[appeals] to a youthful audience” (Stern 437). It is man and woman taking on the demands of the world outside of their union with an unshakeable solidarity. Along the way, their bond grows stronger. Even in the sentimental white-washing of the Alcott plight in the *Little Women* trilogy, Louisa acknowledges the restlessness of a woman’s soul in battling life’s inevitable tribulations when saintly Marmee explains her own “change from girlhood with its beautiful instincts, but unharmonized thoughts, its blind pupilage and restless seeking, to self-possessed, wise, and graceful womanhood” (Fuller 72). Marmee validates the hot-blooded nature

of Jo in revealing her own struggles with a steadily simmering temper, her soul-mate's hopeful temperance, and her passionate longing for his presence.

In a scene between Marmee and Jo, where Jo is challenged with the repercussions of her bad temper, we see a Marmee with no thought to resignation or acquiescence. In this scene, Marmee confesses to Jo, "you think your temper is the worst in the world; but mine used to be just like it" (Alcott, *Little Women* 68). While Marmee does credit the arrival of her father with the ability to control what she found to be incurable, it is not his paternalistic, autocratic enforcement of Victorian ideals for a model wife which made the change. It's the example of "patience"— "[waiting] so cheerfully"— that is so characteristic of Mr. March, a.k.a. Bronson (Alcott, *Little Women* 69). The love of her husband ennobles her own character. Marmee further admits that she "is impatient by nature and it tried [her] very much to see [her] children wanting anything" once the reality of a struggling young family with four girls set in. Through these struggles, though, it is revealed that Mr. March is the "ballast to [Marmee's] balloon" (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 162) in that he "always hopes, and works, and waits so cheerfully, that one is ashamed to do so before him" (Alcott, *Little Women* 69). Marmee admits her want for a more favorable financial situation, while at the same time, she exhibits a love untainted by resentment for this want. Through misty eyes "for missing him" (70), Marmee shows that which holds most weight in the balance of their relationship are the virtues which "ennoble and bless" (Fuller 83).

When discussing marriage in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Margaret Fuller tells young maidens to allow their identities to develop independently before becoming enmeshed with another's identity. In *Jo's Boys*, Louisa illustrates the end product of this journey--an independent woman of action in a loving, egalitarian partnership rearing the next generation. In this conclusion to Louisa's domestic trilogy, she expands on "what was" (Mills) and indulges the

“never-failing delight” of “castle-building” (Alcott, “Recollections” 428). The tale of the March family, as told through Louisa’s character, vindicates her father’s educational methods, having “[ridden] their favorite hobbies” (Alcott, *Wild Oats* 159) to dreams realized. In a final vicarious indulgence, Jo’s journey ends with her living a life of divine love with her Emersonian avatar in an equitable “marriage of souls” (Fuller 83). While this might sound like the ultimate feminist statement, it is a fictional representation of Louisa’s real life through the eyes, experiences, and influences of Jo March.

In the pages of the *Little Women* trilogy, the Alcott/March women lived within the framework of feminism’s current ethos as they overcame the paradigm of resignations. Marmee loves her soldier absent for fighting for higher ideals and shows love to her community through charity and service. A good example of this is when the girls share their breakfast with a family in deeper need than themselves. While Marmee lived the “glossed over and sentimentalized” (Stern 437) version of the Alcott poverty, the depth of charity and the enduring hope through any level of poverty is illustrative of the kind of strength, hope, and perseverance that Louisa values at the heart of her feminism.

In meeting the expectations of feminism’s latest wave, a woman is once again “pressured to be all things to all people” to a degree which forces women “into unnatural rhythms to please others” (Estes 1), just as she was forced to do prior to the first wave of feminism. Feminism has reached the point of diminishing returns with regards to occupational/spiritual balance. The growing rates of depression among “working” women prove as much. In a study titled “Understanding Society” conducted by the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study, data comprising 23,000 men and women and their employment profiles found that “the people with the worst mental health overall were women who worked 55 hours or more” (Beyer). Women

who exercised their freedom to choose to have children while working outside the home fare even worse when factoring in “household duties and caring for family members.” This free labor “increases their workload across the board” (Beyer). Within the most recent incarnation of the feminist movement, we find demands on women have increased, leaving absolutely no time for enrichment and fulfillment.

Louisa’s stories suggest that a better coexistence between men and women can add to that fulfillment. It is not an “either/or” but an “addition to.” In the modern-day goal to honor the nature of the individual, Louisa’s stories serve as a guide. Adulthood is inevitable and there is no escaping the universal trials of life. As boys and girls transition into men and women, single or married, wisdom is built through the myriad of experiences bringing joys, tribulations, blessings, and loss. This is universal, as is the reality of holding the ultimate responsibility for one’s own existence. Whether man or woman decides to be married or single; whether the marriage be egalitarian or subjugating; whether there be kids or no, fighting for daily bread and a roof over one’s head is the unromantic and inescapable reality for all—even in a literal Utopia. For the men and women of today, the bulk of one’s life is spent in the service of anonymous executives, perpetuating profits of a faceless entity which knows no names. Those who find love in a loyal partner also find a purpose larger than themselves in work which might otherwise feel empty. The seamstress is no longer a mender of other’s clothes, but woman winning daily bread for her family. The waiter is no longer a servant to patrons, but a man securing the needs for those he loves most. Adulthood itself requires resignation of youth and all its trappings, but to make the choice of living and fighting for love turns resignation to triumph. Marmee, Sister Hope, and Abba loved unconditionally and fiercely. They never resigned to submission under man, but always operated as the equal half to the husband. Abigail “Abba” Alcott models through her

loving relationship with Bronson and actions through life's trials that man and woman in harmonious accord is a divine whole which is far greater than the sum of its parts.

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