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Gender Trouble in Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth
Century* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

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Sivuainetutkielmassani "Gender Trouble in Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" tutkin Margaret Fullerin sekä Kate Chopinin ajatuksia naisen rooleista ja tilasta (*sphere*) 1900-luvun Amerikassa. Tutkielmassani analysoin heidän teoksiaan *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) ja *The Awakening* (1899). Fuller ja Chopin lähestyvät naisen roolia sääteleviä normeja eri näkökulmista: Fullerin kuvatessa naisen rooleja ja niitä sääteleviä normeja yleisellä tasolla, Chopin kuvaa yhden naisen kamppailua ahdistavien sukupuoliroolien puristuksessa. Molemmat kirjailijat esittivät äärimmäisen radikaaleja ajatuksia sukupuoliroolien purkamisesta aikana, jolloin miesten ja naisten roolit oli tarkoin erotettu toisistaan ja niiden erottaminen oli legitimoitu uskonnon ja myöhemmin darwinististen ajatusten voimalla "luonnolliseksi", "normaaleiksi" ja ainoiksi mahdollisiksi. Sukupuoliroolien kyseenalaistaminen tuomittiin kapinoinniksi sekä Jumalaa että luontoa vastaan.

Tekstien analysoinnissa käytän Judith Butlerin teoriaa, jossa identiteetti käsitetään alati muuttuvaksi ja ei-pysyväksi ilmiöksi. Butlerin mukaan sukupuoli ei ole olemista vaan tekemistä: sukupuoli on nähtävä sarjana toistuvia tekoja ja rituaaleja, joita toistamalla ja esittämällä me jatkuvasti 'teemme' sukupuolemme. Fuller ja Chopin järkyttivät aikalaisiaan kyseenalaistamalla luonnollisena ja normaalina pidettyjä käsityksiä sukupuolesta. Butler on tehnyt saman meidän käsityksillemme sukupuolesta ja sen muodostumisesta. Näiden kolmen kirjoittajan ja heidän radikaalien ajatustensa välillä on paljon yhtymäkohtia, joita tuon työssäni esille.

Tutkielmassani selvitän tekstien ja niissä esitettyjen ajatusten asemaa aikansa vallitsevien ideologioiden keskellä, esittelen Fullerin ja Chopinin ajatuksia sukupuoliroolien muuttamisesta ja koko sukupuoleen liittyvien käsitysten mullistamisesta, sekä sovellan Butlerin teoriaa sukupuolesta Fullerin ja Chopinin teksteihin ja pyrin esittämään yhteyden kaikkien näiden kolmen kirjoittajan välillä. Työni on osa feminististä tutkimusta.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. CHALLENGING THE NORMAL: RELIGION, TRANSCENDENTALISM AND FEMINISM	5
2.1 The Great Lawsuit: Fuller against God’s Normal Order.....	7
2.2 The Soul’s Slavery: Chopin and Immoral Sex Fiction.....	19
3. MENTAL SLAVERY AND BEYOND: INWARD AND OUTWARD OBSTACLES.....	24
4. CONCLUSION	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

1. Introduction

In my thesis I will explore Margaret Fuller's and Kate Chopin's ideas concerning women's sphere and roles expressed in their works *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and *The Awakening* (1899). These two American writers of the nineteenth century shared a common aim to challenge and question the commonly accepted norms regulating female and male roles in the society. Whereas Chopin explores this problematic indirectly by describing the private life of her main character, Edna Pontellier, Margaret Fuller chose a more public approach on the matter. They both concentrate on the evident difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of combining male and female spheres of life. By the terms *female sphere* and *male sphere* I mean women's and men's different life conditions as well as the opportunities that were open to them in the strictly segregated American society of the nineteenth century.

Fuller presents a radical suggestion to expand women's sphere in the society and open up new roles and professions for women, who were denied access to many areas of public life, like politics (voting, speaking in public), literature (writing), religion (preaching). Her writings provide a reader with an interesting view of the whole society as well as of discussions among the literary elite of the era. I will focus on her attempts to combine transcendentalism with social reform on this matter. I will discuss Fuller's notions of inward and outward obstacles hindering and prohibiting expansion of women's sphere, and her suggestions to overcome those obstacles. I will also use a text by Orestes Brownson, who was one of Fuller's most severe critics right after her text was published in 1845, to point out what Margaret Fuller was up against and how she defended her ideas against such critics

in her text. Fuller's text can well be considered the first feminist text published in America, and it is possible to identify many ideas similar to hers in Chopin's work

Chopin describes Edna's desperate attempts to expand her sphere and roles from being a mother and a wife, to the sphere where women had no access. In the novel the male sphere that Edna attempts to break into includes the very idea of an individual's right for self development and self-reliance. The tragic ending of the book seems to suggest that trespassing on the male sphere was impossible at the time, at least for married women and mothers. I will ponder on the reasons for Edna's eventual destruction: why was it impossible for a woman like Edna to live in the society in the nineteenth century? What made it impossible for a woman to function in different areas of public life simultaneously being a mother and a wife? Why did women have to choose either being outcasts, functioning in the male sphere (Mademoiselle Reisz), or being accepted as women, functioning as mothers and wives (Madame Ratignolle)? In Edna's character we can see an attempt to combine the male and female spheres. The combination turns out to be impossible because of both inward and outward obstacles. In my thesis I will aim at defining some of those obstacles.

In my thesis I will compare the texts with each other in order to illuminate the impossibility for women to develop themselves and function in various spheres of society that were not considered to be female in the nineteenth century. I will not concentrate on the issues of social class or race. In this study I also have to disregard the differences between the lives of women in the Southern or the Northern parts of America. It is definitely true that social class, race and ethnicity are important aspects when we study the nineteenth century American literature, but in my short research I cannot deal with those issues. Those important and interesting issues require a separate study. My research can be regarded as falling within the area of Feminist Studies

In order to explore the idea of female and male spheres and the norms that regulate these spheres, I will use Judith Butler's theory on gender as a performance. I have found the approach very useful in the investigation of our need to divide the world and life into artificial binary oppositions according to sex and the myths that naturalise and renew these divisions. The human need to make the world understandable dividing it into pieces, the need to divide the undividable, in order to comprehend it, can also be seen in our attempts to define the male and female roles. According to Butler, comprehending gender as a series of repetitive acts instead of a hierarchical binary that determines the sex in advance, provides us with more than two possibilities of sex and makes the whole idea of male and female categories pointless. As there is no fixed sexual identity, but only repetitive performances, normative regulatory practices, that change at different times, we can definitively challenge such ideas as "natural sex". There is no issue concerning sex that would not be political – not even biology as Butler shows in her analysis of a DNA research attempting to define sex (Butler:135-141).

Chopin's and Fuller's texts have not lost their relevance for today's discussions concerning different spheres of life in relation to gender. Their importance lies both in their historical significance and their meaning for the modern reader. The ideas expressed in the texts were extremely radical at the time they were published, and some of the ideas are radical or under discussion even today. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has become, over the last forty years, one of the most thoroughly examined novels in the American canon, and Margaret Fuller's text *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* has been frequently revisited by today's scholars. I will combine these two texts and read them closely together. In addition to that I aim at illustrating how Judith Butler's extremely radical ideas of today about gender as something we do rather as something we are, can be found in Chopin's and Fuller's texts

over 100 years earlier. This connection between two nineteenth-century and one twenty-first-century writers prove that there exists the feminist research tradition that the next generation can build on. We need to re-read these texts and ponder on the way how we think and why. Why does something appear to be natural and self-evident? Everything we create is artificial and open for discussion and change.

2. Challenging the Normal: Religion, Transcendentalism and Feminism

I want to begin my research reminding the reader that religion and deism have always been an important element of American ideological arena. In America religion has influenced such ideological ways of thinking that could well be seen as controversial to the religious approach (for example Naturalism) and religious explanations of the world and social order have coexisted with other ideological explanations rather than been contradicted. Stow Persons wrote that it is noteworthy that American intellectual history, including The Enlightenment and Transcendentalism, was closely associated with a religious tradition. Even the thinkers of the Enlightenment accepted at least formally the principles of deism (Persons: 222). American transcendentalism that was seen originating in Europe in the writings of Immanuel Kant, was actually developed closer to home in a local scene where rebelling Unitarians became American transcendentalists expressing their ideas in both literary and religious arenas. Romanticism that was inherently individualistic gained even more individualistic forms in America than in Europe. Transcendentalists believed in self-reliance and according to them the spiritual truth could be found by each individual instinctively. They emphasised feeling and intuition over reason and the individual over society. They considered customs, norms and traditions to be restraining obstacles that an individual should abandon in the process of self-development. Even America itself was seen as a kind of Romantic principle (Ruland: 62).

It is no surprise that in the nineteenth century the correct feminine role, the model for the ideal woman was based on religion. Not only male ministers but also many active women guided other women in the search for their proper sphere and role in society. Women were instructed to have no character of their own, no needs, they were expected to be unselfish and rely on God and religious institutions. Men were seen as self-sufficient and non-autonomous women needed religion and its moral guidance even more than men did (Douglas: 44-45). Woman's role was defined for her in a way that left no room for speculation:

[...]the women [...] were both flattered and threatened: stay within your proper confines, and you will be worshiped, their self-appointed mentors assure them; step outside and you will cease to exist. (Douglas: 44)

Stow Persons' book *American Minds: A History of Ideas* was first published in 1958 (revised in 1975). The book is probably lacking only in one respect: there are no women involved. What I think is noteworthy in Persons' book is that even in the twentieth century, women were not included in American history. Did not women participate in American intellectual history? What about feminism? Is that not an ideology? Who were American minds? Were they all male? Although published several decades after Fuller and Chopin lived and wrote, the very idea of women as non-persons, the very idea the two women struggled against, can still be seen in Persons' text. The idea of women as non-independent non-persons was typical to the nineteenth century America. An ideology provided by the American Revolution, promising equality for all, did not concern women's rights. African-American women who were slaves did not have rights at all, while other women were suppressed in other ways: they were not allowed to speak in public, their right to support themselves was restricted to the extreme by poverty wages and the segregation of occupations, the right to vote was denied. They could not inherit property or serve on a jury,

etc. (Ryan:12). They had no access to education and they were not even accepted in trade unions.

The idea of women's rights did not emerge only in the nineteenth century as some writings had discussed the issue earlier. The women's movement started in the early 1800's as philanthropy work among prostitutes and in prisons and during the next decades developed further in temperance and abolition work. The work was difficult as women were severely criticised on speaking in public and they were excluded from important conventions and conferences. The difficulties women encountered in temperance and abolition work made them focus on women's rights issues as well as anti-slavery statements. It can be said that an organised women's rights movement began in the United States in 1848 when the first women's rights conference was held in Seneca Falls, New York. The early women's movement became a suffrage movement that achieved its goal after decades of work in 1920 (Ryan: 10-20)

2.1 The Great Lawsuit: Fuller against God's Normal Order

Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is considered to be the first feminist text published in America and it has been compared with, and even seen as an American counterpart to, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published in Europe already in 1792. Both texts are no doubt groundbreaking and elementary texts in the history of feminism and have paved the way to other feminist writings. These texts can well be called feminist although at the time they were written feminism as a concept, or as a social movement, did not exist. The controversial concept of feminism is a relatively new term that began to be employed at the end of the nineteenth century and it is under debate

even today what that term actually includes (Beasley:xiii). Fuller's and Wollstonecraft's texts brought issues concerning women's sphere and rights into public discussion at the time when gender roles were seen as an unchangeable part of God's order, a part of the Natural state of affairs. The writings challenged the norms and the natural order at least in two ways: the content of the texts was highly radical, and the act of writing itself was seen mainly as an activity reserved for men, as well as political aspirations which these texts definitively include. Fuller's and Wollstonecraft's texts were compared with each other by George Eliot in 1855. She argues that most of the themes mentioned by Wollstonecraft are present in Fuller's text as well (Eliot: 233). In Eliot's article we may also see that even those who "wanted freedom and culture for woman" (Eliot: 234), like Eliot, accepted limitations concerning gender roles that were considered as Natural, and were careful not to demand "too much":

Unfortunately, many over-zealous champions of women assert their actual equality with men – nay, even their moral superiority to men – as a ground for their release from oppressive laws and restrictions. They lose strength immensely by this false position. If it were true, then there would be a case in which slavery and ignorance nourished virtue, and so far we should have an argument for the continuance of bondage. (Eliot: 234)

Surprisingly, in spite of the extreme radical nature of Fuller's and Wollstonecraft's work, Eliot praises them for avoiding "sentimental exaggeration" and "seeing and painting women as they are" (Eliot: 234). In a way, these comments illuminate the very core of Fuller's thinking. This is not to say that she saw women as inferior to men in any aspect but her focus on transcendentalism was the most important element in her text¹. Fuller was

¹ *Transcendentalists offered extreme individualism and 'self-reliance': deity was not to be found outside but inside of an individual. Instead of commonality and institutions like society and family, the transcendentalists*

“transcendentalist *par excellence*” (Douglas:269). Her ideas and writings that today constitute an important part of the history and tradition of feminism, were not about women’s rights *per se* but about women’s rights as both a consequence and a prerequisite of implementing transcendentalist ideology in practise which would, according to Fuller, benefit all people, not only women. Fuller writes about the inward and the outward obstacles. According to Fuller, repressive institutions and tools (the outward obstacles) must be removed in order to facilitate women’s self-development (the removal of the inward obstacles) i.e. repression has to end and women themselves have to change. According to Fuller, all people, not only women, may be free only after the removal of both the outward and inward obstacles. I will discuss these obstacles further in the third chapter.

The extreme radicalism of Fuller’s thought can be even better understood when we read feminist writings written over one hundred years later and compare them with Fuller’s ideas. Fuller was ahead of her time. She wanted to see women’s rights in connection with the transcendental ideology, the future of America and thus the development of the whole world. Although she recognised the fact that her writings as well as her example in real life made her some kind of a model or an inspiring figure that would serve as an example for other women struggling against social barriers, there did not exist anything that we could call an organized feminist movement at the time. Fuller was not a leader of any feminist movement as there was no such thing but she was an innovator creating the very basis and grounds for such a movement to become possible. She wholeheartedly believed in the power

focused on the individual. For Fuller the connection between transcendentalism and women’s rights lies in this right of every individual to develop.

of her own example (Douglas: 270-271). The Conversations she organised every winter from 1839 to 1843 in order to discuss women's rights, can be seen as the first attempt of women to gather together in order to improve their superficial education and their position in the society. It seems to me that the most important aim of Fuller was her serious attempt to combine social reform with transcendental ideology; to bring theory and practice together and thus harness the transcendental ideology to improve social reality.

This is what makes her work extraordinary among her fellow transcendentalists. She truly saw that it would be possible and beneficial to combine idealism and reality in order to achieve harmony. The extreme individualism included in the transcendental texts of her fellow writers makes her an exception: she stated that it was not enough for one to find one's own harmony because it is not possible unless there is harmony everywhere: no-one can be totally happy if everyone is not happy:

Man² is a being of two-fold relations, to nature beneath, and intelligences above him. The earth is his school, if not his birth-place: God his object: life and thought, his means of interpreting nature, and aspiring to God. Only a fraction of this purpose is accomplished in the life of any one man. Its entire accomplishment is to be hoped only from the sum of the lives of men, or man considered as a whole. As this whole has one soul and one body, any injury or obstruction to a part, or to the meanest member, affects the whole. Man can never be perfectly happy or virtuous, till all men are so. (Fuller: 99)

Fuller's text was extremely radical at the time it was written and she was the first one to express many ideas that were vital for women's right movement that appeared later. She related herself with Madame Roland, Madame de Stael and Georg Sand³ but had few models

² By 'Man' Fuller refers to both men and women.

³ All the three women that Fuller admired were defying the norms of society in their own way. Madame Roland lost her life during the French Terror for her political comments, Madame de Stael interpreted German books

to follow (Douglas: 268). She was a role model without an American predecessor whom she could follow herself. Fuller was very optimistic and sure that the change concerning women's position would take place soon enough. Today we know that the change was starting to take place but it would take longer than she probably had expected; even without the tragedy that ended her life too early, she would not have seen masculine spheres open up for women in her lifetime. I will cite Virginia Woolf's "Professions for Women" published in 1942, almost one hundred years after *Woman of the Nineteenth Century* was published. I will do that in order to underline the extremely radical nature of Fuller's text as well as the potential of her text to launch the change in society.

Even when the path is nominally open – when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant – there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way. To discuss and define them is I think of great value and importance; for thus only can the labor be shared, the difficulties be solved.[...] the whole position, as I see it – here in this hall surrounded by women practicing for the first time in history I know not how many different professions – is one of extraordinary interest and importance. You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men.[...] But this freedom is only a beginning; the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared. How are you going to furnish it, how are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms? These, I think are questions of the utmost importance and interest. For the first time in history you are able to ask them; for the first time you are able to decide for yourselves what the answers should be. (Woolf: 1348)

I must agree with Rebecca Rix who in her article writes that it seems impossible to investigate Fuller's text with the essentialism of feminist literary theory that argues that there can be found something that is specifically "feminine" (Rix: 1). Rix mentions Elaine Showalter's "gynocritics" but many other feminists have also presupposed specifically female cultural practices, "female language", "female history", and "female identity" that

that were banned by Napoleon, George Sand left her husband, moved to France and wrote propaganda concerning the French Revolution. The women wanted to change the society through their writings.

would be shared by women around the world. Judith Butler questions the idea about specificity and integrity of women's cultural practices and asks if there really exists some commonality between women outside their oppressed position (Butler: 7). She also warns the reader about false coalition that in advance defines its members because a coalition that determines one's identity necessarily excludes part of the people it aims to present and protect, this goes for feminism as well as any other ideology:

[...]the juridical formation of language and politics that represents women as "the subject" of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics. And the feminist subject turns out to be the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation. This becomes problematic if that system can be shown to produce gendered subjects along a differential axis of domination or to produce subjects who are presumed to be masculine. In such cases, an uncritical appeal to such a system for the emancipation of "women" will be clearly self-defeating. (Butler: 4-5)

Butler's non-essentialist approach is suitable for the exploration of Fuller's ideas that are based on the androgynous nature of a human being – Fuller saw no essential difference between men and women. Both Fuller and Butler attack the idea of natural order of things that cannot be challenged or changed. While Fuller challenged the inequality between sexes as God given order that no human being should try to defy, Butler challenges today's idea of natural binary division into two sexes that is seen as being factual and neutral. There exists an illusion about social reality but nothing is natural and gender is not natural either. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler demonstrates that gender is not a prerequisite for heterosexuality but that compulsory heterosexuality constantly produces the idea of two opposite sexes and heterosexual desire:

Gender can denote a unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender – where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self – and desire – where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality.

[...]

The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. (Butler:30)

In the preface of the second edition, printed in 1999 ten years after *Gender Trouble* was first published, Butler modifies her argumentation, recognising that compulsory heterosexuality is not the only element or the only factor that creates gender. What is vital is that sex or gender does not cause heterosexual desire but the other way around: heterosexuality is not the effect due to the binary construction of sex but it is a productive and regulatory practice that affects defining binary categories of sex:

[...]I do not mean to claim that forms of sexual practice produce certain genders, but only that under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality. (Butler: xii)

In Margaret Fuller's case it would be superficial and not prove worthwhile to try to separate her political ideas and transcendental ideology from each other as the very basis of Margaret Fuller's political aspirations lies in her understanding of transcendental ideology. Her political argumentation derives from transcendental theory of human nature and the world at large. Transcendentalists have been accused of being passive in relation to the social issues and problems of their era. They did not take part directly in the discussions concerning slavery, women's rights or the massacre of native Americans. Transcendentalists have been seen as theorists who were not interested in the realities and "the real world". In this sense Margaret Fuller was an exception. In order to be able to write her political *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, however, she had to leave her old social environment, the Concord circle. According to David M. Robinson, Margaret Fuller herself did not see any contradiction in combining transcendental idealism with social reform:

That she was an innovator she was painfully but proudly aware; and she did not see any conflict between her transcendental moral idealism and her political commitment to feminism. (Robinson: 95)

It is interesting to ponder on the reasons that finally made Fuller leave the Concord circle. Can the reason be found in her political aspirations i.e. would it have been too much for her fellow transcendentalists to see her combine theory with practice in such a radical manner she did? Or could it have been the very question of women's rights as such and Fuller's ultimately radical ideas on that matter that made it impossible for her to continue her writing among the contemporary male transcendentalists. There are many interpretations on the matter. The fact that a woman writes was in itself seen as a threat to men as writing women were trespassing the male sphere. This was accurate in the nineteenth century, at the time of "scribbling women"⁴ that should be kept far away from the canon of real writers (all male). Margaret Fuller herself could have been accepted as an exception to the rule but her demanding a right for all women to grow and become writers or whatever they wanted to become could have been too much. Fuller was not able to combine transcendental idealism and social reform in the social environment of Concord but outside the immediate influence of her contemporary transcendentalists.

David M. Robinson argues that we should reconsider the concept "transcendental politics" and historical consciousness in transcendentalism. According to him we can find social issues present in texts written by transcendentalist writers (p. 95). For me it is difficult to find grounds for that kind of argumentation in general especially if we compare classics written by transcendentalists with other texts of the same era (Tompkins: 147 - 185), but I

⁴ *The term that was lamentably used by Hawthorne in the 1850s. With this term he referred to women writers who had a wider audience than he and whose writings he called sentimental trash.*

totally agree with Robinson on this matter in relation to Margaret Fuller. She is an example of a transcendentalist whose texts include social engagement and historical consciousness. I do not agree with Robinson on transcendentalist political awareness in general but what he says about Margaret Fuller is indisputable:

Transcendent ideals pointed not only to otherworldly values but also to earthly abuses, and the transcendentalists' lament over such abuses served both to reaffirm those ideal values and to enliven the commitment to their realization. A complex dialectic is at work here, but in a sense each of its poles necessitates the other: the ideal demands embodiment while the process of social transformation must have the guidance of an ideal. Fuller, embodied her ideal in the commitment to self-culture, discovered that self-culture as an end required social reform as a means, that the fulfilment of woman necessitated the concerted action of women. (Robinson: 96)

Following transcendental idea of duality, Fuller sees Man including both sexes those being the two sides of the same entity. Fuller underlines the fact that we cannot separate the well-being of either but what is good for one sex is good for both: equality between sexes is beneficial for everyone:

By Man I mean both man and woman: these are the two halves of one thought. I lay no especial stress on the welfare of either. I believe that the development of the one cannot be effected without that of the other. My highest wish is that this truth should be distinctly and rationally apprehended and the conditions of life and freedom recognized as the same for the daughters and the sons of time; twin exponents of a divine thought. (Fuller: 5)

According to Fuller, there was no essential difference between men and women but the difference is an illusion due to the repression of women (lack of education, restricted access to public sphere, sexual exploitation, etc.). Her idea of an androgynous Man was extremely radical at the time and it was radical almost one hundred years later when Virginia Woolf wrote about androgyny as well as the necessity of a writer to be androgynous (Woolf 1929: 91-98). Fuller argues that in order to grow Man needs to address both the masculine and feminine side in him and develop both:

The growth of Man is two-fold: masculine and feminine. As far as these two methods can be distinguished they are so as

Energy and Harmony.

Power and Beauty.

Intellect and Love.

[...] These two sides are supposed to be expressed in man and woman, that is, as the more and less, for the faculties have not been given pure to either, but only in preponderance.

[...] There cannot be a doubt that, if these two developments were in perfect harmony, they would correspond to and fulfil one another, like hemispheres, or the tenor and bass in music. (Fuller: 99-100)

It was vital for Fuller that women would be seen to have a potential for and to be capable of intellectual work and mental activities. Severe criticism had been expressed against women's attempts to expand their traditional restricted sphere, and Fuller aimed at undermining criticism which was based on women's essential incapability to participate in "masculine activities" in the society such as politics (voting, speaking), literature (writing), religion (preaching). Fuller's argumentation for women's right to participate in new spheres in the society relied on the essential similarity of both men and women who were "the two halves of one thought" (Fuller: 5), as well as on the similarly important role of both halves in developing Man and his society. According to Fuller, women's restricted role in the society was not due to their essential inferiority but oppression conducted by men. Fuller underlines several times that the situation was not beneficial for either sex: men, too, suffered from the inequality between the sexes:

Man, in order of time, was developed first; as energy comes before harmony; power before beauty. Woman was therefore under his care as an elder. He might have been her guardian and teacher. But as human nature goes not straight forward, but by excessive action and then reaction in an undulated course, he misunderstood and abused his advantages, and became her temporal master instead of her spiritual sire. On himself came the punishment. He educated woman

more as a servant than a daughter, and found himself a king without a queen. (Fuller: 100)

But yet, his habits and his will corrupted by the past, he did not clearly see that woman was half himself, that her interests were identical with his, and that, by the law of their common being, he could never reach his true proportions while she remained in any wise shorn of hers. (Fuller: 100)

Fuller aims at convincing her readers that the question of equality is a question of “truth and justice” (p. 100). According to Fuller, equality between sexes would benefit men as well as women, and she clearly states that inequality is not the natural order of affairs but it is a mistake made by men and it must be and can be changed. She must have known that her extremely radical views would raise criticism that is based on religion and she used the religious rhetoric and the religious imagery to motivate political change (Robinson: 95). Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* includes religious categories and religious imagery throughout the text. Surely this reflects the style of writing at the time in general (among transcendentalists in particular) but it can also be seen as defence against religiously based criticism expressed in order to prevent the expansion of women’s sphere in society. Orestes Brownson’s article “Miss Fuller and Reformers” (published in April 1845 in Brownson’s Quarterly Review 2) was one of many critical articles published after *Woman of the Nineteenth Century* had appeared. In the article Brownson uses religious argumentation to deny Fuller’s ideas of equality based on transcendentalist ideas:

But God, not a man, has assigned her the appropriate sphere; and, moreover, we must be ungentle enough to question Miss Fuller’s leading doctrine of the social and political equality of the sexes. She says man is not the head of woman. We, on the authority of the Holy Ghost, say he is. The dominion was not given to woman, nor to man and woman conjointly, but to the man. Therefore the inspired apostle, while he commands husbands to love and cherish their wives, commands wives to love and obey their husbands; and even setting aside all considerations of divine inspiration St. Paul’s authority is, to say the least, equal to that of Miss Fuller. (Brownson: 215)

Fuller used religious imagery and religious rhetoric in order to avoid, as much as possible, criticism that would be based on accusations of her text and arguments being secular rather than having a religious basis. She very skilfully used the rhetoric of her opponents when she cited stories from the Bible and used the religious categories and images in her text in order to convince her readers that she was fully aware of the importance of religion in this matter. She was also capable of utilising these biblical stories to illustrate her own views; she could use the religious rhetoric against those who considered themselves the ones possessing the religious authority on earth:

Yet, by men in this country, as by the Jews, when Moses was leading them to the promised land, every thing has been done that inherited depravity could do, to hinder the promise of heaven from its fulfilment. The cross here as elsewhere, has been planted only to be blasphemed by cruelty and fraud. The name of the Prince of Peace has been profaned by all kinds of injustice toward the Gentile whom he said he came to save. But I need not speak of what has been done towards the red man, black man. Those deeds are the scoff of the world; and they have been accompanied by such pious words that the gentlest would not dare to intercede with "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Fuller: 13)

Fuller also used the religious argumentation defending women's right to pursuit self-reliance and live fully their lives without inward or outward obstacles. She wants to underline that her aspirations are not in contradiction with religion but they are in accordance with it; the emancipation of women is not a sin or against religious principles but instead of worshipping men she would be able to fully worship God:

I wish woman to live, first for God's sake. Then she will not make an imperfect man her god, and thus sink to idolatry. Then she will not take what is not fit for her from a sense of weakness and poverty. Then if she finds what she needs in man embodied, she will know how to love, and be worthy of being loved. By being more a soul, she will not be less woman, for nature is perfected through spirit. (Fuller:103)

In spite of criticism similar to Brownson's, and the power of old traditional thinking, Fuller was hopeful and optimistic. She was sure that the change would take place soon and

this would happen in her own country. She saw that situation was altering and women should step forward and take their place in the society in order to lead both sexes out of the darkness of inequality:

That now the time has come when a clearer vision and better action are possible. When man and woman may regard one another as brother and sister, the pillars of one porch, the priests of one worship. I have believed and intimated that this hope would receive an ampler fruition, than ever before, in our own land. And it will do so if this land carry out the principles from which sprang our national life. (Fuller: 101)

At the beginning of her book, Fuller reminds the reader that the very idea of America includes a promise of equality as she states that “the verbal statement has been made, ‘All men are born free and equal’ (p. 13)”. Although she is disappointed in the failure of her own country in succeeding to apply its ultimate principles she is optimistic: America is still immature and must stop violating the moral law of equality. Solving women’s rights issues is vital for America and its development: equality should be a national concern. According to Fuller, it was women’s turn to step forward and take their place in the society and contribute in its development. Men had tried and failed as their other half, that was equally important, had been missing, oppressed. It was women’s turn, not only to help themselves, but to help the whole country to develop and achieve its noble goals of equality and democracy. Fuller’s ideas were ultimately radical at the time and stayed that way long after she was gone.

2.2 The Soul’s Slavery: Chopin and Immoral Sex Fiction

Chopin was no less radical in her rebelling against “natural” order than Fuller or Butler. She shows the reader that the category called “woman” is not a singular but it consists of multiple different individuals: there is no universal female identity but different women,

different individuals. Women are not a unified group of people with similar expectations, affections and hopes – their identity is not some universal feminine identity but they are all different. This is exactly what Butler writes about as well: According to her, there does not exist some universal femininity and it is harmful to create an illusion about a coalition and unity between individuals **in advance**. Butler argues that this kind of illusory coalition is based on defining what a woman is and it is necessarily exclusionary: it is absolutely sure that this kind of false unity will exclude part of the people it aims to protect. The aim at defining what a woman is, and all women are, can be seen through history. In the field of feminism this is understandable, as women needed to unite in order to create solidarity that would provide the basis for fighting against oppression. However, it may be harmful to the whole idea of emancipation itself to define “woman” in advance and leave out all those who do not “fit”: the “liberator” then uses the same violent, hierarchical and oppressive means as other ideologies aiming at define the categories of gender.

I believe that Kate Chopin was familiar with Margaret Fuller’s text as well as transcendental ideology in general. The reader is provided with an image of Edna reading Emerson’s text in *The Awakening* (p. 73). Emerson and his fellow transcendentalists underlined self-reliance and self-development, and Fuller added to that an equal right for women to develop and become fully themselves. Unlike many transcendentalists who focused on extreme individualism, Fuller argued that development and growth aiming at the self-reliance of an individual is not possible unless an equal opportunity to pursue self-development is given to every individual alike, including women.

We can clearly see the influence of transcendental ideology in Chopin’s text. She writes about Edna “seeking herself” (p. 52) and “becoming herself” (p. 57). Even the concept of “transformation” is mentioned in a scene where Doctor Mandelot has arrived to observe

Edna to find out what is wrong with her (p. 70). It is obvious that there is a connection between Chopin's and Fuller's texts. They discuss the same issue, and argue for the same principles, but they do it from different points of view: whereas Chopin takes an individual and describes her struggle against the obstacles hindering her possibilities to become herself, Fuller writes about the same issue on a much more general level. I claim, however, that both texts are equally political, and they were equally radical at the time they were published. Although *The Awakening* was published over fifty years after Fuller's text in 1899, it was still radical enough to create a storm of controversy and to leave Kate Chopin with a role of a social outcast.

Although Kate Chopin had managed to support herself and her family as a professional writer and her Local Color texts were appreciated by contemporary readers, these previous achievements did not save her from public disgrace that *The Awakening* brought onto her. Her novel was labelled by reviewers with terms such as "poison", "immoral sex fiction" and "unhealthy" (Toth: 222). Despite a few positive reviews that saw Chopin's text as a useful warning of immoral conduct, she had few supporters. After *The Awakening* was widely condemned, Chopin's publisher cancelled her third short-story collection. She died in 1904 as a forgotten writer and her texts were not published for sixty seven years until the second-wave feminists found her text among other women writers' texts that had also been forgotten for decades. Chopin had never been included in the canon – her text was not allowed near it. Jane Tompkins opens up the American canon and the whole process of canonising a writer in her book *Sensational Designs. The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790 – 1860*. The exclusion from the canon did not concern Chopin only but all women writers of that era. Although women writers dominated the literary scene in the mid-

nineteenth century, their names had disappeared from the American literary history (Jung:223).

Why did Chopin's book create such a strong reaction in contemporary readers – both men and women? It seems that just like Fuller with her text fifty years earlier, Chopin had rebelled against the natural order. This time both religion and Darwinist ideas that had appeared in America, were challenged. In both ideologies gender was defined through binary opposition of male and female and their roles were strictly segregated. As Butler suggests, the binary opposition itself is a masculine construction, it is necessarily a political and hierarchical construction that is mistakenly comprehended as a natural fact instead of socially constructed fantasy: Chopin illustrates in her text how there is no clear-cut boundaries between sexual identities between men and women but we create and produce our gender, performing repeated acts. The repetition of acts constitutes an illusion of a constant, steady sexual identity that we understand as a factual, natural phenomenon although there does not exist such a thing. We have consented to play certain roles, performances in order to participate in that illusion. Chopin shows the reader that it is possible to wake up, to renounce oneself from that illusion but it is costly

But again, why was Kate Chopin, a woman who defied social and sexual conventions, condemned by her contemporaries in such a severe manner? Judith Butler describes how gender works: we have to perform our gender right or we will be punished by the society. This is what happened to both the real Mrs. Chopin and the fictional Mrs. Pontellier. They had to pay for their wrong role play and crossing the boundaries that were not allowed to be overcome. The women trespassed, imitated their gender in a wrong, unacceptable way and were punished:

[...] as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what “humanizes” individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right. Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress. (Butler: 178).

Chopin defended herself only once against the critics condemning her work as immoral sex fiction and poison. Jarlath Killeen argues in her article that in her response to severe criticism towards *The Awakening*, Chopin is confused and wants to “distance herself from her infamous novel and its notorious heroine” (Killeen: 415). In this respect I must disagree with Killeen: Chopin did not “plead ignorance in her defence” (Killeen: 415). In Chopin’s words that were published in *Book News* we can hear her pure irony. In her response, she shows us what kind of moral and hypocritical restrictions existed and how all the ‘dangerous’ and unpredictable individuals should be treated as outcasts. Here she refers both to herself and Mrs. Pontellier. Anyone defying the existing norms of morality should be excluded from literature (like Mrs. Pontellier) and society (Chopin herself). Chopin’s irony is sharp and revealing:

Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnations as she did. If I had had a slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was then too late. (quoted in Killeen: 415)

3. Mental Slavery and Beyond: Inward and Outward Obstacles

Marriage as an oppressive institution that concerned every woman in the nineteenth century, provides us with a good starting point to explore restrictions that limited women's sphere in America at the time. The analogy between slavery and the woman's role was one way for Fuller to illustrate the mental slavery, the intellectual control that limited women's life (Fuller:18 – 20). According to Fuller, marriage as such an institution as it then existed, was an enslaving mechanism. She devoted to the analysis of marriage a great deal of her book, as the question of marriage concerned every woman at the time – married or not married. Fuller demanded that women should be the legal equals of men, and that they should not be forced to marry, not by physical force or on financial grounds or in any other way. Neither should women marry when they were too young. Unmarried women were in many ways outcasts of the society without protection or financial independence – their whole life and future was dependent on the institution of marriage. As long as women were made dependent on their husbands and the institution of marriage, they would be vulnerable; they could not be themselves, develop, and achieve self-reliance. Thus the institution of marriage was constituting an outside obstacle to women's growth: only marriage would give women protection in the society, but when women married they became property of their husbands:

A profound thinker has said, "no married woman can represent the female world, for she belongs to her husband. The idea of woman must be represented by a

virgin.”⁵ *But this is the very fault of marriage, and of the present relation between the sexes, that the woman does belong to the man, instead of forming a whole with him. Were it otherwise, there would be no such limitation to the thought. Woman, self-centred, would never be absorbed by any relation; it would be only an experience to her as to man. It is a vulgar error that love, a love to woman is her whole existence; she also is born for Truth and Love in their universal energy. (Fuller: 103 – 104)*

Describing the outside obstacles of self-reliance, those arbitrary barriers, Fuller even compared the position of women with that of slaves. Women were commodities, slaves that were controlled from outside. This was an effective if an extreme image:

Knowing that there exists in the minds of men a tone of feeling towards women as towards slaves, such as is expressed in the common phrase, “Tell that to women and children,” that the infinite soul can only work through them in already ascertained limits; that the gift of reason, man’s highest prerogative, is allotted to them in much lower degree; that they must be kept from mischief and melancholy by being constantly engaged in active labor, which is to be furnished and directed by those better able to think, &c. &c. (Fuller: 18)

As the friend of the negro assumes that one man cannot by right, hold another in bondage, so should the friend of woman assume that man cannot, by right, lay even well-meant restrictions on woman. (Fuller: 20)

In *The Awakening*, Chopin creates an image of Edna’s role as a property belonging to her husband. Edna’s husband sees his wife as a part of his possessions, and he is interested in her in the same way he is interested in his other valuable objects he has managed to include in his belongings with hard work and good business management. In this sense, Chopin goes even further than Fuller does with her extreme comparison of women and slaves: Chopin compares women with inanimate objects:

“What a folly! to bathe at such an hour in such heat!” exclaimed Mr. Pontellier. He himself had taken a plunge at daylight. That was why the morning seemed long to him. “You have burnt beyond recognition,” he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of property which has suffered some damage. She held up her hands, strong, shapely hands, and surveyed them critically, drawing up her

⁵ From Wordsworth’s “Laodamia”.

lawn sleeves above the wrists. Looking at them reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach. She silently reached out to him, and he understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm. (pp. 2-3)

Mr. Pontellier was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details, to see that nothing was amiss. He greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain – no matter what – after he had bought it and placed it among his household gods.

[...] Mrs. Pontellier did not wear her usual Tuesday reception gown; she was in ordinary house dress. Mr. Pontellier, who was observant about such things, noticed it, as he served the soup and handed it to the boy in waiting. “Tired out, Edna?” (p. 50)

Chopin describes Edna’s marriage to Leonce Pontellier as a pure “accident” (p. 18). Edna’s marriage is not based on any romantic notions, but rather on an agreement of both spouses to carry out their duties in their common enterprise. Their relationship describes well the time when the rigid gender-role differentiation had led to the emotional segregation of women and men. The culture allowed close and intimate relations inside the same sex but left women and men to live in separate realities, in the separate worlds (Smith-Rosenberg: 372). Edna must contribute to the marriage her female share and her husband is responsible for the male sphere. Her value is in her carrying out her duties as a woman i.e. the duties that were considered to be natural for women: being a wife and a mother. A woman’s worth was measured in her success in taking care of her duties as a wife and a mother. And according to her husband, Edna was not succeeding very well:

He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother’s place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them. He talked in a monotonous, insistent way. (p. 5)

At the time these two roles were generally considered to be enough for women. Women should focus on those two roles of private life and leave the public arena to men. The idea of

separate spheres for women and men in the society was seen as being natural and the system was defended with religious argumentation. The system where both sexes had their own lots and spheres was seen as the only possible, natural order: that was how God intended it to be. According to Fuller's critics, it would be harmful for both sexes to disturb that natural God's order. To argue against that system would be arguing against God:

In the distribution of the several spheres of social and domestic action, woman has assigned to her one sphere, and man another; both equally important, equally honourable. This therefore is no cause of complaint. – But who assigned her this sphere? Has she given her consent to be confined to it? Has she ever been consulted? her assent asked? – And what if not? Who assigned man his sphere? was his assent asked or obtained? Their appropriate spheres are allotted to man and woman by their Creator, and all they have to do is to submit, as quietly, and with as good a grace, as they can. Miss Fuller thinks that it is man who has crowded woman one side, and refused her full scope for self-development; and although the sphere in which she moves may really be that most appropriate to her, yet man has no right to confine her to it, and forbid her to take another if she prefer it. She should be as free to decide her own destiny as man is his. All very plausible. But God and not man, has assigned her the appropriate sphere. (Brownson: 215)

Fuller and Chopin relate women to slaves and inanimate objects. In addition to that, they both take up the way men talk to women as they talk to children. Chopin illustrates this in the manner Mr. Pontellier talks to his wife and scolds her like a child who is misbehaving:

“Out! exclaimed her husband, with something like genuine consternation in his voice as he laid down the vinegar cruets and looked at her through his glasses. “Why, what could have taken you out on Tuesday⁶? What did you have to do?”

“Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out.”

“Well, I hope you left some suitable excuse,” said her husband [...] “Why my dear, I should think you’d understand by this time that people don’t do such things; we’ve got to observe les convenances if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession. If you felt that you had to leave home this afternoon, you should

⁶ Mrs. Pontellier should have stayed at home every Tuesday due to the upper middle class habit of reserving an afternoon to receive visitors.

have left some suitable explanation for your absence. This soup is really impossible; it's strange that woman hasn't learned yet to make a decent soup."[...]

"You used to think that the cook was a treasure" returned Edna, indifferently.

(pp. 50-52)

In the scene where Mr. Pontellier meets Doctor Mandelet in order to find out about the possible insanity of his wife, the men agree on the fact that "most women are moody and whimsical" (p. 66), and it is impossible for rational men to understand women. Fuller does the same as Chopin above, extending her analogy of slavery and women's rights. Fuller writes that oppression does not produce women, but under suppressive circumstances a woman becomes "an overgrown child" (Fuller: 103). According to Fuller, women are treated as naturally inferior to men, less intelligent and childish.

In order to contribute to the development of America and the whole world, women should first find themselves. Their mission had been blurred by tradition, their minds were confused in their restricted sphere and those who wanted more felt angry and frustrated inside the limited sphere where the barriers and obstacles prevented them from being fully themselves. There was no harmony, no balance. Fuller was convinced that women have to find the answers and harmony themselves – men can (and must) only remove the outside obstacles, women have to transform and find their inner self-poise:

I believe that, at present, women are the best helpers of one another. Let them think; let them act; till they know what they need. We only ask of men to remove arbitrary barriers. Some would like to do more. But I believe it needs for woman to show herself in her native dignity, to teach them how to aid her; their minds are so encumbered by tradition. (Fuller: 101)

According to Fuller, American women had the right to develop self-reliance and they were able to do that transforming themselves. But they were controlled from outside as well as inside. Women had lost harmony with themselves and others as a consequence of

oppression. Marriage, restricted roles, sexual exploitation, etc. had made them lose themselves. Fuller demanded that men would remove “arbitrary barriers” (p. 101) but women should transform themselves, to free themselves from tradition and the inside obstacles of development and self-reliance.

In addition to criticism towards marriage, Fuller also noted that we should pay careful attention on how we raise girls. Restrictions that concern women can be seen already in their childhood. According to Fuller, we must not limit girls’ sphere if we want them to become self-reliant women: restrictions for women make their life miserable and limitations for girls make them suffer:

In families that I know, some little girls like to saw wood, others to use carpenters’ tools. Where these tastes are indulged, cheerfulness and good humour are promoted. Where they are forbidden, because “such things are not proper for girls,” they grow sullen and mischievous. (Fuller: 102)

Brownson had it right when he wrote that “Miss Fuller would have all offices, professions, callings, pursuits thrown open to woman as to man” (p. 215). Margaret Fuller did not see any essential impediments why women could not freely choose their careers and professions. She was convinced that women were intellectually and otherwise equally capable of succeeding in any profession. From her idea of the androgynous Man logically followed that either sex could successfully function in any sphere of society only regulated by their own wishes and interests. She did not argue that women should not choose to be mothers and wives; she wanted all women to choose themselves how they wanted to live their lives. She even estimated that one third of all women would choose a profession outside the traditional women’s sphere (p. 102). Once again she is not talking about only women’s opportunities but men’s as well; according to Fuller there were men whose feminine side was stronger than masculine as well as women whose masculine side was

stronger than the feminine side. She demanded freedom for Man to develop not women to abandon their traditional roles just for the sake of it:

I have no doubt, however, that a large proportion of women would give themselves to the same employment as now, because there are circumstances that must lead them. Mothers will delight to make the nest soft and warm. Nature would take care of that; no need to clip the wings of any bird that wants to soar and sing, or finds in itself the strength of pinion for a migratory flight unusual to its kind. The difference would be that all need not be constrained to employments, for which some are unfit. (Fuller: 103)

When she wrote that women would have “every arbitrary barrier thrown down” and “every path laid open to woman as freely as to man” (p. 20) she really meant every barrier and every path. That women could take part in any public sphere they wanted, was an ultimately radical idea at the time when women were not even allowed to speak in public. This restriction made it impossible for women to access the political sphere and it constituted a problem for activists of the anti-slavery movement who often were women, and of course to women who would have wanted to improve women’s rights: they were not heard because they were not even allowed to speak. Margaret Fuller demanded that women should have a right to pursue any employment they wanted: masculine or feminine:

But if you ask me what offices they may fill; I reply – any. I do not care what case you put; let them be sea-captains, if you will. I do not doubt there are women well fitted for such an office, and, if so, I should be glad to see them in it [...] (p. 102)

Edna was one of the unfits. Or I would rather call her a misfit. She was “different from the crowd” (p. 14), “not one of us” (p. 19). As Chopin writes: “Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman” (p. 8). Mother-women are described by Chopin in a sarcastic manner, and she suggests that all women are not “mother-women”. At the time, however, these devoted mothers and wives were considered as ideal women who deserved to be worshipped. They would provide an example also to those women who were not equally good mothers; who were not performing their roles with equal success. Chopin deliberately uses the term “role”

in relation to mother-women: it is not a real person, a real woman, but a woman acting a role she is supposed to act:

The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious blood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. Many of them were delicious in the rôle; one of them was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm. If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. (p. 8)

It was difficult for a woman to avoid motherhood in the nineteenth century and for married women it was almost impossible. Married women were obliged to become mothers in order to produce children carrying their father's name. It was also impossible to control one's body as there was no reliable contraception available, and the church did not accept any of the methods that were available then. Despite the idea that gender is only a construct, that aspect of sex was determined for women at the time. She could object to being forced into the mother-woman mould, but biology and society forced her to become a mother. Having said that, the role of the mother-woman still is one way to perform female gender. Butler argues that gender is not something we are but gender is doing, repeated acts, a performance. Mothers playing and performing their roles in *The Awakening* are producing their gender. According to Butler, gender is purely a performance not an essence:

[...] the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this "action" is a public action. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame – an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject.

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follows; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in

time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. (Butler: 178-179)

Edna is not willing to follow the mother-women's example. She is a misfit. Or rather the roles offered to her do not fit her. She is restless, missing something more than she has, "life's delirium":

Edna felt depressed rather than soothed after leaving them. The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle, - a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium. Edna vaguely wondered what she meant by "life's delirium". It has crossed her thought like some unsought, extraneous impression. (p. 56)

A mother-woman's life does not interest Edna but she is more interested in the life of an outcast artist, Mademoiselle Reisz whom nobody likes. Edna feels like she could find something she is missing with Mademoiselle Reisz. She would like to know if she could become an artist. But Mademoiselle Reisz warns her: in order to become an artist one needs to have the courageous soul, "the soul that dares and defies" (p. 64). But as many times before in her life, Edna returns to "the world of reality" (p. 18). When Edna finally ends up in the sea determined to end her own life, she feels disappointed in her inability to overcome her own pretensions, inward obstacles for development:

How Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed, perhaps sneered, if she knew! "And you call yourself an artist! What pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies." Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her. (p. 116)

Edna has found herself: she has woken up from a dream (p. 111-112). In the end it is not the outward obstacles that destroy her, but the inward ones. She is not capable of leaving behind her role as a mother. It is not that she would love her children too much to be able to leave them, but after being present at Adèle's childbirth, she is once more taken back to the

real world. There is no escape for her: she has to “think of the children” (p. 112). She is always a mother; the children have won. Edna could have left her husband and home, as well as Robert. The weak men characters of the novel are no obstacle for Edna – the men in the book are presented as weak to the extent of ridicule. Marriage and romance are both obstacles that she could have overcome in order to become herself. But children are too much; the role of Mother is invincible:

“But I don’t want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others – but no matter – still, I shouldn’t want to trample upon the little lives.” (p. 112)

Still, she remembered Adèle’s voice whispering, “Think of the children; think of them.” She meant to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound (p. 112)

We can once more observe the difference between the mother-woman Adèle and her friend Edna, who is not capable of hiding behind the role of the mother, but is becoming something beyond that role. She is painfully becoming herself. When Adèle whispers to Edna that she must think of the children (p. 111) and when Edna later repeats her words, they are talking about two different things: they see mothering from totally different perspectives. For Edna being a mother means that she cannot win the children, they are always there, existing; there is no way out. As she once explained to Adèle on the beach, she could die for her children but not give herself for them. Her words were inconceivable to Adèle, the mother-woman:

“I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn’t give myself. I can’t make it more clear; it’s only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me.”

“I don’t know what you would call the essential, or what you mean by the unessential,” said Madame Ratignolle, cheerfully; “but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that – your Bible tells you so. I’m sure I couldn’t do more than that.” (p. 47)

The children would never let Edna be herself: as a mother she would always belong to her children, not to herself. It is not the children *per se* and their claims and needs that is the ultimate burden for Edna, but the fact that they exist, the fact that she has children, she is a mother, makes her unable to live a life fully as herself. The responsibility that arrives along with the children is exhausting:

She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them. The year before they had spent part of the summer with their grandmother Pontellier in Iberville. Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense longing. Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her. (p. 18)

The image of slavery emerges once again when Edna describes her relation to her children. Whereas Fuller used the image of slavery to illustrate women's relation to men (Fuller:18), Chopin extends the metaphor to include the children. It would be possible for Edna to disengage from the marriage, but it is the role of Mother that is suffocating her:

She understood now clearly that what she had meant long ago when she said to Adèle Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children. Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach. (p. 115)

The description of Adele's painful childbirth is an extremely meaningful and important image in Chopin's attempt to illustrate the reasons for Edna's destruction. Chopin suggests that the new norms of Nature, science and biology that were emerging with Darwin (*The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* was published in 1871), were just as restrictive and binding as the old religious norms basing on Man as God's creation had been.

For a woman there is no escape: her role is always dictated in advance. Ideologies may vary but it is the definite roles that are given to each sex that leaves her, the misfit, with no other choice than suicide. She cannot free herself but she cannot live in this restricted role either. Edna's awakening that has been taking place until the point she witnesses her friend's agony in childbirth, is nothing compared with the awakening she experiences beside Adele's bed when she realises that there is no escape for her. I agree with Jarlath Killeen on the fact that it is the motherhood and Edna's determined, inescapable role as a mother that finally makes her choose destruction over meaningless, biologically determined life as a reproductive tool programmed genetically in advance:

To think of the children, and to submit oneself fully to the logic inherent in Darwin's ideologies of survival, is ultimately to give oneself over to a natural process over which you have little control over and which ultimately controls you. Darwinism offers only an illusory freedom. A world without deities appears to offer the possibility to construct our lives at will: this is what Edna believes is open to her at first. However, at the birth scene a different interpretation of reality is on offer. If we accept Darwin at his word, then we are automatons of survival, mere genetic repositories with only one desire, the desire to recreate ourselves. The path out of dilemma, the text suggests, is to reassert control in the only way we know how: through taking our own life. If Edna is to think of the children she will indeed confront the very fact of her own inescapable helplessness. Despite the rhetoric of emancipation that surrounds the text, at the end Edna discovers that she is no freer than she was at the beginning. (Killeen: 418)

In the novel we can witness Edna rebelling against contemporary conventions and norms that were based on capitalism (women as the objects of exchange) and what was seen as socially accepted behaviour including rituals such as Tuesdays for visitors, and the norms that regulated womanhood (no gambling or artistic ambitions). The rebellion against these norms is possible and that rebellion creates an illusion of escape, of a possibility to free oneself from restrictive and oppressive patterns of behaviour. The struggle against these norms does not kill Edna, but it is the struggle against Nature that destroys her. The order of nature as well as the order of God are both seen as being equally restrictive and oppressive

in Chopin's novel. All systems and categories that inevitably determine our position in the universe and society are repressive, and there is no such thing as a natural order in a sense that every order we create is political not natural. Surely there cannot exist an ideology, including Darwinism or Christianity that could be neutral or non-political. What seems to be natural is naturalized and only seems to be neutral. Although this fact has been recognised by many researchers before Judith Butler (for example Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* 1957), Judith Butler brilliantly reminds us about the importance of questioning all that is seen as or treated as 'natural' around us. According to Butler, the category of sex is not natural but naturalised and it is not neutral but political, serving political and economic purposes of the institution of heterosexuality. Butler questions the whole concept of solid identity, an individual "before the law" waiting to be determined:

There is no ontology of gender on which we might construct a politics, for gender determining what qualities as intelligible sex, invoking and consolidating the reproductive constraints on sexuality, setting the prescriptive requirements whereby sexed or gendered bodies come into cultural intelligibility. Ontology is, thus, not a foundation, but a normative injunction that operates insidiously by installing itself into political discourse as its necessary ground. (Butler: 189)

Any ideology that implies fixed identities, identities that are determined in advance, must be questioned. These naturalized identities are phantasmatic, not 'real', 'factic' or 'natural'. We have discussed the norms of God's order and the natural necessities of Darwinism that have been seen as neutral and real. Butler shows us that the whole idea of binary opposition is in itself restrictive and political. Our need to split the world into seemingly natural categories and naturalise those categories without even seeing the political and hierarchic nature of these oppositions produces our idea of ourselves and makes us perform our identity or role as expected by repeating gestures and rituals that we think are inherent and

natural. She also shows us that it is not only religious categories that work that way. She criticises feminist ideology for the same reason:

The feminist “we” is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent. (Butler: 181)

Butler shows in her text that even deconstructivists like Lacan create systems that determine individuals in advance and she analytically shows us that these new systems are equally enslaving as the old that aimed at determining what is a ‘woman’ or what is a ‘man’. Butler herself relates Lacan’s idea of the Symbolic order to that of God’s order and criticizes Lacan for his religious idealization and romanticization of his theory. She manages to illuminate our need to create explanations that define us and our position religiously or otherwise:

The dialectic between a juridical imperative that cannot be fulfilled and an inevitable failure “before the law” recalls the tortured relationship between the God of the Old Testament and those humiliated servants who offer their obedience without reward. That sexuality now embodies this religious impulse in the form of the demand for love (considered to be an “absolute” demand) that is distinct from both need and desire [...] lends further credibility to the Symbolic as that which operates for human subjects as the inaccessible but all-determining deity.

This structure of religious tragedy in Lacanian theory effectively undermines any strategy of cultural politics to configure an alternative imaginary for the play of desires. If the Symbolic guarantees the failure of the tasks it commands, perhaps its purposes, like those of the Old Testament God, are altogether unteleological – not the accomplishment of some goal, but obedience and suffering to enforce the “subject’s” sense of limitation “before the law”. There is, of course, the comic side to this drama that is revealed through the disclosure of the permanent impossibility of the realization of identity. But even this comedy is the inverse expression of an enslavement to the God that it claims to be unable to overcome.

Lacanian theory must be understood as a kind of “slave morality”. (Butler: 72)

Butler’s criticism towards Lacanian theory is accurate and important also in a broader sense. According to Butler, we have to see that the natural, non-political system is

impossible as long as we see the binary opposition of gender as the cause and sexuality as an effect. She argues that gender is not a neutral, fixed and permanent identity that causes heterosexual behaviour, but heterosexuality seen as the only (seemingly) natural and normal pattern of sexual behaviour affects the way we conceive our gender and how we accept to perform it. If we see 'men' and 'women' as political categories and not as 'natural' facts we can question the whole idea of binary opposition of sex and gender. There is nothing neutral or natural concerning our attempts to define gender – was not in the nineteenth century or is today (as Butler writes pp. 135 – 141). Seeing gender as a repetition of performative acts and doing not as a permanent identity makes it possible to challenge oppressive and hierarchic categories and see beyond them

Edna's last thoughts reveal to the reader the utter impossibility for her to live as someone's property, belonging to someone else. She could not do that after finding herself, after she has woken up from a dull dream of her previous life. It is impossible to go back to the old life after realizing its emptiness and lack of meaning. Chopin implies that it is a role play after all that regulates our lives. People play roles that they are expected to play, just like mother-women: Tuesday receptions, dinners, mothering as a spectacle before the audience judging the actors. Edna was not like others and in the end she refused to play. She did not want to live a life like that and anything else seemed impossible:

She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end.

Her arms and legs were growing tired.

She thought of Léonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul. (pp. 115-116)

4. Conclusion

In my thesis I have attempted to show that in *Woman of the Nineteenth Century* Margaret Fuller combined social reform with the transcendental ideology. Unlike her fellow transcendentalists who underlined extreme individualism, Fuller argued that development and growth aiming at the self-reliance of an individual is not possible unless an equal opportunity to pursue self-development is given to every individual alike. Individual self-reliance and harmony is not possible without changing the social reality that is based on oppression of others. According to Fuller, women had a crucial role not only in developing and transforming themselves but also in developing the whole country and leading America away from its immature state that was based on oppression and slavery, back to its noble principles. Margaret Fuller was convinced that all obstacles, inside and outside, should be and could be removed, and all spheres of life should be opened up for both sexes. As there is no essential difference between the sexes either one could function successfully in any sphere one wishes to enter.

I have also attempted to present Kate Chopin's ideas expressed in *The Awakening* about the impossibility for women to expand their sphere and roles in the society in the nineteenth century. There existed inward and outward obstacles for women's self-development. The restrictive roles of a wife and a mother prevented them being anything else. There is an interesting connection between the two texts; Fuller presents the public and general side of the issues whereas Chopin presents the same issues in the private level. They both take up obstacles that prohibit women from developing and finding self-reliance. They argue that

marriage as well as the role of Mother hinder women from becoming fully themselves. Women have assumed their roles so deeply that their own pretensions create an inward obstacle for development. They are unable to detach themselves from norms and prejudices that govern in the society. According to Chopin and Fuller, removing the outward obstacles is not enough; women themselves have to destroy the inward obstacles.

Fuller and Chopin shocked their contemporaries in the nineteenth century by questioning something that was considered natural and normal. Butler has shaken our beliefs about “normal” and “natural” today. She is just as radical in her analysis of gender as the two female writers were in the nineteenth century. Her rebelling against all structures that aim at defining individuals as subjects before the law waiting to be determined in advance and forever, has been groundbreaking. It seems that inward and outward obstacles that were described by Fuller and Chopin have not totally ceased to exist but they transform. According to Fuller, we have to see beyond ideologies and recognise the oppressive mechanisms that we allow to restrict us. There is no such thing as “natural” when we discuss gender.

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