

The Second Generation: Ednah Dow Cheney Carries Margaret Fuller's Feminist Transcendentalism into the Early Progressive Era

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In the nineteenth century, the Transcendentalist and women's movements combined to alter the discussion on the politics of womanhood, developing creative space for progressive individuals to actively make change in the expansion of human rights. Ednah Dow Cheney, a young widow and single mother in the mid-1850s, merged the spirit of Transcendentalism that she inherited from her family and friends and her burgeoning passion for social activism to become a dedicated public servant. An early attendee of the Conversations of Margaret Fuller, author of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and a pioneer in the field of feminist Transcendentalism, Cheney borrowed Fuller's radical ideas and translated them into real action. Throughout the second half of the 1850s and into the early twentieth century, Cheney founded the New England School of Design and the New England Women's Club and managed the New England Hospital for Women and Children, the Boston Education Commission of the Freedmen's Aid Society, and lectured for the New England Suffrage Association and the Concord School of Philosophy. More significantly, she continued through the century to become a feminist intellectual in Fuller's vein.

Despite the crucial role that Cheney played in running such prominent organizations in an environment that was particularly restrictive for women, her story has been left largely overlooked by recent scholarship. Anne Rose's 1981 book, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850*, provides a starting point for conversation on the application of Transcendentalism not just as a philosophical movement, but also as a theory that gave way to activism; however, the book also ends at the very point where the writings of Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson were absorbed and carried to social involvement by the second generation of Transcendentalists, which included individuals such

as Ednah Dow Cheney, Caroline Healey Dall, and Julia Ward Howe. Moreover, while Therese B. Dykeman's scholarship on Cheney in *Presenting Women Philosophers, American Women Philosophers 1650-1930* and in several articles demonstrate the influence of Cheney's writings on the histories of American aesthetics, it provides little insight on the social impact that Cheney had in New England and in the Reconstruction, postwar south. Finally, although scholarship has significantly picked up on the influence of key female Transcendentalists, such as Margaret Fuller, the role of the second generation of Transcendentalists, Cheney's generation, in bringing Transcendentalist thought into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through social activism remains partially explored by Tiffany Wayne and Phyllis Cole. Therefore, this paper is an effort to recover a new piece of the history of the Transcendentalist movement, which has been assumed to have ended by the 1850s, through the life of Ednah Dow Cheney. Cheney, influenced by the teachings of Margaret Fuller, applied Transcendentalist philosophy into direct social action; in this way, she extended the Transcendentalist movement into the early twentieth century and furthered the feminist movement in her own way by challenging the commonly held gender roles of the time.

Cheney's collision into Fuller's world came with the support of her parents and grandparents, who were liberal enough to take their daughter to hear Emerson. In her autobiography, *Reminiscences of Ednah Dow Cheney (Born Littlehale)*, Cheney recalled that one of her first experiences with Transcendentalism was when she, in her early teens between the years of 1840-1850, was "at a lecture before the society 'for the diffusion of knowledge,' which [she] attended with [her] father and mother" (*Reminiscences* 99). It was around this time that she was also attending classes to study Plato and Dante; Cheney noted that Amos Bronson Alcott, abolitionist and women's rights advocate, would often join her classes and engage with her peers with their readings (*Reminiscences* 100). Even from the time when she was a child, Cheney had learned to appreciate a rather unorthodox spiritual lifestyle; her own grandmother "never joined the popular church, and read Emerson and Parker with great enjoyment" at a time when Transcendentalism was vilified and perceived as an "elite" and exclusive club (*Reminiscences* 3). Cheney's father, Sargent Smith Littlehale, was also a prominent figure in Cheney's life, as she claimed that he was "very liberal in his views...and was a believer in

Woman Suffrage at a very early date. The first anti-slavery word that I ever heard was from him” (Reminiscences 4). Exposure to her father’s progressive beliefs set the initial stepping stones for Cheney’s subsequent life as an activist for freedmen and women in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, her involvement in the Freedmen’s Aid Bureau, which she was the secretary of in the headquarters in Boston, could have stemmed from her childhood experience living on a diverse street that was inhabited by a variety of individuals from different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. She recalled that Belknap Street, where she lived after her parents were married in 1819, expanded into several sections; the upper part was:

often called Joy Place...Here were some of the finest houses and most ‘swell’ people in the city. In the middle part were families of good standing, and in this part was our house, where I was born. The lower part was almost entirely occupied by colored people, who streamed by our house, and gave us children that familiarity with this people which, thank God, has prevented me from having any difficulty in recognizing the ‘negro as a man and a brother’ (Reminiscences 7). Cheney’s childhood environment and her rich connections to the Transcendentalist society through her family provided the perfect breeding grounds for a strong life of intellect and activism. As her colleague, Julia Ward Howe, writes on Cheney, “The home atmosphere was favorable to mental growth. Love of learning, with a taste for good literature, was an inheritance” (Howe 8).

Cheney moved on to reflect on her mother and her network of friends; one particular acquaintance of her mother stood out: Mary Ann Haliburton. Daughter of a bank officer in New Hampshire, Haliburton met Ednah Parker Dow when they were young children; their relationship grew throughout the years, as the two companions engaged in intellectual discussions and were involved in the various literary societies of the time (Reminiscences 27). Cheney was especially inspired by Haliburton’s story following her father’s remarriage after his wife’s premature death. Violently opposed to the remarriage, Haliburton left her home: “At last she came to the resolution to leave home and support herself by teaching drawing, for which she had some talent. But she had a brother then in business in New York who was scandalized at the idea that his sister should work for her support” (Reminiscences 27). Finally, Haliburton was convinced by her brother to leave her work and live off of a monthly allowance from her brother for the

remaining years of her life. Cheney’s exposure to such a radical-minded woman combined with Haliburton’s own return to domestic life further shaped Cheney’s understanding of the restrictive state of women in society. As a widow and an eventual mother of a deceased child, Cheney reflected back at her relationship with Haliburton and fondly remembered that Haliburton had always said that she “wished she had been born a widow with one child; for she thought it was the most ‘independent position for a woman’” (Reminiscences 28). But, more than anything Cheney writes that she is “greatly indebted to [Mary Ann Haliburton], not only for a great deal of intellectual stimulus and social enjoyments, but especially because Haliburton introduced her “to two of the most precious friends of my life...Margaret Fuller and Mary Shannon” (Reminiscences 28).

Over the summers, Cheney would visit the prestigious Exeter Academy in New Hampshire where she would attend lectures given by Emerson and would also build intellectual friendships that would introduce her to the early British Romantic poets. In this early era of her life, she was acquainted with Mary Shannon whom Cheney described as “broad and progressive in her thought, a dear and honored friend of John Weiss, Samuel Johnson, and Theodore Parker, an original member of the Free Religious Association, an active Abolitionist, a friend of the Freedman’s schools, and a thorough Woman Suffragist” (Reminiscences 55). She also made acquaintance with Harriot Kezia Hunt whom, she claimed, “was among the most remarkable and characteristic of pioneers of women physicians” (Reminiscences 51). In the coming years, Cheney and Hunt would work together to found the Women’s School of Design in Boston. The connections Cheney developed at Exeter Academy remained with her throughout her career and were crucial in fostering in her a sense of romanticism combined with the practical notion of activism.

At the ripe age of thirteen, between November 1837 and February 1838, Ednah Dow Littlehale (later Cheney) and her classmate Caroline Healey (later Dall) engaged in a debate on the position and rights of women in society. Margaret McFadden explores this correspondence in “Boston Teenagers Debate the Woman Question, 1837-1838,” stating that while Cheney’s strategy was to “deemphasize differences between the sexes, as a matter of justice in light of their common humanity,” Caroline Dall claimed that “women are different from men, and these differences give them

strength and power in different separate areas. Abandoning those separate spheres will denigrate women, take away their power, and make them 'mannish' instead of 'ladylike'" (McFadden 837). McFadden also notes that the strong education that the two girls received were vital in the development of a "'feminist' consciousness" and that both individuals relied on the "vocabulary and ideas of the Enlightenment and liberal Protestantism—belief in human value, egalitarianism, and women's worth" to structure their arguments (McFadden 841). These early debates reveal a rare glimpse of Cheney's life before her marriage and before her meeting with Margaret Fuller. Even beyond Cheney's bold and radical assertions on the rights of women in the political sphere and her call for civil disobedience ("If we don't have a hand in making laws, I don't think we ought to obey them"), these early writings bring out her inherently ambitious character. Dall had evidently expressed to Cheney that fame would not bring happiness as much as it would bring misery and that women should refrain from seeking fame; in response, Cheney furiously wrote, "Many thanks Carry for this good advice, but I think it will go up to the moon, for I have not the least idea of following it. I may sink down into obscurity, I may become a humble member of society, but it will not be willingly. While I live my powers shall be devoted to a different purpose" (McFadden 841-42). She even declared that "I never intend to be married" and that "I shall not have any husband or children to take care of...I am equal to the men, and not superior to them. I am a slave until I am free" (McFadden 845). Perhaps it was because of this early, independent thinking that she was not married until the age of 29.

About three years after the debates between Cheney and Dall, in 1841, the two young women attended Margaret Fuller's "Conversations," which had a profound impact on their modes of thinking later in their lives. Over fifty years later, in 1895, Cheney would recall in a "Lecture Given at the Congress of American Advancement of Women" that she "had the inestimable privilege of attending [Fuller's] conversations for three successive seasons, and I count it among the greatest felicities of my life that I thus came under her influence at a very early age, an influence which has never failed me in all the years of my life" ("Reminiscences" 205). Margaret Fuller took on the challenge of reconceiving the position of women through the Transcendentalist philosophy established by Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Man Thinking" in an environment that posed severe

limitations on women. Starting from November of 1839, Fuller delivered a series of lectures titled "Conversations," which were conducted in the bookstore parlor of reformer and activist Elizabeth Palmer Peabody; through these lectures, she hoped to initiate dialogue among women on the major issues that she felt that women must contend with: "What were we born to do? How shall we do it? which so few ever propose themselves 'till their best years are gone by" (Marshall 387).

As Tiffany Wayne points out, the language of Transcendentalism promoted independent thought and self-development; it encouraged women to cultivate their strengths and achieve their highest potential. The philosophy held that "all humans, regardless of sex, race, or social position, had the right to pure self-culture and to engage in a vocation, or life's work, suited to one's individual character" (Wayne 3). Thus, Margaret Fuller's reinterpretation of Transcendentalist thought provided her younger disciples with a doctrine of self-culture that imbued women with a sense of agency and ownership; Phyllis Cole states that "these New Women shared a Romantic faith that individual consciousness, permeated by the divine energy of the universe, could rise to revelation and authority" ("Women's Rights and Feminism" 223). Moreover, Ralph Waldo Emerson's call for resignation from oppressive demands of external, social institutions in order to further cultivate the internal consciousness could not be applied to women, who "had no Harvard regimen to boycott, no pulpit, profession, or citizenship from which to stand aside" (Schultz). Therefore, women readers and writers engaged in conversations with each other through periodicals, diaries, and even books, using Fuller's feminist interpretation of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" to conceive women's equality beyond "the rights tradition and its claim to public citizenship" ("Exaltadas" 8).

Fuller's Conversations were placed in the context of an era shaped by the ideology of separate spheres, which pushed women to reimagine the restrictive boundaries in which they were placed in order to gain political clout and to assert themselves in the public sphere. Barbara Welter coined the term "Cult of True Womanhood" to describe the qualities of domesticity and purity that women were encouraged to develop. Such an ideology confined women to a society that understood that women were naturally inclined to seek shelter from the outside world in the private arena of the home, while men were expected to work hard and engage in aggressive competition in the public sphere

(Women's America 174). Dissatisfied and restless under the oppressive regulations of such a culture, both middle-class and working-class women implicitly challenged the idealized sexual division through their actions. In the mid- and late-nineteenth century, Boston, with its "female majority, expanding boundaries, relatively large female labor force, numerous female associations, ethnic and racial diversity, and political struggles between Yankee reformers and immigrant or political machines," gave rise to a politically-charged climate in which women fought to become autonomous and to gain legitimacy as active members of society (Deutsch 4). Sarah Deutsch, Professor of history at Duke University, points out that the daily lives and domesticated spaces of women were connected to the "claims they made in and on public areas"; this was particularly true "in the case of middle-class and elite matrons, who based their claims to a new role in municipal governance on the purported superior morality of the domestic spaces they created" (Deutsch 5). By actively participating and interacting with male political and economic institutions, such as labor unions and other political organizations, women were able to lay claim to a city designed and controlled by men.

However, for those women who refrained from participation in the organized women's rights movement, private letters and journals circulated among like-minded thinkers served as alternate modes of expression. As such private discussions heightened, women began to manipulate and reshape the city of Boston by physically claiming spaces in buildings and forming their own institutions. Deutsch emphasizes that "women intended some of the institutions they formed to mediate between the privacy of the parlor and the public nature of the city. They created these as separate female spaces rather than female-controlled and feminized mixed-sex spaces" (Deutsch 15). Therefore, Fuller's Conversations were a part of a quieter women's movement that is often overshadowed by the more public political actions of first-wave feminists, such as Elisabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. Charles Capper identifies three groups of women that attended Fuller's Conversations in 1839. The first group included Fuller's own group of close friends, such as Ellen Sturgis Hooper and Anna Barker, while the second group of women were the wives of men who were active members of the social reform movements taking place in the period, such as Lidian Emerson and Sophia Ripley. The third group, the focus of this study, was composed of younger, often single, women in their late

teens and early twenties. Capper remarks of the latter group, "Neither so intellectual nor so Transcendental-minded as Fuller's protégées, still they were high-spirited, interested in new trends, socially active in Boston literary and reform circles, and, most important, although not intimate with her, ardently devoted to Fuller" (Capper 291). Ednah Dow Cheney and her friend, Mary Haliburton, both were a part of this second group of women, who stood steadfast to Fuller's principles and were loyal attendees to her lectures.

Cheney and Fuller on Goethe

While the first half of Cheney's life was largely dedicated to forming and running public institutions while raising her daughter, Margaret, Cheney spent the second half of her life, after the 1870s, completing much of her writings. In 1886, four years after the death of this daughter at twenty-seven, Cheney provided a lecture on Goethe for the Concord School of Philosophy. The Concord School, founded by Amos Bronson Alcott in 1829, hosted a series of lectures and discussions on philosophers related to Transcendentalism, such as Emerson, Plato, and Kant. Cheney's lecture, "Das Ewig-Weibliche," was a specific study on Goethe that borrowed from Fuller's notion that women harnessed a divine energy that allowed them to transcend worldly limitations and rise to authority ("Woman's Rights" 223).

Through Goethe, Cheney and Fuller interpreted that the two sexes could not be identified with the use of absolute terms, and that man and woman were containers of the same divine force. Arthur Schultz argues that in Goethe's *Faust*, Fuller recognized Goethe's ideal of woman, "das ewig Weibliche" ("the eternal womanly"), as the "key to the interpretation of woman's essential character" (Schultz 178). Schultz's claim remains consistent with Fuller's statement in her 1841 essay on Goethe that was published in *The Dial*, which claimed that "Goethe always represents the highest principle in the feminine form" ("Goethe 26). Nearly four years later, in 1845, Fuller departed from the literary biography of Goethe that she had detailed in her article for *The Dial* to construct a more focused, gender-based analysis of Goethe. For instance, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, she wrote that in *Faust*, "we see the redeeming power, which, at present, upholds woman...[Margaret], enlightened by her sufferings, refusing to receive temporal salvation by the aid of an evil power, obtains the eternal in its stead" (*Woman in the Nineteenth* 316). Cheney later echoed Fuller's interpretations in her 1886 lecture, elaborating on the

Chorus' use of the phrase "Das Ewig-Weibliche" in the conclusion of the first part of Goethe's *Faust*; Cheney claimed that the Chorus took the reader to the "supreme abstract idea of womanhood," which "seems intentional on the poet's part. Faust has learned at last the meaning of mortal life...it is no single loved one, but the Eternally Womanly which is henceforth to lead him upward and on" (*Das Ewig-Weibliche* 221). Once again, Cheney, like Fuller, announced that the permanent ideal, the "redeeming power" was manifested in Margaret, and appealed to all of humanity, calling for a universal rise to perfection.

Although traces of Fuller are easily detected in Cheney's analysis of Goethe, Cheney also shaped her argument to make it relevant to her late nineteenth century audience. For instance, in her attempt to establish Fuller's point that "there is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman," Cheney delved deep into a scientific discussion on plant life and biology, which was a topic that was vastly different from Fuller's subject and style of writing (*Woman in the Nineteenth* 310). Perhaps influenced by her daughter, Margaret Swan Cheney, who had been a student of science at MIT, Cheney wrote, "the sexes are like the stamen and pistil, different modifications of the same type, and so perpetually varying that it is impossible to make any statement of distinguishing characteristics, which will be invariably true"; moreover, Cheney added that unlike in the animal world where "sex is less differentiated in the lowest forms of life," in the "highest types of human life, we always find a blending of the characteristics of the sexes" (*Das Ewig-Weibliche* 231). In this way, Cheney adapts Fuller's radical statements to match the naturalistic and rationalistic thought that was so integral to the late 1800s.

In "Reign of Womanhood," an address Cheney delivered in 1897 during the Unitarian Service to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, Cheney wrote that woman's "ideal of man must match her own standard of spiritual purity and truth, or instead of leading him on she is dragged down to the dust with him" ("The Reign of Womanhood" 227). The reciprocity of divinity and virtue that Cheney expected in men as well as women was shared by Fuller, who had held a similar vision of the transformation of all humanity; on masculinity and femininity, Fuller had written, "There cannot be a doubt that, if these two developments were in perfect harmony, they would correspond to and fulfil one another, like hemisphere, or the tenor and bass in music" (*Woman in the Nineteenth* 343). Thus, although

not nearly as focused on gender and, perhaps, less a feminist than Fuller, Cheney's expectation of reciprocity was more than a passive female piety that conformed to the conventions of "true womanhood"; rather, it was a powerful idea, calling for the development of a more perfect humanity.

Nora's Return

In Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll House* (1879), Nora Helmer, realizing her own need to find a greater meaning in life and suffocated by her husband's frustratingly patronizing behavior towards her, finally leaves her home, husband, and family. Since that final scene of Ibsen's when Nora sharply slammed the door and walked out of the suffocating bourgeois sphere of domesticity, authors awoke worldwide to imagine the sequence of events that would follow the shocking rejection of family life. Of the several sequels that were written, it was Walter Besant's outrageous depiction of Nora that sparked Cheney into a fury that inspired her to construct her very own sequel to the play. Reflecting back in her autobiography, Cheney passionately wrote that in 1890, the year in which Besant's story was published, she was "so moved to indignation by Walter Besant's conclusion of the book, which seemed to me wholly false to the original idea, that I hastily wrote my own solution" (*Reminiscences* 67). Her short book titled, *Nora's Return: A Sequel to "The Doll's House" of Henry Ibsen*, was sold as a fundraising item at the New England Hospital Fair in December of 1890 (*Nora's Return* 3). Within a few pages, Cheney revolted against Besant's depiction of Nora as an unforgiving woman who was merciless towards her husband, Torvald, and painfully out of touch with her family's needs. In sharp contrast to Besant's story, Cheney's sequel remained true to Ibsen's text, as she presented Nora as a woman who revolted against a society that defined a woman's identity by the stature of her husband and that also limited her options to gain a fulfilling education. Even more, both Nora's and Torvald's developments in Cheney's sequel highlight the value of self-culture that was so central to Margaret Fuller's doctrine.

As Cheney's rendition of the sequel was produced in reaction to Besant's writing, it is important to note the specific themes that Cheney addressed and counteracted. *Nora's Return* approached the conflict between Nora and Torvald through a more intimate narrative structure in which the reader gained insight into the characters' sentiments through their written journal entries. Cheney recognized that Besant had unfairly created a villain out of Nora, departing from

Ibsen's intentions with the protagonist's bold decision to leave Torvald. In Besant's interpretation, Nora's friend, Kristine, visited, begging her to think of her "helpless children" and her husband: "Did you never ask yourself what it meant for such a man to be deserted by his wife, and without a cause?" (Besant 321). Within the dialogue between Kristine and Nora, Besant emphasized his understanding that Nora's action was unjustified; Nora had walked away from her children, which was the ultimate sin for a woman living in the nineteenth century. However, Cheney was careful to address this issue in *Nora's Return*; she took special care to articulate Nora's grief at having to leave behind her children: "Gone are the joys and pangs of motherhood, the nights of watching and care, the hours of joy and glee. The mother might play with them, but their honor, their life, their souls, were his care" (*Nora's Return* 13). In this way, Cheney's Nora, while choosing to leave the family, also affirmed conventional notions of motherhood and domesticity. At the same time, Cheney's Nora followed through Fuller's advice in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*: "If any individual live too much in relations, so that he becomes a stranger to the resources of his own nature, he falls, after a while into a distraction, or imbecility, from which he can only be cured by a time of isolation" (312). Nora's motive in leaving was to develop those "resources" to which she had become a stranger; the same applied for Torvald, who was hopelessly dependent on Nora for all the tiresome domestic services and entertainment. In the same passage, Fuller had also said that "Union is only possible to those who are units. To be fit for relations in time, souls, whether of man or woman, must be able to do without them in the spirit" (*Woman in the Nineteenth* 312). Thus, the fission of the Helmer household forces the husband and wife to develop themselves as human beings, as man and woman.

Furthermore, Cheney's Nora worked to broaden the position of woman in society by extending her duties to the public sphere, rather than confining them to the private sphere, as Torvald and Besant had attempted. In Ibsen's play, Nora boldly told Helmer that he and her father had wronged her by making her a "beggar" and a "doll-wife." In this crucial scene, she declared that she had duties, other than being a wife and a mother, that were "equally sacred"; she said "before all else, I'm a human being, no less than you—or anyway, I ought to try to become one" (Ibsen 193). Nora claimed that as a human being, she was entitled to the same rights that men enjoyed, even if the customs of society told her

otherwise. She stated that she could not continue her life as a mother and a wife without fully discovering herself: "I have to stand completely alone, if I'm ever going to discover myself and the world out there" (Ibsen 192). Therefore, in Cheney's sequel, Nora was shown at the home of a poor sailor's family, reflecting on her condition: "I am a wreck. What is gone? All my early life of loving trust...I hardly knew what truth was. Love and beauty were all I had heard of woman's life; were they not enough?" (*Nora's Return* 9-10). Cheney began to question the foundations of her life that were established by her father and husband, and in questioning, she began her journey to the truth. Cheney's message fell in line with Fuller's statement that called for woman to "dedicate herself to the Sun, the Sun of Truth...I would have her free from compromise, from complaisance, from helplessness, because I would have her good enough and strong enough to love one and all beings, from the fulness, not the poverty of being" (*Woman in the Nineteenth* 312). In the end, in Cheney's account, it was Nora's dedication to seeking the truth, uninhibited by the demands of Torvald, that eventually led her to grasp the complexities of her existence as a woman.

Moreover, through *Nora's Return*, Cheney argued that women and men, both, had to discover their individual identities before they could learn to understand each other in relative terms. In this regard, Cheney's Helmer went through a process of self-discovery just as his wife, Nora, had. While reading a passage from Plato, he realized how he had never bothered to share such knowledge with her, as he had not realized that women could have such interests; moreover, in response to Plato's line that "each one is in search of his counterpart," Helmer responds: "My counterpart! Am I not whole? Do I need another? And is that other my equal, my counterpart?" (*Nora's Return* 23). This passage in Cheney's text is particularly significant because Plato was one of the most revered of philosophers to the transcendentalists; therefore, it was not by mere coincidence that Helmer was reading Plato when he had an epiphany on the situation on his strained marriage. Furthermore, Fuller, like Plato, had idealized the ultimate union of souls as lying beyond even the existence as units, and it was this understanding that Cheney underscored through Torvald's reflection on his "counterpart." Meanwhile, Nora experienced an epiphany of her own, as she realized her meaning in life: "Yes, I have found myself again; I have found what is left me—the one thing which will make life over again for me. It is service...Love is

not enough, I must learn also, I must prepare for life” (Nora’s Return 24). With this realization, Nora joined a hospital as a nurse. In this way, Cheney’s Nora directly counterattacked the Nora in Besant’s story, who, as the narrator claimed, made “love the sole rule of conduct” (Besant 320). Moreover, Cheney’s Nora followed Fuller’s declaration that “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” (Woman in the Nineteenth 347). Thus, Cheney stayed true to not only Ibsen’s Nora, who had left her husband for self-discovery, but also to Fuller’s statement on women, which had called for the search for a higher, more spiritual Love that would draw the inward soul out to perfection.

Distinct to Cheney’s experience while working for the New England Hospital for Women and Children, Cheney had written that “the mind and heart, during sickness and convalescence, are open to religious and moral influences, and the grateful patient often became a zealous convert to the church which had given him help in the hour of suffering” (“Care of the Sick” 346). Thus, as Nora, a nurse, returned to heal a cholera-infected Torvald in Cheney’s sequel, Torvald, although too ill to realize that it was his wife taking care of him, began to absorb the goodness in Nora’s spirit. After all, following Nora’s leave after Torvald had sufficiently recovered, Torvald reflected: “But how could she stay with me, when I had so wronged her, so insulted her? I never understood her. I was a stranger to her, and she a beautiful idol to me, no more.” Therefore, Cheney’s Nora played a similar role to Fuller’s Margaret, who had contained the enlightened force that lifted Faust from his sin Goethe’s play; Nora’s epiphany in Cheney’s sequel allowed her divine spirit, the “eternal womanly,” that she had cultivated, to influence Torvald and raise him from his faults to realize the truth.

Cheney’s sequel concluded with Nora’s return to the Helmer household after the two characters’ had gained a sense of understanding and had learned to achieve Fuller’s stated goal of “self-dependence.” Helmer, although he missed his wife, learned to care for his children and to better appreciate Nora. At the same time, working in the hospital provided Nora with a sense of fulfillment through self-reliance: “My life is sure now; I can serve, and, if I cannot be happy, I can be calm, patient, and content with that” (Nora’s Return 56). Nora had reached the point of self-actualization in which she was finally on sure grounds and had arrived at a position where she could stand on the independent

foundation of her own making. Margaret Fuller wrote that she wanted “woman to live, first for God’s sake. Then she will not make an imperfect man her god... 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” (Woman in the Nineteenth 347). Thus, Cheney reiterates that in living first for God, woman would learn to embark on a steadfast journey towards perfection; equipped with such high, transcendent ideals, Nora would not be forced to helplessly rely on a flawed man, such as Helmer. Therefore, once Nora learned her true place in service, her own standing in life, she could, once again, remain open to meaningful love and equal partnership.

Thus, when Nora received a note from Torvald that revealed his remorse and his willingness to sacrifice for his wife, Nora was able to forgive and return to the Helmer household. Upon her arrival, Nora was welcomed lovingly by her children and found that her husband has furnished her old room with new supplies: a bank book, keys to the house, a watch, and paintings by Raphael and Michelangelo. Such items not only affirmed woman’s right to manage the practical and financial modes of her own lifestyle, but also the higher, intellectual goals that a woman may want to pursue, as Raphael and Michelangelo were essential to the transcendentalists because of their representations of the ideal. Therefore, Cheney worked to blend the modern aspects of contemporary life with the more romanticized, early nineteenth century philosophy. Moreover, Nora’s success in the hospital led to an offer for a promotion; however, Cheney’s Nora rejected the job in favor of managing the family and occasionally helping with the hospital in the coming years. The rejection of the management position seems oddly out of place with the themes conveyed by Cheney throughout her sequel; this scene may indicate Cheney affirming the domestic role as a woman’s primary one, which is radically different from Fuller’s principle. Nonetheless, Nora’s decision to leave Helmer for a higher pursuit was justified and was not motivated by a simplistic drive to fulfill selfish desires, as Besant had claimed. Nora simply followed Cheney’s interpretation of Fuller in that she realized that “It is not woman, but the law of right, the law of growth, that speaks in us, and demands the perfection of each being in its kind, apple as apple, woman as woman” (Woman in the Nineteenth 347). Nora’s journey was one that allowed her to temporarily depart from domestic roles to explore the spiritual

qualities of human life, and to return once more to fulfill Cheney's ideal of womanhood.

Conclusion

Ednah Dow Cheney's literary and intellectual development was shaped by the radical thought of Margaret Fuller, whose feminist interpretation of Transcendentalism, in Cheney's words, "planted in my life the seeds of thought, principle, and purpose...and I owe it to her to speak in her name, and try to make her life again fruitful in others" (Reminiscences 193). However, Cheney was not a passive figure, but rather a creative individual who took Fuller's words and made them relevant to the audience of her time. Following her poignant words on Fuller's influence, Cheney also moved on to argue a place for herself and her colleagues; she wrote that Fuller was not an "exceptional" woman and that "her nature was builded on grand lines, and included much of that large range of powers which belong exclusively to neither sex, but which are the solid basis of humanity" (Reminiscences 193). Thus, Cheney's philosophy, though largely shaped by Fuller, also emerged from her own range of experience and education.

In the November of 1895, Cheney eulogized Fuller in a "Lecture Given at the Congress of American Advancement of Women," marking Fuller's influence not only in her life, but also within the nineteenth century society. She said of Fuller, "It was not acceptance of the outward rule, but of the inward law of life that she demanded, and that law could only be found in freedom. It is by the test of life and experience that we learn both our limitations and our powers" (Reminiscences 194). And so, as Cheney's Nora ventured beyond the protected walls of the Helmer household and into the public realm of the hospital, she gained deeper insight into her own state. Only a few months of being a nurse led her to feel, for the first time in her life, "the meaning of truth. Here I must not only speak the truth, but live it, for I am not here to please, but to serve" (Nora's Return, 24). Cheney's Nora was finally released from the years of lies and deceit within which Ibsen's Nora had found herself tangled for the sake of Torvald. She was freed from "the life of woman," which Fuller remarked was "outwardly a well-intentioned, cheerful dissimulation of her real life." Instead, Cheney's Nora learned to live her life in accordance to the truth, never again veiling the reality of her condition. In her 1895 lecture, Cheney had specifically stated that "Margaret was no sentimentalist, who valued self-sacrifice for its own sake. She thought

that self-culture was the duty of every human being" (Reminiscences 202). Therefore, Cheney made certain that her character followed through Fuller's design, cultivating her spirit through Cheney's personal choice of service—hospital work—and rising to truth and perfection. Although Nora's return to domesticity in Nora's Return may have been more affirming of the domestic roles of womanhood than Fuller's would have been, Cheney nonetheless deeply valued the experience gained from both public service and intellectual nourishment; after all, Cheney's tireless years of working for the Freedmen's Aid Bureau in the 1860s, managing the education of freed African Americans, stands as further evidence of her own understanding for the need of education to collapse "arbitrary" restrictions.

Finally, throughout her literary journey, Cheney extended the claim that with the rise to the ideal condition, men and women, both, may finally access that divine energy, "the eternal womanly," that may consistently uplift humanity from its tribulations. In a voice contemporary to her time, Cheney communicated Fuller's call for women in her analysis of Goethe; she conveyed Fuller's argument, which, she said, was the same for woman as for humanity and which involved "the individual right of freedom and development. She shall work out her life according to her own insight, finding access to the infinite soul by direct aspiration and reception, without arbitrary constraint" (Reminiscences 194). Margaret, the key figure in Goethe's *Faust*, remained as the ideal subject for Fuller and, later, Cheney, both of whom recognized that the transcendent spirit, feminine in form and manifested in Margaret, had the power to collapse all obstacles that emerged out of humanity's fallible nature. In an essay commemorating the women who had helped to change the social landscape of Boston, Cheney poignantly wrote that "Although the influence of Sarah Margaret Fuller...was by no means confined to Boston, it was here fully felt; and it lingers in all the life and character of Boston women" ("Women of Boston" 351). Thus, Ednah Dow Cheney, through her own life as an author and reformer, carried on that "lingering" spirit of Margaret Fuller well into the late-nineteenth century, carving out a solid platform for justice into the early Progressive Era.

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Great Job Ladies, Now Give Us Our Jobs Back!

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"The Angel of No Man's Land" is full of conservative themes relating to the experience of women in America during the early 1900s. Women during the early 20th century were expected to follow several guidelines or social norms, mostly revolving around religious piety and caregiving. The so-called "angel" in this image is depicted as a nurse, rising high above the battlefield with heavenly rays of light emanating from her. Despite progress being made by suffragists, images such as this still appeared to the public in an attempt to glorify the traditional woman. Men were afraid that women were going to rise up and demand their rights and freedoms, so they continued to pump out propaganda such as this work in order to reinforce the motherly, loving image of women. The three major themes of religion, motherhood, and domesticity are the driving forces behind this particular piece.

The first major theme that really engulfs this work is that of religion. One of the most noticeable components of the image is the enormous cross behind the nurse. During the early 1900s, men and women in the United States were mostly Christians, and it was a society in which many Americans were encouraged to stick to their religion in a devout manner (DeJong 260). Without much entertainment besides the invention of the radio, many Americans religiously attended church in order to form a sense of community and to have fellow Christians to form friendships with (DeJong 260). The invention of cell phones, television, film, and modern music devices has had a somewhat opposite effect on

religious life in America. They provide almost a sort of synthetic feeling of community without having to leave the home. But without these inventions, Americans had to rely on important community centers such as the local churches and places of worship. So, to draw in potential customers, the folks at Tullar-Meredith Company added a religious tone, apart from the obvious use of the word angel in the title of the song. The rays of light given off by the angel add to this theme. To give her one final touch, the artist made her much, much larger than the soldiers in the battlefield, giving her the appearance of an angel that has magically appeared in the sky. The majority of sheet music produced by the Tullar-Meredith Company was in the form of Christian hymns, which makes the religious theme of "Angel of No Man's Land" even less surprising ("Grant"). By portraying this nurse as an angel, the artist has managed to applaud the nurses for the job they did while maintaining their religious integrity. She is not threatening like some of the young atheists and feminists, but merely a pious woman performing her nursing duties.

Another major theme of this work is motherhood, and the caregiver persona that women were expected to adopt. The job of a nurse was almost exclusively for women in the early half of the 20th century, because women were expected to have the motherly caregiver type of instincts necessary to be a nurse (Wagner 27). Men regarded nursing as a "womanly profession," despite the fact that nurses were so important to all men, especially to the men on the front lines in Europe (Wagner 27). Ironically, the men in the image are very small, almost infantile. The soldiers that are not already dead are sitting or lying on the ground, and a few are reaching up towards the nurse as if they were toddlers reaching for their mothers. This appeals to the patriotic men and women of America, who see this nurse on the front lines tending to the heroic men risking their lives overseas. A few nurses during World War I, such as Helen Fairchild, were even more dedicated to taking care of the soldiers, setting up trauma tents just a few hundred yards away from the battlefield, well within the range of artillery and chemical weapons such as mustard gas (Wagner 33). This works steers the viewer away from the idea of nurses such as Fairchild practically on the battlefield by portraying the nurses as an angel rising above the battlefield, away from the action and danger. It's almost as if credit is being taken away from the actual nurses who were on the front lines by saying that they were merely there in the minds of the soldiers. Rather than showing the