

8-1999

# Revisiting Lydia Sigourney

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**Revisiting Lydia Sigourney**

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**For the Degree of Master of Arts**

**in the Department of English.**

**Seton Hall University**

**August 1999**

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## Introduction

Although one of the most popular and perhaps famous literary women in mid-nineteenth-century America, Lydia Sigourney has been dismissed by various modern critics as "a sentimental, circumlocutionary, prolific poet—notorious for her versification of conventional attitudes and preoccupation with death, resented for her extraordinary popularity" (De Jong 35). However, this popularity has led critics to ignore her as a "light" writer who operated within minor spheres. The "sweet singer of Hartford," as she had come to be known, "epitomizes the neglect suffered by many nineteenth-century women authors" (35). According to Judith Fetterley, "Sigourney is treated, when mentioned at all, in American literary histories or even in contemporary criticism, with almost universal contempt, but she was... a major event in the history of women and literature in nineteenth century America" (Fetterley 107). Sigourney has been ignored, but she is indicative of nineteenth century thoughts toward women and their responses to those attitudes.

As a result, despite these critical dismissals, Sigourney's work does deserve consideration, as it has "much to tell us about both gender and class conditions for nineteenth-century writers" (De Jong 35). While not regarded as revolutionary, Sigourney provides a background for the shaping of American literature. Her works "stand as testimony that, near the beginning of this country's conscious commitment to developing a national literature, women were already struggling to expand what America meant" (Zagarell 60). Most importantly, Sigourney's works gave women a voice, serving as an example and a model, as Ann Douglas Wood summarizes:

[She had] the unconscious and uncanny ability to adapt herself to the

patterns laid out for the women of her day, and to exploit them. She, like her sister poets, provided middle-class American women with a manyfold example: she used poetry to gain social mobility, she used it as an advertisement for piety and as a home substitute for church ritual; but equally important, she used it as a means for a kind of militant sublimation. Her readers may not have known of the conflicts which helped to engender Mrs. Sigourney's own process of public self-mesmerizing, but they saw similar ones of their own and were being pushed towards like forms of repression. Like the Sweet Singer of Hartford, they could hardly achieve such sublimation in actual life, and undoubtedly found its vicarious triumph in literature doubly satisfying. Mrs. Sigourney was never an outright spokesman for countrywomen's rights, but she was the shining example and tireless champion of their fantasy life. (Wood 181)

It is this "militant sublimation" that reflects Sigourney's value as a writer because it is part of the subversive strategy employed by nineteenth-century women writers. By using such strategies, "these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards" through works "whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (Gilbert & Gubar 73). Under the guise of submissive characters and voices and works that seemingly support male-dictated stereotypes of females, Sigourney actually critiques them using a female voice. As Judith Fetterley suggests, "instead of direct confrontation, they [women writers] chose

to treat this subject [oppression] indirectly--as a secondary theme or a side issue, as a subtext beneath and interfering with the surface text, or even as a text within the text" (Fetterley 13). Sigourney was able to work within established conventions, providing entertaining literature that was acceptable to the mainstream while at the same time offering creative and critical strategies to her female readers for subversion in literature and life. For example, she shows how women writers can encode meanings in subtexts in their works. At the same time, she also shows how to appear submissive while using domestic language to communicate ideas to other women under the guise of the mundane.

Her creative voice spanned several genres as well. She wrote nonfiction, poetry, and short stories, which further cements Sigourney's place as a writer worthy of critical study. Each of these must be revisited because they contain examples of the different strategies she employed. Her ability to work within the traditions of these genres is a main reason that she is of critical worth. This discussion will break down her works into these three categories and critically examine the techniques Sigourney uses in each one to criticize patriarchy and reestablish women's place in society as a viable force. Her combined efforts spanning these genres reveal Sigourney to be more than the "light" writer she is reputed to be.

In her nonfiction, under the guise of female "guide books," Sigourney offers strong advice to women on how to adapt to their society. For example, her emphasis on reading and writing shows that women need the ability to express themselves, using the very language that denigrates them. However, women must use this to voice their own thoughts. Sigourney's nonfiction is a working example of how women should write. She

buries messages within manuals that appear to instruct women in the arts of how to be good women who fit male expectations. In actuality, they are lessons in subversive technique.

In her poetry she is an unconventional voice within an established tradition. She appears to conform to the norms of a domestic, submissive woman. However, through her use of the domestic and the religious, she is able to use a subtext to express concern for the position women should hold in society. What look like light commonplace poems are in fact masks for sharp criticisms of patriarchy. At the same time, Sigourney uses her works to call for female solidarity.

Finally, in her sketches she offers a blueprint for feminist critique of literature and the conventions of society. She hides her criticisms underneath the guise of stories that conform to sentimental and religious stereotypes of women. Sigourney takes these traditions and applies different strategies to them. For example, she takes traditional male motifs such as the quest and parodies them, using them for her purposes. Some of her characters exhibit symptoms of madness and anxiety, expressions of the reservations felt by nineteenth century women writers in response to their craft. Finally, she uses a double, a secondary character that stands in for the author and voices her criticisms outright. Because this figure is disreputable or punished at the end of the work, the criticisms are not directly associated with the author. The subversive message is located within a subtext of the double. Thus, her short stories outline a pattern for feminist subversive critique.

Because she is so well rounded, she transcends the label of "sentimental writer." She also serves as one of the founders in feminist literature and one of the first authors to

make writing an acceptable profession for women. She is also a reflection of the cultural influences of the nineteenth century and the reactions of women to their surroundings. As a result, Sigourney also serves as a vehicle for cultural study.

However, she is more than a simple historical or cultural curiosity. In order to appreciate her value, it is necessary to revisit her as a literary figure, where she was a forerunner in women's writing because of the strategies she employed. For example, Dickinson later used domestic imagery as a way to express her concerns and as a means to react against the confines that men have placed women in. Susan Glaspell, a writer from the early twentieth century, uses domestic language to encode a subtext detailing the strong bonds of female relationships and to critique how men cannot read the language of women. This parallels Sigourney's use of subtext to explore how men gloss over women's needs and their values. Thus, Sigourney is a writer on which others could expand or react to. Because of this, her strategies and works need to be revisited, since her writings serve as foundations for later feminist literature.

## Chapter 1: Strong Advice—Early Feminism in Lydia Sigourney's Nonfiction

Mary Bryan, in her 1860 article, "How Should Women Write?" examines women's involvement in literature (Nelson 191). Men sought books to satisfy themselves intellectually (191). Women sought to take part in this as well, but found themselves hindered by the male intellectual establishment. Bryan chronicles the problem: "Thus is apparent what has gradually been admitted, that it is woman's duty to write—but how and what? This is yet a mooted question. Men, after much demur and hesitation, have given women liberty to write; but they cannot yet consent to allow them full freedom..." (qtd. in Nelson 191). Men set the boundaries for women in terms of what was acceptable to write. For example, they were not taken seriously in philosophy, nor were they accepted as poets of a grand tradition. Bryan points to the dilemma, since "having prescribed these bounds to the female pens, men are the first to condemn her efforts as tame and commonplace, because they lack earnestness and strength" (qtd. in Nelson 191). She argued that women writers would obtain advancement through change brought about by their writing and "projects the social mission of nineteenth-century women's fiction" (191-192).

Years before Bryan's article, Lydia Sigourney wrote three collections of nonfiction in which she advised women of the power of writing. These were Moral Pieces, In Prose and Verse, a mixture of nonfiction and poetry (1815), Letters to Young Ladies (1833), and Letters to Mothers (1838). All three served as manuals, offering advice on how to be a successful woman. Within these manuals, Sigourney offered a way through which women could work within their sphere towards knowledge and perhaps power. She did this by seemingly embracing those characteristics that were

assigned to the nineteenth-century woman. However, underneath the guise of docile submission in her nonfiction, there lies a strong foundation for a feminist literature. Sigourney offers strong advice underneath a façade of weakness.

Sigourney is an example of the prevalence of non-fictional works by women, which resulted from the changing cultural conditions of the nation. With the rise of the penny press and a publishing industry spurred by mass production, the printed word was made available on a national level (Baym 289). Since writing was now widely available, a new audience was established that went beyond the earlier white privileged males and the small group of acquaintances who read their works (289). This new audience consisted mainly of women and young people (290). With these new interest groups, there was a rise in new types of literature that would appeal to them. Also, as the economy began to grow, a variety of voices and concerns were raised. Key voices were those of women. These numerous voices led to an assortment of non-fictional works. Some of these took the form of reform magazines, many having women editors. For example, Harriot Farley edited the Lowell Offering, which contained writings by the women workers at the mill in Lowell, Massachusetts (Burns 346). Sara Bagley edited The Voice of Industry and founded the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (399). Lydia Maria Child, for instance, moved beyond novels and wrote a work called An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans in 1832, arguing that, because they were Americans, blacks deserved full protection under the law and equal educational and professional opportunities (Baym 294). She also served briefly as the editor of the National-Anti-Slavery-Standard (294).

Such anti-slavery sentiment was partly the result of the growth of evangelical religion (Porter 346). During the 1830's and 1840's, this revival was marked by the Second Great Awakening, and with this resurgence of evangelical religion, a number of reform movements, such as temperance societies and petitions against slavery, appeared (347). The Christian virtues served as a way for running a home since women were given the role of homemaker and were designated with such traits as docility and motherly purity. In other words, the home would be a sanctuary of "moral sanctification," with its accompanying traits of moral purity and "maternal self-sacrifice," which were considered the characteristics of a true Christian (347, 355). Catharine Beecher, sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe and daughter of Lynam Beecher, wrote Treatise on Domestic Economy in 1841, which "transformed the religious travail provoked by her father's conversion demand into an engine for running the American home" (Porter 347). As Carolyn Porter explains:

Women were enshrined in the private sphere of the home so as to neutralize the threat to masculine control presented by a social scene by a social scene in which women were increasingly visible—as part of a volatile labor forces as outspoken abolitionists, or as the popular novelists whom Hawthorne disparaged as "scribbling women." Ascribing to women the innate traits of a natural Christian—moral purity, passive obedience, and a habit of maternal self-sacrifice—domestic ideology in effect feminized them. (355)

By assigning to women these sanctified and docile traits, men placed them on a pedestal and through this idealization kept them separate.



However, in making women separate and leaving them in the home, the power of the domestic sphere came to the forefront. According to Nina Baym, "women writers felt that America could be transformed by making the home the locus of national values and by giving them influence in all aspects of public life" (Baym 292). Women stayed at home, so the status quo was not disturbed, but the domestic sphere served as the language through which they could find expression. The home had become a source of power.

This power could be used to teach. Baym observes "they sought to set before the youthful readers a series of models to help them become the men and women of a reconstituted domestic nation" (292). To this end, a number of lady's manuals were published, all of which sought to instill the values in young ladies that were embraced by society. Such books included The Young Lady's Book: A Manual of Elegant Recreations, Exercises, and Pursuits (1830), The Young Ladies' Class Book: A Selection of Lessons for Reading in Prose and Verse (1831), and Woman As She Was Is And Should Be (1849) (Welter 152).

The purpose of studying these nonfiction works is that they are reflective of the time period, but little critical attention has been directed toward them. However, they go beyond simple historical documents. From a cultural standpoint, such works echo the expectations of the era. More importantly, though, such works are worthy of study because they are indicative of strategies used by women writers to subvert stereotypes and express their concern over their world.

Sigourney's Moral Pieces, Letters to Young Ladies, and Letters to Mothers fit into this category. All three conform to the popular images of women as Sigourney urges them to be pious, gentle, and submissive. However, Sigourney's nonfiction works are

unique because, although they authenticate the attributes assigned to women, Sigourney's works are an early form of feminism. All three also predate the Seneca Falls conference, which took place in 1848. All three assert the importance of education and writing. At the same time, they reflect cultural influences such as religion and education.

In 1815, Sigourney published Moral Pieces, In Prose and Verse, well before the "common school awakening" in the 1830's. Part of an education for a woman, according to Sigourney, is the ability to write. Sigourney writes, "ONE of the most important branches of a regular education is the art of writing accurately the thoughts that arise in our minds" (Sigourney 79). With this statement, Sigourney is acknowledging that women have thoughts and minds, taking them off the pedestal upon which they have been placed and repositioning them within the human spectrum. Secondly, she wants those thoughts to be written accurately. There should not be any misunderstanding, whether it is because of fear or loss of meaning resulting from a male filter. Using the strategy of self-deprecation, Sigourney writes, "and though we do not ourselves aspire to those high departments of literature, still the art of writing our thoughts, with accuracy and facility, is an object worthy of our strict attention" (80). Again, Sigourney uses the term "our thoughts," placing women back within the human realm.

Sigourney offers a template for the type of writing that is most advisable for women. For example, she suggests that writing must have the proper mixture of reflection and style. Although she thinks English is inferior to ancient languages and lacks the harmony of some modern languages, it has certain degrees of elegance and refinement that are seen in the works of Johnson, Young, and Milton (79). Certain writers in America "understand and exemplify the peculiar refinements of their native

language" (80). These statements indicate patriotism, but, more importantly, are an example of early female literary taste and standards as Sigourney is listing her qualifications for good writing.

Despite her admission that there are good writers in America, she seems to mock the literary establishment in terms of the proper figures of speech that are used. Sigourney observes, "these technical terms, and amplification may be thus simplified for us females" (80). Her use of "us" suggests a desire for unity and the word amplification suggests inflating the importance of technical terms such as metaphor or allegory. If she is, in fact, belittling such technical terms, it is fascinating because women used strategies such as metaphor to express their situation through the use of a double for the narrator or feelings of sickness or entrapment among female characters to express their frustration (Gilbert & Gubar 79). As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain, "When we consider the term 'oddity' of women's writing in relation to its submerged content, it begins to seem that when women did not turn into male mimics or accept the 'parsley wreath' they may have attempted to transcend their anxiety of authorship by *revising* male genres, using them to record their own dreams and their own stories *in disguise*" (73). Instead of mimicking male literature, Sigourney instructs women to think clearly and accurately and express thoughts concisely.

She also believes that there is a "degree of ornament which flows from simplicity and purity of task" (Sigourney 80-81). In other words, Sigourney admits that simple, domestic language can be appealing. Along these lines, Sigourney advises the use of the epistolary form because it is familiar and can take as its subject common life (81). She also suggests that the writer select stories of memory and imagination for her subjects

(81). Such writings are friendly and descriptive and help to alleviate the pain of separation as well as foster feelings of friendship (81). In this way writing becomes therapeutic because it provides a way to work out anxiety.

Once again, Sigourney is laying the groundwork and offering a paradigm through which women can express themselves. It is interesting to note that Sigourney is calling for a style that conforms to expectations. From a surface perspective, she is conforming to the Cult of True Womanhood, living up to "a solemn responsibility, which the nineteenth century American woman had--to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white hand" (Welter 152). Women were supposed to cultivate values as piety and domesticity as means of keeping a moral center intact while the world around this center changed. However, an epistolary style is a form that can hide protest. Women, in their letters to one another, could use code or bury meaning in ways that only other women would understand. Since males saw such works as trivial, they would not object to them as revolutionary or anti-establishment.

Moral Pieces is an example of this epistolary style. Sigourney addresses her readers as if she were writing them a letter, calling them "my dear young girls." Likewise, it is an example of a coded subtext. For example, in a continuation of her discussion of the value of writing, Sigourney proposes that more can be learned from a person's writings than can be learned from his or her speech. Sometimes people are afraid to talk:

To such a mind the harsh and censorious tempers which are found in society are a terror, and it is in solitude alone that the ideas are freed from their bondage, expressions from their constraint and the pen which aids the

progress of this secluded delight is resigned reluctantly, as a friend, that  
has imparted the highest degree of intellectual enjoyment. (Sigourney 82)

Within the context of this observation, Sigourney is discussing male minds, but her analysis can be applied to women. The "harsh and censorious" tempers are terms used to describe a patriarchal environment. Solitude and isolation, according to Gilbert and Gubar in The Madwoman in the Attic, represent the "common female search for an aesthetic that would yield a healthy space in an overwhelmingly male 'Palace of Art'" (73). In her advice, Sigourney is comparable to Dickinson and other women writers who have chosen to seclude themselves because she, in her description of the secluded delight writing brings, is describing female literary authority in a sphere that women have created themselves. In other words, she is offering a way for women writers to allay their "anxieties of authorship," similar to Emily Dickinson's later advice: "tell all the truth but tell it slant" (Gilbert & Gubar 73). Sigourney is doing the same thing because she is criticizing a woman's inability to speak out, but she is doing so through a celebration of writing that appeals to everyone.

One of Sigourney's main points is that women should be original in thought. She warns, "But as you strive to inure yourselves to this important exercise, be careful that what you produce is strictly *your own* (Sigourney 84). She also writes that the enlargement of the mind is a benefit of writing that cannot be found among the restraints of society. She stresses that each girl will eventually understand the benefits of writing, "which you now view as a burden, for if it was not of real utility, I would never recommend it to you...pursue with perseverance...the future will overbalance the present exertion" (83-84). As mentioned, this writing was published many years before Seneca

Falls and treatises on anti-slavery written by women such as Child. It also seems that the "burdens" and "exertions" Sigourney mentions could symbolize women's struggles for equality that would eventually come to fruition.

The fruits of these labors would become something that a woman could call her own. Sigourney compares property and literary labors, and the theft of either is deplorable. She mixes an apology with the hope that a writer "will ever prefer [her] own thoughts, however rude and unpolished, to the borrowed sentiments of another, from which the eye of penetration would turn away disgusted, and the voice of conscience secretly condemn the deception" (84). Her call for original ideas is a precursor to a female literary tradition. It also predates such canonical works as Melville's 1850 call for an original American literature in "Hawthorne and his Mosses." Not only does she note that many American writers have original ideas and a good command of language, she also calls for women to be part of it in their own way. Sigourney does so by embracing, rather than rejecting, a domestic literature that has been thrust upon her.

As a companion to writing, Sigourney stresses the value as reading as well. In Letters to Young Ladies, she outlines a program of reading that will strengthen the intellect as well as alleviate stress. Within this outline, however, while Sigourney does challenge women to make the home a place of knowledge, she also critiques, in subtle ways, the stereotypes that have placed them there.

For Sigourney, reading serves as a defense against "intellectual apathy" and the "vanity of superficial knowledge" (Ladies 146). Reading is the way "aliment is conveyed to the mind" and is "peculiarly necessary" for women (147). It is necessary because it is a shield against the emptiness and the hostility that the world often holds for women.

With this observation, Sigourney is criticizing her world. The sphere whose concerns are “what shall we eat and wherewithal be clothed” (146) puts a woman’s mind in jeopardy, but writing reading and writing are a way out, and by “recording their own distinctively female experience, [women] they are secretly working through and within the conventions of literary texts to define their own lives” (Gilbert & Gubar 87). Women are trapped, as Sigourney admits, by the lack of variety in domestic life. They are also confined by bodily functions or emotional imbalances that may accompany those functions. Because of this, books are a source of relief “in seasons of indisposition, when active duties are laid aside, when even conversation is a burden” (Ladies 147). In an early example of feminist discussion, Sigourney is stressing literature as a sort of medication to treat the anxiety of entrapment by expectations. Women can use writing to create a space for themselves within those cells—housewife, religious pillar, and mother—in which they have been imprisoned by men.

Reading provides a foundation for future endeavors or conflicts. Sigourney foresees trouble that will require intellect even though young girls may not see the need for reading now. She prophesizes, “in youth and health, you can scarcely appreciate the truth of this argument. But confirm *now* your taste for reading into a habit, and when the evil days come, you will be better able to prove its value, than I am to enforce it” (147). Sigourney is not being specific, leaving the reader to wonder what the evil days actually are. This was written in the 1830’s, during the rising educational, labor, and early women’s rights movements, so perhaps Sigourney saw that these issues, especially those of slavery and women’s rights, would eventually become heated. As a result, women

would need to be prepared for them. It is almost as if Sigourney wants her readers to be prepared for a revolution because times will get difficult.

However, this may be Sigourney's way of suggesting that times are already difficult for women. As Cathy Davidson suggests in her study of the sentimental novel, "the concomitant unstated premise of sentimental fiction is that the woman must take greater control of her life and must make shrewd judgements..." (113). One of the functions of sentimental fiction was the "reappropriating choice" for women (123). They allowed women to see the consequences of good and bad choices, especially in terms of marriage, permitting them to, at least vicariously through literature, see their lives as a "consequence of [their] own choices" (123). As Davidson observes, "Weighed in that balance, many of the novels of the time are not the frothy fictions that we commonly take them to be, but evince, instead, a solid social realism that also constitutes a critique (even if sometimes covert) of the patriarchal structure of society. Thus if some early novels end unhappily, it may be because they acknowledge the sad reality of marriage for many women" (123). Because of the dangers of unhappy marriages, such works stressed the value of "informed choice," championing the cause of female education (123). The same ideas are present in Sigourney's nonfiction. She is outlining a curriculum for education that will allow women to make informed choices about their lives. Like the sentimental novels that ended unhappily because of the sad reality of the times, Sigourney's statements about difficult times acknowledge the adversities that women must now face and seek to change. In this case, Sigourney is suggesting a way for women to arm themselves for a present revolution.



To secure ammunition for this fight, Sigourney suggests a course of study and offers her philosophy of education. Written in 1833 and, because she includes women as intellectuals, Letters to Young Ladies corresponded to educational reform movements of the 1830's. She was herself a schoolteacher and opened a school of her own in 1811 in Norwich, Connecticut (Haight 9). In fact, Gordon Haight writes, "If Lydia had continued teaching, it seems likely that her name would rank nearly as high as Emma Willard's in the history of education for women" (10). Her philosophy of education extends beyond the school, however. For Sigourney, "life is one great school and we are all pupils, differing in growth and progress; but all subjects of discipline, all invested with the proud privilege of acquiring knowledge" (Ladies 149). Once again, Sigourney acknowledges women as intellectual beings who, through discipline, can achieve wisdom as a result of a strict course of study.

However, books are just like food and she realizes that certain kinds are not as good for a person as others are; she argues that "Miscellaneous reading has become so fashionable," it is difficult to prescribe a curriculum (149). Sigourney admits that "works of imagination" often fill the libraries of young women (149). Although some of these are excellent works and are "the productions of finest minds and abound with purist sentiments," a reader must make discriminations (149). By making this observation, Sigourney is achieving two purposes. First, she places women within a sentimental sphere, and this would be acceptable to a patriarchal culture. By saying that a woman needs to make careful choices about sentimental books, she is suggesting that such works are inferior and this would not disturb conventional views. She even says that they have little value except to amuse. Secondly, though, Sigourney is suggesting that women can

do more than what is expected of them. They can go beyond simple domesticity or sentimentality, producing works that showcase their imagination of the "finest minds."

However, the statement also suggests that women can work within the categories assigned to them to achieve a greater purpose, similar to the sentimental novels that Davidson discusses that covertly critique society. Likewise, Sigourney herself is doing the same thing through her "guidebooks." She is taking traditional, feminine stereotypes and language and using them to suggest creative strategies for women to use in writing and daily life in order to cope with bad marriages, confining household duties or perhaps feelings of anxiety or entrapment.

In terms of curriculum, she suggests, "it is wiser to be busied in furnishing a full storehouse for that approaching winter" (151). Sigourney is reiterating her warnings about the future because a mind filled with works that amuse rather than ones that stimulate the intellect will not be of use when a time of crisis is at hand. Instead, Sigourney stresses the necessity of reading history and biography. The reader must be willing to interject her own opinions when reading such things, so as to get beyond false glories and in order to analyze the facts. She also emphasizes the importance of poetry and mental philosophy because they "refine sensibility and convey instruction" and "promote knowledge" respectively (153-154). It is interesting to note that Sigourney advises the study of logic and argues that women have devoted too little to that subject. She repeatedly employs the strategy of self-deprecation when she makes her arguments, calling women's modes of reasoning inverted, which exposes them "to the criticism even of schoolboys" (155). However, within this deprecation she is still laying the groundwork for an education that will develop strong reasoning and argumentative

techniques, so that women will be able to argue their cause through intelligent discourse that will not allow them to be dismissed.

Because of her strong religious nature and possibly the growing religious movements of the era, Sigourney underscores the need for a firm background in ethics and sacred literature. People should read the Bible everyday since some of them have a tendency to be blinded because of earthly concerns, creating the need for a strong meditative reading of the Bible, which can offer clarity. She adheres to a religious education, which might be the result of having religious ideals ascribed to her. Religious reading becomes a guiding force for a strong moral background for Sigourney. It is also an avenue through which she can criticize her culture. Through her adherence to a religious curriculum she is embracing the pious qualities that men have used to describe women, so she does not take a threatening stance, since she is working within the religious realm in which men have placed women. However, her criticism that people are blinded by earthly concerns is an indictment of a society that values economic hierarchy over communal relationships. Her statements are general, so they can be seen as applying to all people. Since she does not come right out and criticize men who have the power, she is able to get away with such critical remarks.

Sigourney offers an early education in strategy, stressing the techniques necessary for memorization and incorporation of knowledge. Her strategy is ingenious because she takes a sarcastic tone when discussing how women use their minds:

If anyone complains she has a weak memory it is her own fault. She does not take due pains to give it strength. Does she forget the period for meals, the season for repose? Does she forget the appointed hour for the

evening party, or to furnish herself with a fitting dress in which to appear there? Does she forget the plot of the last romance, or the notes of a fashionable piece of musick? Yet some of these involve detail, and require application. Why then might not the same mind contain a few historical facts, with their correlative dates? (157)

Although it appears that Sigourney is simply poking fun at women and how they choose to spend their time, from a feminist perspective Sigourney is critiquing women's confinement in a sphere that neglects their intellectual capabilities. Husbands, fathers, and other men of power who influence women's lives, force them into domestic and social obligations. However, she is chiding women for not applying the same initiative to reading and education as they do fulfilling the expectations of the men in their world. She is suggesting that if one can devote so much energy to domestic issues and frivolous social energies, then that same energy could be used for more. With her comment on the plot of the romance, she is belittling it as silly. In doing so, she takes the same dismissive attitude of many male literary critics. However, she does so in a manner that would be recognized by other women in the situations outlined above. Women who do use all their energies towards cooking or preparing for parties as opposed to writing or pursuing intellectual interests might be convinced to try and change their situation because they can identify with what Sigourney is saying.

The points she makes are intriguing because she is harsh in her criticism, but by burying it within a lesson book for women that stresses female inferiority, at least on the surface, she can make her points without disturbing the status quo. After all, Sigourney does admit that in order to further female education women must talk with men because

"with the other sex will be found the wealth of classical knowledge and profound wisdom" (160). She is either playing the submissive role she has been assigned, or she is offering a deceptive way of building argumentative strategies by copying male models.

As with her discussion of writing, Sigourney's attentions given to reading stress the need for expression in one's own way and she does this by emphasizing memory, treating it as a female entity and ascribing feminine characteristics to it. She capitalizes "Memory" and personifies it, making it similar to a character from a medieval morality play. Her whole emphasis is on memory, but the goal is to "give the substance of the author, correctly and clearly in your own language" (158). Memory and understanding are linked so that the female mind prospers. In comparing memory to a domestic servant, she offers a subversive critique, suggesting the power of taking charge of Memory as if it were a housewife or a servant: "Tell her it is her duty to keep them and to bring them forth when you require. She has the capacities of a faithful servant, and possibly the disposition of an idle one. But you have the power of enforcing obedience, and of overcoming her infirmities" (158). She is parodying the power relationship of men to women by reversing the roles. Yet, she also compliments women and their duties by saying that memory has the same capacities as a faithful servant. Through her analogy of memory and servant, Sigourney enters into the discussion of the creative process, "[and] finds that her imagination is compelled... by images that are closer to her experience as a nineteenth-century American woman" (Baker 74). She is using what both she and her readers know to make her points.

In order to practice what has been learned, Sigourney suggests the creation of weekly societies composed of a few women with similar tastes and interests. She stresses

that opinions that dissent from popular, historical beliefs or those of a noted historian, for example, should be freely expressed. She explains, "From this partnership in knowledge, great increase of intellectual wealth will be derived, while your subjects of thought and conversation will be perceptibly elevated" (Ladies 161). It is significant to note her use of "partnership," which suggests a common bond among women in their quest for knowledge and an even greater control over their lives as a consequence. With the phrase "partnership in knowledge," Sigourney offers a female voice that is grounded in a relationship web. In this respect, she was ahead of her time, for it is over one hundred years later that Carol Gilligan describes a similar type of relationship in her 1982 book, In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. At the same time, Sigourney's recommendations for societies are reminiscent of women's literary clubs of the time period and a precursor to women's rights conventions. As a result, Sigourney's educational views are both reflective of her time and also a hint of what is to come.

Sigourney's final discussion of books provides another outlet through which she can critique men who control women, such as husbands or fathers. She does this through a subtle comparison of books to the people around her. Sigourney sees books as "*friends*, safe accessible, instructive, never encroaching, and never offended at the neglect of any point of etiquette" (Ladies 163). She then asks, "Can this be said of all your associates?" (163). Books are the perfect friends because they do not force a woman to conform to duty or stereotype. However, this is problematic, because books, especially those written by males, often portrayed women in stereotypical ways. Still, as Sigourney has shown, books can be allies because even when women conform to traditional norms on the

surface, they can deliver a message in a discursive or subversive way. Through her questioning, Sigourney criticizes both men and society for their constraints in a covert fashion.

Thus, education is one of the keys to expression and perhaps an increase in influence for Sigourney, and because a mother is an important agent for education, and she has great power. Sigourney sees motherhood as holding "a higher place in the scale of being" (*Mothers* 9). She acknowledges that a mother is a creator when she states, "no longer will you now live for self; no longer be noteless and unrecorded, passing away without name or memorial among the people" (9). Sigourney's use of "noteless" and "unrecorded" lends itself to a literary analogy. Through their teaching and the nurturing of their children, women pass something of themselves along, much as a poet does when she writes something on a page. In fact, a poet nurtures creation from future writers because she serves as a role model, much like a mother to her children. Like the mother who gives up her self for the good of her children, the early female writer often sacrificed herself in a way because she was many times the recipient of harsh criticism and ridicule. Sometimes, as was the case with Sigourney, her accomplishments were forgotten and dismissed by later generations. However, both the poet and mother lay the groundwork for future endeavors.

One of the benefits of motherhood that Sigourney emphasizes is that of power. She relishes the fact that a mother has power over the mind of her child. A mother has special dominion and "how perfect is this dominion over the unformed character of your infant" (10). At least in this realm, women are in command and can exercise control. Her emphasis on command suggests an inversion of the traditional power structure. In

this case, women occupy the higher place. Instead of being told what to think by men, mothers dictate what is to be learned and thought. Yet, mothers remain in a specific realm. As Gilbert and Gubar state, "the fact that angel woman manipulates her domestic/mystical sphere in order to ensure the well-being of those entrusted to her care reveals that she *can* manipulate, she can scheme; she can plot—stories as well as strategies" (Gilbert & Gubar 26). Mothers are capable of influencing their children within their domestic realm and thus reflect the potential for influence outside that sphere.

By adhering to traditional conventions, Sigourney can celebrate the power of motherhood. For, example, she accentuates the significance of religion. It is a woman's duty to instill the values of God's will in her children. It is even more noteworthy to observe Sigourney's appeal to the patriotic importance of mothers. She talks about how the country is "exposed to the influx of untutored foreigner, and it seems to have made a repository for the waste and refuse of other nations" (Mothers 14). Her observations, from this perspective, make her celebration of motherhood and women's power tolerable because they address a key concern of the time, which was the influx of immigrants.

Hence, in her non-fiction works, Sigourney offers manipulative strategies for women, whether they are authors or housewives. As a result, her writings detail the beginnings of a feminist aesthetic. She provides, through her suggestions, an early answer to Bryan's question of how women are to write. Sigourney does this by example, burying messages within seemingly domestic and motherly manuals. By doing so, she laid the groundwork for later feminist techniques and does so by offering strong advice within a palatable framework.



This unconventional voice that worked within established tradition resulted in a successful literary career that bridged different genres. Sigourney was most famous for her poetry and she employed many of the same strategies in her poetry that she uses in her nonfiction, critiquing from within. She was also able to paint descriptive pictures, taking those elements that had been designated as female and using them to create poetry with subversive undertones. It is towards Sigourney's poetry that this discussion will now focus its attentions. In so doing, it will be clear that Sigourney's poetry exhibits an unconventional voice within conventions.

## Chapter 2: Lydia Sigourney's Poetry

### An Unconventional Voice Within Convention

Although modern critics often belittle it, poetry of the sentimental tradition was very popular in the nineteenth century. In fact, Judith Fetterley suggests that poetry is representative of some of the best work of nineteenth-century American women writers (14). For example, from 1800 to 1850 there were at least eighty women in America who published books of poetry, and great number of women published their works in magazines (Baym 296). While Longfellow was considered the most popular poet of the antebellum period, "most of the native poetry read and remembered by Americans was the work of women" (Baym 297). For a male critic, such popular poetry is seen as "light," and it reemphasizes a woman's place in domestic or religious spheres. However, it was popularity that opened a door through which women authors could explore subversive techniques.

Women put forth their best in this less scrutinized form, their voices free to express critiques in this less "serious" format. In fact, within poetry, subtextual meanings become evident through "gaps" and "fissures" of the text and are present in its rhythms and images (Stanton 75). Women authors can place their indirect critiques within these subtexts. As Audre Lourde states, "Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought...Poetry is not only dream of vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives" (Lourde 126). Poetry is a way of conveying ideas that are often difficult to express or are unacceptable to the mainstream; as Lourde explains, "Right now, I could name at least ten ideas I would have once found intolerable or incomprehensible and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poems" (126). Poetry of the sentimental tradition "takes on common sense, the weapon we most strongly control, and uses it to undermine our sense of the individual self...reversing the crucial hierarchy over emotion" (Finch 5). Lydia Sigourney's critiques are evident within the subtexts of this supposedly "inferior" and

"sentimental" form. In this manner, she is able to express unconventional ideas within the confines of tradition.

Of the best-known and read women poets during the first half of the nineteenth century, Sigourney is the most popular and the most important because she serves as a foundation for future women's poetry. Sigourney preceded Longfellow by a decade and made poetry "an acceptable and profitable profession for women" (Fetterley 107). As the "first" to be read by a mass female audience, Sigourney, like Sedgwick with her novels, had a powerful influence, both on other women writers as well as on how women's poetry was received at the time (Baym 297). In this respect, Sigourney set the stage for later women writers. During the first half of the nineteenth century, she published approximately sixty books and appeared in the major journals of that period such as Godey's Lady's Book and Graham's Magazine (297). As Nina Baym observes, "As a poet who elected to 'write as woman,' she defined the opportunities and limits controlled by a literary representation of gender still powerful today" (297). Sigourney's poetry was "to some degree an extension of the service conventionally assigned to women" (Fetterley 107). Sigourney serves as a role model for later writers because she worked within the submissive feminine roles ascribed to women, in order to critique them.

As a poet who operated within these conventions, Sigourney's poetry can be categorized according to subject and tone. For the purpose of this discussion, I have chosen to break her poems down into three categories: domestic poems, elegiac poems and poems that describe women's lives in terms of education, poetry, and religion. Her domestic works use everyday objects as vehicles for expression. Sigourney's elegies, her most popular poems, lament the passing of an individual but celebrate that person's entrance into Heaven. Finally, the third category of poetry contains subject matter ranging from patriotism to the value of poetry.

Lydia Sigourney spent much of her career as a poet celebrating and examining the life of women, including girlhood, education, religion, marriage and motherhood, and "the

domestic sphere." In fact, domestic issues become a trope through which Sigourney can speak (Baker 69). As Dorothy Z. Baker notes, "It is commonplace that nineteenth-century American female authors often address their domestic roles and domestic concerns within their art" (69). Poetry such as this is an example of the "self-reflexive" because it meditates on the concerns and tasks of a woman's home life, reasserting the validity of such a sphere as a means for poetic expression (69). For example, Baker discusses Sigourney's poems, "To a Shred of Linen" and "To a Fragment of Cotton" and notes that in both, "Sigourney spotlights a modest, homely object for use not as a metaphor but as a vehicle for poetic expression in its own right" (70). Eventually, in "To a Shred of Linen," the speaker sends a scrap to a paper mill, where it will be transformed into the paper on which the poet can create (72). With this, the scrap literally becomes a domestic writing instrument.

This same aspect of Sigourney's inner, subversive voice is evident in a poem entitled "Oak in Autumn," which is seemingly about the effect of autumn and winter on an oak tree, but is actually Sigourney's lament about men's attitudes towards women, especially female writers. An oak tree is an everyday object found in nature. It symbolizes American homelife for women, whether the tree is being used to hang a clothesline or is simply in the yard outside the kitchen. In this poem, Sigourney uses it as a vehicle through which she can explore her concerns about women's creativity and independence. Like the frost and cold that slowly eat away at and drain the life away from nature, men threaten to take the life from women's voices. As Annie Finch suggests, "In 'Oak in Autumn,' the speaker, as a 'poet,' is a natural and self-evident object with predictable attributes as much as is the tree she writes about" (Finch 9). The tree is the substitute voice through which the poet can speak.

The poem begins with Sigourney addressing the oak tree, linking herself as a poet to the tree as she calls, "Old oak! Old oak! the chosen one,/ Round which my poet's mesh I twine" (ll. 1-2). She proceeds by placing the tree in a menacing context, which is a

characteristic of her domestic poetry. When Sigourney celebrates the ideal, through her praise of motherhood or the domestic sphere, she often situates it in menacing contexts, such as the possible severing of a bond (Baym 297). In this case, the oak tree is in danger of being killed by frost. Sigourney observes, "I see the frost-king here and there/ Claim some brown leaflet for his own" (ll. 5-6). Because "He soon shall rear the usurper's throne" (l. 8), the "frost-king" is not only winter's attack on the oak, but also men's coldness. This is representative of men's attitudes toward women, since many men wish to claim women for their own and usurp power from them. Women's creativity is a life force, like the leaves of a tree, beautiful and growing outwards, but men would rather that creativity shrivel up and grow cold, similar to the brown, crumbling leaves on a tree.

Sigourney continues by chiding men for their false empathy, uncaring nature, and ambitions that trample over anything in sight: "In crimson bright, vain mockery of thy wo, he'll flout, and proudly climb thy topmost height to hang his flaunting signal out" (ll. 9-12). Outwardly, the poem is about a tree and Sigourney is criticizing men and their hypocrisy when it comes to nature, because on one hand, men say that they want to protect forests, yet the same men tear them down to build farms and towns, signifying their dominion over it. Beneath the surface, however, the subtext reveals that the same criticism can be made about male critics and the male writers of the time period who exhibit a double standard in their treatment of their female counterparts. Upper class educated white men designated what writing styles were acceptable for women during the time period, so female authors were judged by male criteria, ensuring male dominance. As a result, men can say that they take the time to look at women's writing, but find it to be inferior based on their standards. In this way men exhibit "vain mockery of thy wo" because they do not really care about women's issues unless they conform to the stereotypes. However, such works are glossed over by male critics and not taken seriously. Hence, the poem can hold a subtext for readers who know what to look for, so there is hope for the female author even if her poetry is belittled.

As a result, Sigourney seems hopeful because although the frost does defeat the tree, it is only temporary:

While thou, as round thine honours fall,  
 Shalt stand with seam'd and naked bark,  
 Like banner-staff, o lone and tall,  
 His ruthless victory to mark. (ll. 13-16)

The tree is bare, but it remains standing. Despite the menace, Sigourney demonstrates the power of a strong will. The threats to the tree are equated to the dangers to the woman writer. Likewise, women must also remain strong, even though they have been outwardly chastised and criticized by men, for a woman's interior, her inner strength and spirit, cannot be stripped away because men do not look for a subtext in a women's poetry or in her actions.

In the last stanza, the poet and the tree are identified with one another, and Sigourney addresses the oak directly, linking the possibility of losing poetic "power" to the defeat of the tree by the frost (Finch 9). However, the speaker says that although the oak is gone for now, the speaker will go to the window to await the spring and the tree's rebirth:

I, too, old, friend, when thou art gone,  
 Must pensive to my casement go...  
 But when young Spring, with matin clear,  
 Awakes the bird, the stream, the tree,  
 Fain would I at her call appear,  
 And hang my slender wreath on thee. (Sigourney, ll. 17-18, 21-24)

This is an example of how Sigourney gives voice to natural objects, allowing them to speak in addition to her own voice (Finch 6). Because they are linked, the tree takes on the role of poetic creativity, or, better yet, opportunity. In addition, the oak tree becomes a symbol for literature. Of course, from a literal perspective, paper is made from trees, but

the analogy can be taken further. The brown leaflet represents the books that men claim as their own. Within this framework, the lines criticize men for usurping the privileged position in literature. The defeat of the tree by the frost parallels the inability of the poet to create because there is either a lack of opportunity or a creativity that has been silenced by male dominance.

However, when poetry is difficult to write, the speaker returns to her "pensive casement." A casement suggests possibility and sight, while pensiveness is a term for thought. The poet retreats to the window of her thoughts when the literal frost comes and the metaphorical frost of male dominance seems to thwart her creativity. In this sense, she is in hibernation like a tree, waiting for an opportunity or mode through which to express the creative voice. The hibernating tree becomes a symbol of poetic creation because, while it appears to be sleeping, it is actually waiting for spring. Similarly, a domestic poem appears to be "dull" on the surface, but it is subversive underneath as it awaits readers who will look for a subtext. In addition, oak trees seem to live forever, suggesting an eternal nature of feminine creative power.

Like the promise of spring's return, a female poet will continue to write despite those around her who wish to denigrate her. As the speaker who stands in support of the oak, and remembers it by placing a wreath on it, women must also stand behind one another, remember their predecessors or become models themselves, and renew their creativity and voice, as nature renews life each spring. Besides being a symbol of remembrance, though, the wreath also represents the possibility of fame and intellectual achievement. Through this act, Sigourney looks towards a future in which women's intellectual accomplishments will be better recognized.

This type of self-reflexive poetry is one of the traits that make Sigourney a valuable study, especially because of her celebration of the domestic sphere. In this regard, she serves as a foundation for and a means of comparison to later writers. According to Baker, both Sigourney and Emily Dickinson use domestic images as a

source for poetic expression and as a means to voice their concerns (74-75). In "Poem 1708," for example, Dickinson uses a housekeeping metaphor to express her feelings on death (Baker 75). She speaks of "Sweeping up the Heart/ And putting Love Away" (qtd. in Baker 75). In "1442," Dickinson writes, "To mend each tattered Faith" (qtd. in Baker 75). In both instances, Dickinson employs the language of the domestic to express an emotional voice (75). However, Baker also notes that in other poems Dickinson uses the domestic for ironic purposes (80). For example, in "1275," the speaker "rejects her place in the sphere and denies the values of the world of commerce" because she takes the hand of the spider (81). In this regard, Dickinson takes the idea of domestic poetry and occupies a different stance. Nevertheless, Sigourney's value lies in the fact that she practiced a poetic tradition on which others could expand and build. By embracing the domestic voice, she opened the possibility for others to both identify with and rebel against it.

As is clear in the above discussion of "Oak in Autumn," Sigourney often exhibited the feminine sphere within a menacing context. One of the most serious threats to a female ideal in her poems is the destruction of mother-child relationship. The second category of her poetry, the elegy, addresses this concern and was one of her most popular types of poetry. In fact, she often wrote "memorial and consolatory" verses for strangers, and she was well known for "her responsiveness to the phenomena of death and bereavement" (Fetterley 107). Because of this, she was part of a nineteenth-century elegiac tradition" (Petrino 318). As part of this tradition, Sigourney is "sociologically significant as an index to the psychology and culture of nineteenth century women" (Wood 163). Sigourney's elegies and death poems are significant because they serve as material for cultural and feminist studies.

Although Elizabeth A. Petrino uses Sigourney's verse as an example of formulaic, sentimental elegies filled with "religious platitudes" (Petrino 318) and regards it as an example of what Emily Dickinson was rejecting in her child elegies, Sigourney's death



poems are more than just a reflection of the sentimental tastes of the period. There are religious tones that exhibit "[her] era's belief that a dying child was a spiritual exemplar for those left behind" (318), but the same poems have feminist undertones in them. In order to demonstrate this, I will be looking at two poems of this variety: "Death of An Invalid," and "Death of A Young Lady At the Retreat For the Insane." Both deal with the death of people whose relationship with someone has been severed. Each one also reflects the issues of the time period such as care of the sick and the treatment of mentally ill patients.

"Death of An Invalid" is interesting, from the outset, because of its title, since the word "invalid" can take on two possible meanings. On one hand, the term describes someone who is powerless. However, invalid can also mean "not valid," so the poem becomes the description of the death of someone who has become or was already not valid. In the eyes of a male-dominated culture, both descriptions are applicable to women. In different aspects of life, women have been traditionally viewed as weaker, or at least not equal to men. Physically, they have been designated as the weaker sex and have been assigned tasks based on those criteria. In terms of writing, women's literature has been considered inferior to male writing. In the nineteenth century, women did not have the right to vote, so their political views were not considered valid. In all three instances, women are deemed not as valid as men. In this way, outwardly, the poem becomes a lament for a woman who has been worn down by age. However, it can also be taken as a sharp criticism of a culture that has designated her as powerless because she is "someone who is not valid."

Sigourney's repeated refrain of "How oft" celebrates the woman's life, especially her observation: "How oft would'st thou the passing hour beguile/ though health refused to flush thy cheek again" (ll. 5-6). These particular lines use the metaphor of the struggle against old age to describe a nineteenth century woman's struggle for a voice. She must spend the hours "beguiling," feigning submissiveness to accomplish literary and social goals. The poem itself is an example of this "beguiling" technique, since criticism is

present within a poem that outwardly reads as an expression of sorrow over the death of an unfortunate and the hope of possible resurrection in Heaven.

Within the same stanza, the speaker laments missing "...thy custom'd mourning smile, though pale beneath the shaft of lingering pain" (ll. 7-8). Sigourney's use of the word "shaft" is particularly telling. On one hand, it can be construed as a phallic symbol that is indicative of a patriarchy that is pinning down and undermining a woman's joy. This could take the form of chores or other duties imposed on a woman by a husband. A second meaning for shaft might be a pen. If taken in this context, the line indicates the frustration of the woman writer and the pen is what is causing her pain. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe, women in literature have been "penned up" or "penned in" (Gilbert & Gubar 13). In the case of the poem, the woman is written as either a submissive angel or a rebellious monster by male writers whose definitions of literature have pierced her, not allowing her a literature of her own without a difficult struggle.

The final stanza describes the burial, evoking images of being confined. Sigourney writes, "Buried and stiff, awhile thy form must rest,/ The cold, damp earth thy dream of life blot" (ll. 13-14). On a literal level, Sigourney is describing a body being laid to rest in the cold earth. However, it can also be read symbolically as a description of women's writing and even their lives. Women are buried and encased by tradition and convention, with dreams of authorship frustrated by lack of role models in combination with the men who seek to control the literary tradition. Sigourney ends the poem with a morbid prophecy rivaling that of Dickinson: "Thus all, like thee, shall sink on Nature's breast,/ Like Thee be mourn'd a moment—then forgot" (ll. 15-16). Sigourney realizes that everyone will eventually die because that is nature's way. From a literary aspect, Sigourney paints a dim picture. If women writers are not able to establish a tradition, they are in danger of being forever lost. It is ironic because, in a sense, Sigourney prophesizes her own fate with these last lines. Immensely popular in her time, Sigourney had long been ignored and forgotten, until recently, by critics.

Despite the unhappy sentiments at the end of the poem, the dash right before the final words suggests an opening or possibility for change. There is an unwritten space, perhaps indicating the necessity for placing meanings "between the cracks," as it were. Like Dickinson's gaps that suggest hidden meaning, Sigourney leaves openings for interpretation. This poem, published in 1815, shows that Dickinson was not alone in her use of gap-filled poetry and a desire for a space. It would seem Sigourney's elegies, at least in this case, are not as overly sentimental as they appear. In this respect, Sigourney and Dickinson are alike because they both criticize their situation in subversive ways, which further cements Sigourney as a forerunner in the development of a feminist poetic.

A second poem, entitled "Death of A Young Lady At the Retreat For the Insane," is also an example of Sigourney's use of the elegiac death poem to make feminist critiques. At the same time, this poem is a reflection of the time period. For example, in the 1830's and 1840's Bellevue was used as "a penitentiary for paupers" (Burns 407). Inmates were treated like prisoners in a system that separated poor people according to race and even "character" (407). This poem was originally published in 1815, many years before, so it begins to address issues that would later arise.

The subject of the poem is the death of an insane woman. Madness is often a strong indication of a feminist text. This expression of madness is the result of the anxiety produced from being both a woman and a writer. Gilbert and Gubar observe, "As we noted above, for an 'anxiety of influence' the woman writer substitutes what we have called an 'anxiety of authorship,' an anxiety built from complex and often only barely conscious fears of that authority which seems to the female artist to be by definition inappropriate to her sex" (51). Women were taught that they did not have the authority to write. A literary tradition that has been handed down by patriarchy to female writers "is in many ways the germ of dis-ease or, at any rate, a disaffection, a disturbance, a distrust, that spreads like a stain throughout the style and structure of much literature by

women..." (51). This anxiety, brought about by alienation, took its form in a madness that is reflected through characters or subject matter in women's literature.

In her opening stanza, Sigourney asks why a young, beautiful woman would go mad when she has "her every want supply" (l. 4). However, this can be taken as sarcasm. A husband, children and a home were considered a woman's dream, and this familial sphere was considered a "woman's place." The same line can also be construed as a critique of how men treat women like infants or place them on a pedestal. To find out why "her glance so wildly rove some fancied fee to find," Sigourney commands, "*Go ask the sickening mind!*" (ll. 5-6, 8). The poem becomes an exploration of the girl's madness. To an outside observer, there appears to be no tangible cause for her ravings. However, from a literary perspective, Sigourney is describing a search for expression caused by an anguished woman's mind. Her attempts to escape from confinement have manifested themselves in the guise of mental illness, so she has been further imprisoned within patriarchal convention because males see her as mad and have "placed" her in an institution.

Sigourney is critical of how women are patronized and stereotyped. For example, when she writes that "They bear her wherewith cheering smile" (l. 9) in hopes of curing her "madness," it resembles a criticism of how men do not listen to women and simply nod and smile, without trying to change things. She makes this criticism within the context of religion when she writes, "Where Mercy spreads an angel-wing to do her Father's will,/ And heaven-instructed, plucks the sting/ From earth's severest ill" (ll. 13-16). The institution is considered a place of mercy where a tortured soul can find peace, so death comes with the promise of a merciful future. This is characteristic of the nineteenth century child elegy because the child is considered a pillar of virtue who dies at God's will and is rewarded in Heaven, so the poem conforms to the religious and social traditions of the time. However, the will of the Father can be considered the cause of the woman's distress. By conforming, women of the nineteenth century were described as "angels" of

virtue; otherwise, they were considered monsters (Gilbert & Gubar 17). To live up to these expectations, through life or literature, was a source of anxiety for women.

This trap is further demonstrated in the next stanza. There is no help to be found at the institution, where "Discas'd Imagination spread/ dark chaos o'er the soul;" (ll. 19-20). Sigourney's use of "disease" to describe the girl's imagination is ironic because her unleashed imagination can find no vehicle for expression. In this way, the inmate becomes a symbol for the dilemma of the nineteenth-century women, for they are often caught in "Devotion's Stream," and their anxieties, like the girl's are "Blent with [a] broken dream" (ll. 22, 24). Through devotion to husbands and fathers, women sacrifice their freedom. By trying to adhere to accepted truths and expectations, women's dreams are broken or do not find a voice.

Finally, with a Christian sentiment, Sigourney describes the girl's death. She urges, "think ye of Heaven!" and describes the way the girl's "stricken form" laid "down to its willing sleep" (ll. 33, 37-38). In using such language, Sigourney once again conforms to the popular elegiac style, but she is able to make her points. For example, "willing sleep" indicates following God's will. This positions the woman as an exemplar of faith who goes willingly to Heaven. In this way, the work looks like a Christian poem. However, "willing sleep" can also describe a woman who is willing to die because she is so worn down. Suicide can be viewed as a solution to the anxiety produced by expectations. The religious subject matter reveals the strong religious influence in her life, and it is also an example of a popular form of poetry but it also masks critique.

Through the death of the girl in the poem, Sigourney works within the confines of an assigned literary tradition, the sentimental poetic elegy. In doing so, though, she is able to express disapproval through a subtext, and she accomplishes what Virginia Woolf later suggests: she "kills the angel in the house," destroying the stereotypical ideal that has "killed" women into art" (Gilbert & Gubar 17). However, at the same time, the girl appears to be a virtuous soul who dies and enters into a merciful Heaven in a celebration

of Christian faith, so Sigourney adheres to the elegiac ideal on the surface while offering criticism within the subtext.

Sigourney's poems address a variety of subjects. She addresses domestic issues in some of her works and discusses death in her elegies. This leads to a final category of her poetry: those dealing with her craft. As teachers, education is something that she and many other women of her time would be concerned with, so the poem entitled "Female Education" is a forum for Sigourney to offer advice to her readers. The poem is an expression of patriotism and admiration for other countries that follow America's example. In this work, Sigourney is addressing a South American poet, as is indicated by a subtitle in the work, on the subject of the South American revolt against Spanish rule. As the poem progresses, it goes beyond admiration for the South American countries and becomes a celebration of womanhood and the call for women's solidarity. The poem is entitled "Female Education" because on the surface America serves as a revolutionary model for countries under colonial rule. By emphasizing female education, she offers that the revolutionary women of the present time become models for future generations of women.

In the opening stanza, Sigourney commends South America for its struggle against imperial rule and remarks that there is joy in America as a result of their freedom. She sees the poet as a "living lyre," a musical instrument that can stir the songs of freedom in people's hearts. In the following lines, Sigourney begins to connect the women of America with those in South America:

We, of thy sister land,  
The empire of free  
Joy as those patriot-breasts expand  
With genial Liberty. (ll. 5-8)

Sigourney communicates patriotism through her description of America as being free, but she deliberately uses the term "sister land" in describing America because she is making

the question of a liberty a feminist one, connecting herself with the women in South America. She uses the traditional female metaphor in her discussion of South America but her use of "sister" places an emphasis on unity between women. As South America achieves freedom, the next step is the expansion "with genial Liberty" of this freedom so that women may attain equality. In this manner, "even Woman's cloister'd soul walks forth among the free" (ll. 15-16). By using the term "even" in regards to women's status, Sigourney suggests that up until this point they are being treated as less than persons. She describes women's souls as cloistered, which suggests being shut away or kept metaphorically in the dark. For Sigourney, the time has come for them to step forward.

Sigourney urges that it is time to break free of prisons constructed by not only Spain but also by men in relationship to women. It is time to begin thinking for oneself, and she advises "Bid the long-prisoned mind attain ... Bid her unpinion'd foot/ The cliffs of knowledge climb," (ll. 19, 21-22). In one respect, she is referring to the country's collective mind that is striving to break free of tyranny, but Sigourney does use the female persona through the word "her." Although countries are often portrayed as feminine, a male contrivance, the use of lines such as "her unpinion'd foot" can be applied to women. A foot that is unpinioned suggests one that is not held back by anything, especially fear. For women, this can be the fear of masculine reprisal, but they must search themselves in order to surpass this fear and climb the cliffs of knowledge to achieve wisdom beyond a male-dominated order. This wisdom and strength can be passed onto each generation, mocking the "blight of time" (ll. 23-24).

In the final stanza, Sigourney wants the citizens to "Break oblivion's sleep" by going beyond their ignorance and striving for more:

Say,—"Break oblivion's sleep  
And toil with florist's art,  
To plant the germs of virtue deep  
In childhood's fruitful heart,

To thee, the babe is given  
 Fair from its glorious Sire,  
 Go,—nurse for the King of Heaven,  
 And *He* will pay the hire." (ll. 25-32)

At the end of the poem, Sigourney makes reference to Christianity, which is one of her favorite subjects. In doing so, she believes in a male-dominated religion as well as a sphere traditionally assigned to women, so she never moves out of the realm that has been designated as belonging to women. Despite the patriarchal nature of Christianity, it occupies a special place for the downtrodden, and is often utilized as a metaphor in literature of the sentimental tradition. Sigourney identifies with the mistreated, counting women among those who have been cast aside.

Mothers are among the women who have been mistreated in the sense that they are often taken for granted. The last stanza is riddled with maternal images, so it is possible that the florist symbolizes a mother because the speaker urges mothers to "plant the germs of virtue" in children. With this invocation, Sigourney reemphasizes a woman's place as a moral center. The mother is asked to "nurse" the babe" who is given to her from God, paralleling Christ's birth and Mary's sacrifice in raising him. Thus, the speaker asks mothers to accept the "gifts" of children because they are the future, and through a mother's sacrifice, "oblivion's sleep," or death, is conquered, much like Christ's sacrifice conquered death. Jane Tompkins discusses the function of Christianity and motherhood in sentimental works through her discussion of Uncle Tom's Cabin:

Christian love fulfills itself not in war but daily living, and the principle of sacrifice is revealed not in crucifixion but in motherhood...The brilliance of the strategy is that it puts the central affirmations of a culture into the service of a vision that would destroy the present economic and social institutions; by resting her case, absolutely, on the saving power of Christian love and on the sanctity of motherhood and the family, Stowe



relocates the center of power in American life, placing it not in the government, nor in the courts of law, nor in the factories, nor in the marketplace, but in the kitchen. (Tompkins 97, 99-100)

These same ideas can be applied to Sigourney's sentimental poems. "Female Education" is a celebration of women's lives in praise of motherhood. The ending calls for Christian service, but she uses it as an avenue to celebrate motherhood. In other words, she takes the religious realm women have been assigned and uses it as a means to express female power.

Another realm that has been traditionally designated as the realm of women is the garden. Sigourney makes the suggestion of engaging in the "florist's arts," which reflects growth, and perhaps the florist is a metaphor for the poet. The use of this metaphor also maintains the traditional women's role by placing them in a domestic context of a garden. From a poetic stance, the germs planted are ideas and images of the poet, so the stanza explains how to pass the dream of creativity along.

Thus, Sigourney achieves multiple purposes in this work. On the surface, the poem celebrates liberty and freedom and, in so doing, supports the patriotic ideal of liberty. However, there are two conflicts presented. There is not only a conflict between an imperial power and its colony, but underneath the support for a nation's freedom is a call for women to unite and achieve autonomy for themselves, which can be accomplished through the power of motherhood. A mother-child bond is a reversal of the conventional male-female power structure because women are in charge of their children and teach them lessons about equality and can pass on to their daughters the ways of subversion.

Sigourney celebrates the importance of her art in the aptly named "Poetry." In this work, Sigourney praises poetry for its lasting quality and its ability to spread a message throughout all the trials of one's life. Poetry is a conveyor of emotion and a reflection of life. Its ideas are eternal, because once someone reads it, for good or bad, it becomes a mode of discussion and its meanings are passed from reader to reader. She

also views poetry as God-inspired, so religion plays a significant role in this poem. Sigourney uses the metaphor of a day to describe a person's life and poetry's relationship to it.

In the first stanza, Sigourney begins by describing the sunrise, which is symbolic for the early years in a person's life: "MORN on her rosy couch awoke, enchantment led the hour" (ll. 1-2). Similar to the beginning of a day, a baby begins life by being enchanted its surroundings. The inspiration that gives rise to and comes from poetry is something that can enhance and "freshen" one's outlook, as Sigourney explains: "And mirth and music drank the dews that freshen'd Beauty's flower" (ll. 3-4). The same beauty that is in nature is replicated through poetry. From within this beauty, a little girl states, "Oh, speak no ill of poetry,/ For 'tis a holy thing" (ll. 7-8). These last lines suggest that poetry is worthwhile. It has a magical effect and Sigourney praises its value through her emphasis of its religious nature of it because it is inspired by God and hence eternal. To further illustrate this, Sigourney chooses to repeat these lines at the end of each stanza, at a different point in the day being described. Through this association of poetry and religion, Sigourney works within the religious sphere that women have been allocated.

The second stanza compares mid-day to the middle of one's life, when things begin to get difficult. Sigourney observes a traveler while the sun beats down on him: "And on with heaving breast, I saw a weary pilgrim toil unpitied and unblest" (ll. 10-12). This seems to be not only a comment on the difficulties of life but also an observation of the complications involved with writing. It is very much like a journey in that there will be times when writing is a struggle, but Sigourney knows it is a necessary way to communicate ideas. For example, women are placed in certain realms, so female writers are subjected to stern criticism should they attempt anything new. There has to be someone willing to take the first step.

Analogous to someone in middle life who faces tough decisions, the writer must be willing to spend her prime years facing decisions about whether or not to proceed in the

face of adversity. Sigourney reaffirms this by repeating the line "Speak no ill of poetry...", which in this case is being voiced "from a broken string" in "trembling measures" (ll. 13-14). Women writers must also be willing to go forward, as pilgrims who toil on, or nothing will ever change. They must adapt to the life as writers by utilizing the genres, styles, and spheres they are given:

The final stanza compares nightfall to death:

Twas night, and Death the curtains drew,  
 'Mid agony severe,  
 While there a willing spirit went  
 Home to a glorious sphere (ll. 17-20)

Like the spirit who willingly traverses agony to get to heaven, the poet must also be strong because poetry is a medium through which hope can be expressed. A person must be a "willing spirit" who "sighs" even though the end is at hand or difficult circumstances arise. The poetess takes on the role of sacrificial victim since there is a risk of ridicule or the possibility of being forgotten after the works are written.

Since they speak of the concept of sacrifice, these lines are a continuance of the religious metaphor. Through the trope of religion, the last line further illustrates the importance and transcendent nature of a poet's work, as it is an angel who repeats the line about the holiness of poetry. In another comment regarding the value of sentimental literature, Tompkins uses Editha's death in Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin as an example of the value of Christianity in sentimental literature:

Stories like the death of little Eva are compelling for the same reason the story of Christ's death is compelling: they enact a philosophy, as much political as religious, in which the pure and powerless die to save the powerful and corrupt, and thereby show themselves more powerful than those they save... Little Eva's death enacts the drama of which all the major episodes of the novel are transformations: the idea, central to Christian

soteriology, that the highest human calling to is to give one's life for another. (Tompkins 85-86)

The speaker in the poem describes a person who dies willingly, like Christ, becoming a servant of God after sacrificing his or her life through the agony of death. In order to reach the kingdom of Heaven, one must give up one's mortal existence, sacrificing the earthly realm for eternal life.

The religious aspects of this poem are reminiscent of the points made in Sigourney's elegiac poems because it sets up the dying person as a pillar of faith. In this case, through her repetition of the line "Speak no ill of poetry...", Sigourney's work becomes a defense of poetry as a valid form. The poem goes through the stages of not only a day, but also a life. The one constant notion is that poetry is crucial because it is a way to transform the spirit. It is transcendent, a way to change the world through Christian idealism, and its ideas will hopefully be available to future generations. Poetry for Sigourney is a way to fight through the travails of life, and it is a way to spread the message of women's experience, partly through its identification with religion.

One last poem gives insight into Sigourney's ability to utilize the trope of religion as a means to discuss the life of the female writer. It is entitled "Farewell," and it typifies the multiple readings that are spawned by her poems. In the first stanza, the speaker appears to be saying good-bye to a friend, and the tone is bitter, almost as if the speaker resents the departure of a friend. The word farewell itself is one that makes the speaker upset: "*Farewell!!* it hath a sombre tone, the lip is slow to take it/ It seemeth like the willow's moan when autumn winds awake it;" (ll. 1-4). However, it could be a description of mankind's reluctance to change. Saying farewell to tradition can be an uncomfortable experience and the speaker is voicing this discomfort. The last lines of stanza indicate the speaker's resentment at being told farewell: "It seemeth like the distant sea on some lone islet sighing, and yet thou say'st it unto me, and wait'st for my replying." (ll. 5-8). Either the person is upset because a friend has said good-bye, or he or she does not want to say

good-bye to old, traditional ways of thinking. If this second idea is the case, then the lines become an ironic description of the state of literature, since traditional patriarchy is reluctant to change the criteria that constitutes acceptable literature. Sigourney occupies a place in the literary world and pokes fun at the reasons behind the lack of female writers included.

The second stanza is somewhat more promising, because it seems to be pointing to a better future, one where the speaker hopes the person she is addressing will find happiness, a place where dreams can be pursued. She compares the present situation to "Winter's wrath," which is cold (l. 9). In this way, Sigourney means to say farewell to the present attitudes of the day and hopes to change them through Christian conversion, because the cold of winter suggests being "frozen" in attitude. In the next two lines, she offers, "May freshest roses deck thy path/ Yet bring no thorn to chide thee; and may'st thou find that better land/ Where no bright dream is broken,/ No flower shall fade in beauty's hand, and no farewell be spoken." (ll. 11-16). These lines contain Christian imagery as well. For example, Sigourney hopes that there will be no thorns, or prejudices to deter people from living. When Christ was put to death, he was forced to wear a crown of thorns, so this metaphor expresses Sigourney's hope that the person she is addressing will not suffer persecution. Through her use of religious metaphor, she poses a description of Heaven, since sentimental writers often "make their bid for power by positing the kingdom of heaven on earth" (Tompkins 96). The images of a place where no dreams are broken, no flowers fade, and no farewells are spoken suggest a time or place where there is no death, suggesting an eternal or heavenly existence.

In keeping with this transcendence motif, it is the speaker who is leaving, or perhaps she is nearing the end of her writing career. She is offering her best wishes to those who follow her in literary circles, hoping that future writers will not have to suffer the "thorny" criticisms of males who belittle the writings of women. If looked upon in this manner, then it is particularly telling of the future of women's literature because Sigourney

can be considered a forerunner to later female poets, so the poem becomes a farewell to her art but hope for those who follow. She dreams of a time when people can pursue their hopes, no matter what they are. In this way, beauty will not fade under the threat of fear or hate, and saying farewell will no longer be as sad because the speaker can take solace in the fact that those who follow are in a good place. From a religious perspective, the speaker hopes that he or she is heading for a better place. Thus, the poem says farewell in different fashions. Its meaning shifts from personal good-byes to the changing of ideas.

It is this rich variety of meaning in Sigourney's poetry that makes her worthy of further study. Her poetry frames a paradigm for feminist strategies. As the first woman in America to make poetry an acceptable way to make a living, she laid the groundwork for verse as a means for both critique and self-expression. Because she was able to utilize subversive techniques that her women readers would recognize, she was also one of the first women authors to write for a mass woman audience. As a result, Sigourney functions as a precursor and an originator of a female literary tradition in America. She makes unconventional statements within the confines of an established convention that she has been assigned to. From a historical viewpoint, she is reflection of a past time and culture and, more importantly, women's reactions to it.

Her ability to work within established tradition is not limited to her poetry, however. Her talents are also evident in her short stories, so this study will now shift its concentration towards them. By doing so, it will become evident that she employs subtexts and subversion in her short stories. Because her sketches are not taken seriously and are considered light and sentimental, like her poetry, Sigourney is able to critique her society by using the language that other women will understand. In doing so, she has created a blueprint of feminist strategies of resistance and subversion.

### Chapter 3: Blueprints of Feminist Strategy

#### In Lydia Sigourney's Sketches

Although known primarily as a poet, Lydia Sigourney also wrote sketches. Along with poetry, the sketch is another prominent genre through which women could express themselves. Sentimental poetry and novels were popular in the nineteenth century so writings in those genres were more apt to be subjected to the confines of male critics. These writings would instantly be compared to those of male authors. For example, women poets were expected to write light lyrical and religious poetry and were considered inferior writers for doing so. Likewise, women's novels were of the sentimental tradition for the most part and were seen as frivolous. Sketches, on the other hand, opened an avenue for women to work within a less-scrutinized genre. As Nina Baym explains, "the Lydia Sigourney who was so often—albeit and has been so ambiguously and ambivalently—praised in her own lifetime, and has been so heartily calumniated subsequently, is a representation based on only some fraction of what she wrote and published (Baym, "Reinventing," 67). Consequently, it is necessary to look at some of the other, lesser-known works that Sigourney produced in order to appreciate her full value.

As with her poetry, Sigourney, in her prose fiction, is able to work within traditional confines in order to examine her world. For example, in her large work, Sketch of Connecticut, Forty Years Since, Sigourney uses the village sketch to reflect "a locality with a diverse population as a microcosm of the nation at its founding" (Zagarell 43). At the same time, the work also "underscore[s] restrictions imposed by masculinity" (60). Thus, Sigourney's prose fiction can be read as more than just a collection of stories that describe particular locales.

Sigourney's shorter sketches work in a similar fashion. Although not often studied, they accomplish the goal of bringing attention to women's writing because they serve as a medium not only for cultural and historical study, but they reflect the strategies

of Sigourney's feminist voice. For example, certain sketches written by Lydia Sigourney can be seen as questioning masculine authority and those women who succumb to it. These works serve as a blueprint for a critique of patriarchal society for others to expand upon. Writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gillman and Susan Glaspell would later make use of the short story genre. Both used strategies that parallel those of Sigourney. Such techniques include charged subtext and encoded feminine language that appear to adhere to traditional male views of women but that are actually subversive.

One such short story, "The Family Portraits," is part of the Sketches collection originally published in 1827. The plot details the background of the people in two family portraits that are located in a Boston home. The narrator, a person who is looking at the portraits and explaining their meaning, has no identity, so the reader does not know whether speaker is male or female although in some of her sketches Sigourney does use a first-person male narrator. Despite the ambivalence about the narrator and the second-hand point-of-view, the story addresses women's conflicts and entrapments, whether they are inflicted by male society or self-imposed.

The sketch concerns Dr. John Ranchon, a native of France, who has been living in Boston for several years along with his daughter Mary. Years before, Ranchon had eloped with his wife Louise to America, liberating her from a convent with the help of her brother, Edward Beauchamp. However, shortly after Mary's birth, Louise dies, leaving Ranchon and his daughter to live alone in a Boston home along with several servants. This is the situation as the story opens in 1722.

The "Family Portraits" is not simply a sketch of a woman's life in relation to her family. It is also a criticism of the entrapment of women and the so-called "duties" that confine them. As Mary begins to grow into a young woman, the men in town become interested in her and, because of this, are especially nice to Dr. Ranchon because they are eager to marry into the family. However, in her description Sigourney states, "He was by no means indifferent to the flattery of marked politeness, though his simplicity of heart



induced him to consider it as a spontaneous tribute to *his merits*" (my emphasis) (Sigourney 89). This statement is a subtle way of critiquing Ranchon and those men like him who do not see their daughters as independent people but mere extensions of themselves. Consequently, it would never occur to a man raised in a patriarchal system to see his daughter as someone deserving praise. He assumes it is his own importance that garners respect.

Ranchon, like most fathers, still regards his daughter as a child, seeing her as "scarcely emancipated from the nursery" and addressing her as "baby" (90). Because of this attitude, he expects her to obey his will and grow up in a certain manner. She is expected to follow "the course which he had originally adapted, of sending her to the most expensive schools, asking her once a week how her music and French came on, and praising every flower or landscape which she produced, however carelessly executed" (90). When Beauchamp reminds him that Mary is growing into a young woman, Ranchon questions her as to whether or not she has begun to master the tasks of a wife, such as knowing what "went to the composition of a pudding" (90). He also reminds her of the type she must marry, one of the French Huguenots who live in the area, a command "founded on the old gentleman's national partialities, which were exceedingly strong and was understood by his family to rank among those few positive commands of the Doctor's which it was never safe to disobey" (90-91). Descriptions such as these illustrate the conditions under which girls had to exist, for it was not safe for Mary and other daughters of the time to disobey their fathers' wishes; to do so might mean chastisement or exclusion. In fact, Sigourney herself entered into an "expected" marriage and was later not happy (Haight 50). In the case of the story, then, Mary becomes the perfect example of a woman trapped by her father's love and patriarchal expectations.

A father's love is not the only pressure on Mary in this story. Beauchamp, her uncle, is always there to make sure that she does not grow too confident. She is pretty and she knows it, exhibiting "betokened haughtiness" (Sigourney 91). However,

whenever she exhibits this "self-exultation," her uncle is there to put her in her place:

Love for his niece prompted him to permit no error in manner, no consciousness of beauty which might weaken its effect to pass without his satire. Finding herself the object of such close criticism, a salutary restraint was laid upon a deportment which would otherwise have been without control; and while she shrank from the wit of Beauchamp, she respected his judgment. She could not but perceive that the partiality of her father often moved him to countenance, or even to applaud in her actions and expressions which conscience told her deserved reproof (92)

Although Mary willingly acknowledges the necessity of such criticisms, the descriptions offered by Sigourney reveal an over-protective, cajoling father and an uncle who uses his reproaches to see that Mary does not attract a man that neither he nor Ranchon disapproves of. In this way, Mary is trapped between two types of men. One is trying to keep his daughter locked away and on a pedestal. The other is a loyal brother and fellow patriarch who perpetuates the belief that a woman needs to be protected and told what to do. Both seek to prevent her from developing a sense of self-esteem beyond that allowed by her gender.

Yet for all of Beauchamp's efforts to protect her, Mary becomes involved with Captain Patten, an Irishman who has his eyes on her money, and this in turn becomes a situation that puts Mary at risk:

The man whose attentions she encouraged, scarce knowing that she did so, was her senior by more years than she had numbered, and no novice in the science of entrapping the affections...His design was to possess himself of her fortune, and he saw no practicable avenue to this point, but through her affections. (93,94)

The language that Sigourney uses in this passage contains negative words such as "pain," "entrapping," and "possess" that reveal Mary's predicament. If the context is pressed

further, Sigourney's use of the terms of possession and fortune takes on a sexual connotation. Mary is figured as a sexual victim. Patten is seeking to take Mary's fortune, a possible metaphor for her chastity. Mary is in a situation that threatens to end painfully because, on the one hand, a man wishes to possess and ensnare her, and on the other hand, there are two men in her home who want to keep her safe, a form of entrapment.

Because of this dilemma, she begins to construct confinements within her own mind in response to the pressures placed upon her by the men in her life. Mary "endured the remorse of a generous mind, which finding itself involved in the mazes of duplicity, gradually loses the power of retracing its path" (94). This statement suggests a woman whose identity is compromised because of her obligations to the men in her life. Her lover pressures her to talk to her father, but due to her loyalty to her father she cannot bring herself to introduce Patten to him. This scenario causes her to withdraw: "Angry at her want of decision, she yielded to all the miseries of mental conflict...the tumult of her spirits created a temporary indisposition, and she confined herself to her chamber" (96). Trapped by male expectations, Mary disintegrates into mental illness, an example of the disease suffered by nineteenth-century women often associated with patriarchal constraints.

The metaphor of disease or madness, and the physical or mental ailments suffered by characters in women's works, has been used to reflect women's frustrations about being trapped by masculine views of them. As Gilbert and Gubar explain in Madwoman in the Attic, "The literature produced by women confronted with such-anxiety-inducing choices has been strongly marked not only by an obsessive interest in these limited options but also by obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them" (Gilbert and Gubar 64). Masculine texts have imprisoned women within the stereotypes of "angels," idealized dutiful housewives, or "monsters,"

those women who express autonomy (20, 28). Such pressures on women cause them a feeling of anxiety or "dis-ease" (51). In fact, women of the nineteenth century, many of them middle-class housewives, often suffered from agoraphobia, hysteria, and claustrophobia, resulting from the anxieties that result from trying to adhere to the expectations of a patriarchal world (53). Because women authors have only male predecessors for the most part, the female writer must fight against social conventions that denigrate women authors (49). Disease was a woman's experience, so, as a result, female anxieties, frustrations, and feelings of confinement were expressed in a covert manner through characters suffering such ailments. This strategy exposes the patriarchal socialization of women. Mary's condition is an example of disease resulting from the anxieties bred by patriarchy.

While in her room, Mary is advised by the housekeeper, Madelaine Dubelde, who chides Mary for sitting alone in her room. During this encounter, she complains about the stifling qualities of America, so Madelaine speaks for women who have lost their voice in America:

Now here you sit moping, day after day, like a creature shut up in a pound.  
I am absolutely afraid you will lose your senses, and I cannot see you  
suffering as you do, without thinking of some beautiful lines of a great  
French poet, about a rose fading in the wilderness. Once I could say them  
all by heart, and sing them too, but I have lost my memory, and my voice,  
and everything else, since I have been obliged to breathe the dull, heavy  
air of Boston. Why, your father invites nobody to visit at the house, but a  
parcel of half-starved Huguenots I wonder which one of them he proposes  
shall swallow you alive. (Sigourney 96-97)

This type of diatribe has certain anti-American sentiments to it, as if the American dream is really a hollow one. The ideal of the male conquering nature gives way to an image of a woman losing her voice and being consumed by her surroundings. Men are

characterized as a consuming threat that will swallow women alive. However, what is interesting is that Sigourney chooses to give such speeches to the maid, a character who later betrays the heroine because she is only interested in saving herself. Sigourney may be saying that women should start thinking of themselves first, but because she uses such a character to make these criticisms, the story as a whole becomes acceptable to the mainstream since the character who speaks her mind is a disreputable one and is not taken seriously. In other words, Sigourney is simply writing what a male audience wants to hear: only women who are of questionable moral character speak their minds, and those who are obedient live happily. However, the critical statements spoken by Madelaine are Sigourney's actual criticisms, and they are visible to those female readers who will recognize them as such because they have similar views.

Often, a women writer's true agenda will emerge from behind a placid, conservative text as she voices her disapproval through an aggressive, angry, or insane female character:

As we explore nineteenth-century literature, we will find that this madwoman emerges over and over again from the mirrors women hold up both to their own natures and to their own visions of nature. Even the most apparently conservative and decorous women writers obsessively create fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their authors' submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable. Of course, by projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women (who are suitably punished in the course of the novel or poem), female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them. (Gilbert & Gubar 77-78)

This character is not simply a foil to the heroine, but instead becomes "in some sense the

*author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage" and is a way for female authors to come to terms with their "uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be" (78). Sigourney was married but unhappy and she was a writer who wanted to express her views but was forced to work from within the conventions to which she was relegated. In both cases, there is tension, so her use of the double allows her to express her concern over these matters. Madeline can be construed as an example of the double. Because such characters are often destroyed or at least punished, women writers are able to voice opposition to patriarchal conventions in an acceptable manner, since, for the mainstream, these characters simply get what they deserve.

Madelaine likens Mary's situation to that of Mary's mother when she is taken to America, portraying the plight of women who become stifled by their environment. Although she is rescued from a convent, she is brought to America where she is once again shut in. Madelaine explains, "Your poor mother was not the shadow of herself, for years before you were born. And you are in the same way, I perceive... You cannot even bear a few minutes' discourse with a friend" (Sigourney 100). Madelaine tells Dr. Ranchon that Mary is sick even though she really is not because she wants to go back to France and uses Mary's supposed sickness as a means to get him to move back. In this respect, Madelaine is beginning to take the form of another obstacle for Mary. There is a lack of a real mother-daughter relationship in the story, and the surrogate mother/advisor role Madelaine takes on becomes harmful. This situation mirrors Sigourney's domestic poetry because the feminine is placed in a menacing situation since there is a lack of a mother-daughter bond. For example, in the poem "Oak in Autumn," Sigourney places a lone oak tree in danger of being overcome by frost to signify men who wish to deny women their creativity. In this short story, Mary's father and uncle wish to keep her shut away and Madelaine uses her as a means to get back to France. In both cases, Mary is not treated as an independent person.

When he hears of Mary's sickness, instead of talking with his daughter, Dr. Ranchon immediately looks for a physical cause thinking he will be able to protect and save her: "Credulous, and prone to agitation where his daughter was concerned, he ransacked his library for authors who had written upon this disease, collected his antiquated manuscripts to search for cases within the range of his own practice, and turned the whole current of his thoughts and conservation upon the phthisis pulmonalis" (101). This passage is indicative of a communication problem because Dr. Ranchon is unable or unwilling to look at the possibility of another problem besides sickness. Much like the "antiquated manuscripts" Dr. Ranchon uses, he is immersed in a masculine, patriarchal world which does not allow him to grasp the feminine or read any of his daughter's "signs" of a possible problem. In short, he cannot decipher the female code as it is not part of his superannuated ways.

As the story progresses, the tension increases because Madelaine is stopped by Captain Patten and asked to deliver a letter to Mary. Deciding not to read it, Mary is overwhelmed as "the bitterness of self-reproach, and the collision of love with duty rendered her an object of commiseration" (106). She has been reduced to an object, as the language of this phrase signifies, and because of her naiveté in such matters she is placed in a position where she might be treated as such and taken advantage of by the money-seeking Patten. She reads the letter, and its effect increases her confusion about her identity and what she must do. In the following passage, Mary is once again reduced to an object to be conquered and manipulated. Sigourney writes, "But to a novice, with an advocate in her own bosom, the appeal, if not irresistible, was at least dangerous. It rendered the writer an object of more undivided contemplation, and the lover who succeeds in monopolizing the thoughts of an innocent heart, is like the conqueror who cuts off the channels of supply from a besieged citadel" (107). Once again, Sigourney uses language suggesting entrapment and conquering, thus criticizing the attitude that women are to be dominated. With her use of the word citadel, though, she sets Mary up

as a fortress that is under attack. In doing this, Sigourney maintains the virginal stereotype of feminine purity through her use of the castle motif. Because she seemingly conforms to the notion that women belong on a pedestal, her story is glossed over by male critics.

Madelaine convinces Mary that she should elope with Patten, much as Mary's mother had done with Dr. Ranchon years before. They arrange a night when Beauchamp will be out of the house and set the time at midnight, because her father will be in bed. Whenever Mary starts to waver, Madelaine reminds her that her mother had eloped before her. Madelaine also describes a set, regular wedding as dull and even goes so far as to compare the wedding ceremony to a funeral:

Lord! How much better is this...to have a little life and motion, and spirit, and joy, than [to have] one of the dull weddings of this miserable country! Why a funeral is nothing to them for sadness...The old women snuffle and cry because they *know what it means*, and the young ones hide their faces because *they wish to know*. Then they all creep in mournful procession, two and two to congratulate the bride with such woe-begone faces...(114)

These urgings by Madelaine offer an interesting forum for analysis of Sigourney because, from one perspective, Madelaine is pushing Mary to be like her mother, a woman who was brought to America by her husband. However, following her husband's wishes is what made her mother miserable, and obedience is what limited many nineteenth-century women's existences, with the cycle being perpetuated through mothers teaching their daughters to acquiesce. From another perspective, Madelaine condemns marriage because it is like a prison, and the ceremony is a precursor to death since marriage robs women of their freedom, as the older ones already know. Still, the character who makes these comments is one who is unreliable since the narrator observes, "Most persons will condemn our heroine for listening to the opinions and employing the intervention of so contemptible a woman as Dubelde" (113). Madelaine is



proven to be an insincere character when the story reaches its climax.

This occurs when, ultimately, Mary decides she will elope with Patten. However, when she is ready to leave, she screams because her jewels were packed haphazardly, causing her father to wake up and subsequently demand to know what is happening. Madelaine, knowing she will be in trouble along with Mary, seeks to redeem herself in the eyes of her master by blaming Mary. She protests, "Thousands of times have I tried to dissuade her from leaving her poor, dear father. Hours without number, have I set before her the deadly sin of an elopement" (120). Ranchon, though, berates her, calling her a "Jezebel," and asks her who told her elopement was a sin because he never said it. This episode is possibly Sigourney's use of the woman as monster in traditional literature for her own purposes. She uses Madelaine to make her criticisms of traditional feminine roles, but male readers would simply see her as example of an independent woman who is punished because she has thoughts of her own. Trying to protect herself, Madelaine says that she was only against the elopement since it was not with an acceptable person but with an Irishman, which only angers Ranchon more because she knew about it and did not notify him. As a result, Madelaine is banished from the house and sent back to France on the next boat.

Meanwhile, Dr. Ranchon is comforting Mary, who has fainted. This time it is a male character who admits that there is a communication problem when Dr. Ranchon exclaims, "There! there! look up again! breathe better now, baby?--don't swoon again, as soon as you see me. A'nt angry--No, no--shall marry who you please--didn't mean you should marry a Frenchman against your will--No, no.--May have whoever you wish, only let father know it--That's all.--An't angry the least in the world,--do speak one word, baby Mary" (121). Dr. Ranchon has still not given up his practice of treating his daughter as a child. By using a male voice that admits there is a problem, and at the same time still practices those male tendencies to infantilize women, Sigourney is critiquing patriarchal beliefs from within those practices.

The situation is resolved when Beauchamp enters and explains that he has scared Patten away. When asked by Dr. Ranchon why he did not tell him that he knew of the proposed elopement, Beauchamp replies that Ranchon would have forbidden Mary to meet with Patten, and this would have caused Mary's passion for him to grow even more. Beauchamp affirms the stereotype that women are flighty, and that they cannot control their emotions. As an alternative to the situation, Beauchamp researches Patten's background, revealing him to be a scoundrel who travels under various names. Beauchamp secures a letter from Patten's wife that proves he is already married. When confronted, Patten runs away. Because Beauchamp uses his intellect to solve the problem, Sigourney seems to show that males are more logical than women and are the protectors of womanhood. In actuality, however, she is simply painting a surface picture that masks her criticism of female entrapments.

At the story's conclusion, Mary marries a descendant of the Huguenots, a type of man her father was hoping she would marry in the first place. The relationship is described as one of "pure and self-devoted friendship" (127). As the years go by, Mary finds that "the illusion of first love, in all its charm and enthusiasm is but misery, if unsanctioned by duty, in comparison with that union of hearts which judgment approves, which piety confirms, and whose crown is the smile and blessing of a parent" (128). The story ends with an affirmation of the need to gain a father's approval, which in turn leads to happiness; so the tale concludes, apparently in support of the status quo.

The story is entitled "The Family Portraits," as the narrator explains, because it tells the story of two portraits, which happen to be of Mary and her husband, but it is actually about something more. While the story does end happily, it goes beyond being a cautionary tale warning young women of the dangers of blind acceptance and the perils of first love and becomes a criticism of how women are treated. The story operates on multiple levels because Sigourney operates within the realm of accepted, popular literature, but there are passages during which she attacks traditional patriarchy. The

reader is presented with an image of a scared girl who is rescued from a man by other men in her life, in what is seemingly a fairy-tale. This same girl finds true love with a man who happens to fulfill her father's criteria. To a male mainstream reader, the story may appear to be a sentimental sketch that validates woman's identity as weak, needing protection from and by the men in her life.

However, the story does contain a subtext, buried within the confines of the plot, that surfaces through certain details and characters' speeches, and identify women's struggle against entrapment. The story requires a second look through a feminist aesthetic, as it is an example of a newer genre of the period, namely the sketch or short story. Within an encoded subtext of the story is a critique of women's roles in society and those forces that seek to entrap them. All of this is done in a palatable way, male writers and critics might tend to glide over the subtexts because the one character who strongly objects turns out to be unreliable and the story itself is almost like a fairy-tale with its happy ending. By presenting such a female heroine, one who is being dominated by the men around her, Sigourney is able to both comply with and lash out against the stereotypes of women. This is indicative of her work as a whole. While adhering to a woman's specified place in society, she works within those specifications dictated by men and is able to subvert or at least criticize the mainstream-thinking.

In a second sketch, "The Patriarch," which is also a part of her Sketches collection, Sigourney "reach[es] for a communitarian narrative structure (Zagarell 58-59). This particular story is pertinent to a study of Sigourney because it is a variation of the village sketch, a popular genre that describes a particular locale and serves as a model of "an America grounded in inclusiveness and communitarianism" (43). It is also a precursor to "local color" literature of the late nineteenth century, which was predominantly written by women. Female authors "like Sigourney drew specifically on the stationary quality of women's lives, their concentration on domestic detail, their commitment to the ideal of interdependence" (45). With sketches of this type, women

authors fashioned a genre that featured daily life, local culture and history as compelling literary subject matter.

"The Patriarch" is another important example of female literary strategies. For example, Sigourney takes traditional forms of literature and archetypes and manipulates them for her own purposes. In this story Sigourney uses what Linda Hutcheon describes as parody: "...a way with great subversive potential, is to speak the language of the dominant (which allows you to be heard), but then to subvert it through ironic strategies of exaggeration, understatement, or literalization. Parody is the mode that allows you to mimic that speech, but to do so through re-contextualizing it and therefore without subscribing to its implied ideals and values" (4). First, Sigourney uses the conventional theme of a male hero's journey into the wilderness and changes it in subtle ways to fit her purposes. Second, she uses a male narrator, so Sigourney "implants herself in her male character and forces him to speak for her" (Fetterley 110). Thus, she is able to work once again within an accepted framework, but she is able to explore her world and critique it.

The story concerns a newly appointed minister in North Carolina who has heard of a religious group that has split from society and formed an isolated settlement. To satisfy his curiosity, the minister decides to journey to the settlement in order to see "whether such precious fruits might derive nutriment from so simple a roof" (Sigourney 200). The sketch describes the narrator's interactions with the community and the experiences he gains from them.

Since she assumes a male narrative voice, Sigourney must also use the language. She does so by adopting patriarchal language in her descriptions of how the community was started. The people are described as "emigrants from New England" who had "become sojourners in the heart of one of the deepest Carolinian solitudes" (Sigourney 199). The group purchased a tract of "wild, swamp-encircled land" and "this they subjected to cultivation, and by unremitting industry, rendered adequate to their

subsistence and comfort" (199). From one perspective, this language reflects the conventional Puritan work ethic since the group are unyielding in their tasks. Secondly, the language mimics the traditional male hero archetype who seeks to escape civilization and conquer the frontier. Sigourney's uses of "unremitting" and "rendered" in this passage mirror a traditional literary hero's desire to subjugate or "tame" nature and force it to submit to his will. Likewise, in his search for the community, the narrator makes the same journey into the wilderness, so he parallels a hero's escape from a confining civilization.

One of the advantages is that the community is "secluded from the privileges of public worship" (199). With a statement such as this, Sigourney suggests that the community members wish to leave the confines of civilization. The statement is problematic though because of the term "privilege." In one regard, it looks as if Sigourney is stating that town worship has privileges. On the other hand, Sigourney could be taking a mocking tone towards organized religion. With her statement, she could be saying that the secluded community does not contain any privileged positions in it. There is no male hegemony and no group of white upper class males that exercises dominion over women and the lower classes.

The community is described as "a peaceful and virtuous community, with a government purely patriarchal" (199). Everything is passed down from father to son. The Patriarch assigns his oldest son the position of "lay-reader," who will take over as patriarch when his father passes away. The title of the story is "The Patriarch," so a reader would guess that the story would be about a traditional, religious community structure. However, if the community is "purely patriarchal" then there is the question of what the community is trying to escape from in creating its own society. Is Sigourney suggesting that town life is not really patriarchal? It would not make sense for her to truly embrace a society that demeans women. In her description, she is clearly trying to accomplish something else. Using Christianity as a vehicle, Sigourney tries to shift the

meaning of patriarchy. She attempts to move from traditional patriarchy to an idealized culture that stands for a society grounded in relationships.

In order to accomplish this shift, Sigourney parodies the journey motif and uses it to explore the possibility of a society built on true communion between people. For example, as the narrator moves towards the commune, he encounters a seemingly dark, threatening forest:

...ere I turned from the haunts of men and plunged into the recesses of the forest. Towering amidst shades which almost excluded the light of heaven, rode the majestic pines, the glory and the wealth of North-Carolina ... With their dark verdure, mingled the pale and beautiful efflorescence of the wild poplar, like the light interlacing of sculpture, in some ancient awe-inspiring temple, while thousands of birds from their dark cool arches, poured their anthems of praise to the Divine Architect.

(201)

Men have typically figured landscapes as "female" in their literary works. The dark, brooding language that Sigourney uses to describe the forest parallels that of male authors who have traditionally assigned "otherness" to women and have used nature as a metaphor to describe them. However, Sigourney conflates the image in two ways. First, she situates a patriarchal culture within the forest. In this way, she is not speaking of true "otherness" because the same patriarchy in New England town life appears to be situated in nature. Secondly, the dark forest actually houses a religious celebration, since it resembles a temple and the birds play the part of a religious choir. With this in mind, the narrator can be seen as making a religious pilgrimage rather than simply a journey into the unknown.

Sigourney's choice of a religious community as a subject reflects the religious background in her life and times. Although her *Sketches* collection was originally published in 1827, and slightly ahead of the Second Great Awakening of the 1830's and

1840's, Sigourney would probably have known about evangelical religion. She would have also been aware of the different sects that broke away from orthodox Calvinism or Unitarianism and moved away from the more populated towns in the Northeast as the country expanded. In this sense, the sketch also becomes a historical reflection of the times.

When the narrator arrives at his destination, he encounters a strongly knit community. The isolation is emphasized because the village is surrounded by a morass, likening it to a castle surrounded by a moat and further linking the sketch to an archetypal journey motif. However, instead of a maiden in a castle, the narrator finds that "a cluster of cottages cheered the eye" (201). The narrator observes that "they were so contiguous, that the blast of a horn, or even the call of a shrill voice, might convene all their inhabitants" (201). Sigourney's use of "cluster" and "contiguous" suggests a community that is interrelated, connected, and familial. The huts become an extension of one another. It is ironic, then, that the story is called "The Patriarch" because the community is firmly built on a nurturing connected structure. In fact, the patriarch himself admits, "we are all of one blood. Seldom does any variance arise, which the force of brotherhood does not quell" (208). Sigourney usurps patriarchal language through the patriarch's speech: by using terms that describe a culture that seemingly forces agreement through "brotherhood," Sigourney appeases the white, upper class males of her time period who do not accept change. However, brotherhood can also take on religious connotations. In this case, it also represents a familial and nurturing love that smoothes out differences.

Rather than exclude, the community chooses to include. This is evident through the fact that the narrator is welcomed to the village as a "man of God" (202). He is asked to partake in their ceremonies. For example, the Patriarch invites the minister to perform baptism and the minister notes that "each [person] seemed anxious to press my hand; and even the children expressed, by affectionate glances, their reverence and love for him who ministered at the altar of God" (202). Again, the community takes on a familial

structure because the narrator is welcomed to be a part of it and the people are reluctant to depart after the baptism ceremony is complete. The children even accept him. Sigourney's sentiments are ambiguous, though, because she still places a man in charge. The people are drawn to both the Patriarch and the minister as "men of God."

Still, there is a family structure, and it is maintained in the community through a disciplined religious education and work ethic. The pupils of the village are indoctrinated with "habits of application and a desire for knowledge" (205). Through her descriptions of this disciplined educational system, Sigourney is able to critique feminine stereotypes by showing that the community has moved beyond the traditional belief that certain tasks or areas of interest are gender-specific. For example, the narrator notes that "the softer sex" is involved in farming, "thus obtaining that vigor and muscular energy which distinguish the peasantry of Europe from their effeminate sisters of the nobility and gender" (206). By making these comparisons to Europe, Sigourney also appeals to the American notion of hard work. At the same time, she is able to poke fun at the stereotype of females as princesses whose domain is in the home and not in the realm of physical labor, since she confines her criticisms to women in Europe. It is notable that science is not a part of the community's libraries, and that the boys knit stockings for the winter months. Logic and emotion are not gender-specific in the village and the tasks are not divided according to sex. Gender becomes not a barrier but a means of adding variety to a closely-knit community.

Accepted patriarchal ideas of rationalism and distribution of labor are also replaced by communal relationships. This is reiterated through the narrator's observation of the marriage customs: "As the children of the colony advanced to maturity, they, with scarcely an exception, contracted marriages among each other, striking root, like the branches of banian, around their parent tree" (205). This is an interesting statement, because, on the one hand, it suggests that the community members are extensions of one another. However, it is also strange because it appears to advocate forced marriages



based on the expectations of the Patriarch and other members of the group. When Sigourney married, she did so because it was deemed the appropriate thing to do. She was not particularly happy but kept up pretenses (Haight 50). As she does in "The Family Portraits," Sigourney in this story explores the possible dangers of forced marriages and the extent to which women are expected to comply within expectations. Thus, Sigourney pokes fun at arranged marriages through this statement, especially since she places it within the context of a utopian settlement.

The community is based on following the teachings of the Bible, but the Patriarch admits, "Laws so simple would be inefficient in a mixed and turbulent community" (Sigourney 208). This is Sigourney's subtle criticism of her New England society. From a surface perspective, she is advocating the status quo because it seems to say that the religious law does not favor a mixed society with equality for all because there would be too much upheaval. By saying this, Sigourney appeals to the white men of New England who control religion and politics. However, the terms "mixed" and "turbulent" can also be applicable to a hierarchical society where there is no equality. According to this reading, laws of brotherhood would be difficult to apply to present society because not everyone is treated equally and as a result there is turbulence. With these words, Sigourney suggests that either society needs to be changed or that religion in its present state cannot overcome society's problems. In both cases, there is a need for a modification.

Finally, after the narrator has left with great reluctance, he is later summoned back, for the Patriarch has requested his presence because he is dying. After the narrator gives communion to the Patriarch and his followers, the Patriarch dies. Once he has buried him, the minister leaves with great sadness. As he journeys home, he observes, "Yet surely, *there is reality in religion*, though man may foolishly cheat himself with shadow" (216). With this statement, Sigourney is celebrating religion as the basis for community. By doing this, she conforms to the viewpoint that women are religious

pillars since she is a woman writer who is embracing the religious realm as the key to happiness. Because she does so, she appears to uphold the tradition of the female religious writer. In this way, she seemingly moves away from rational reality to an existence based solely on relationship and love. In reality, she is critiquing her society for its lack equality by praising a fictional one that is based on interconnectedness.

The main idea of the work is that of a communal and inter-relational structure within this fictional community. Sigourney demonstrates that religion is a means for achieving this end. The concept of patriarchy is used in more of a brotherly sense and the patriarch in the story becomes a metaphor for the Christian love that binds people together. He is representative of a communal belief rather than a hegemonic structure of traditional patriarchal culture. In order to successfully describe such a way of life, Sigourney parodies traditional journey literature and uses the language of patriarchy for her own means.

The whole work is problematic, however, because it appears that Sigourney is accepting her place in the supposed female domain of religious literary works. She is seemingly embracing the ideals that men have ascribed to women. However, the point can be drawn that she is actually empowering the spheres to which she and other women have been assigned since she describes the peaceful existence resulting from them. In fact, she actually reverses them since she assigns the patriarch of the community an idealized role. He is the one who is placed on a pedestal. Because the people of the community view him as occupying this place, believe in the message of love, and follow his lead, a sense of family is fostered among the members. In this way, religion is no longer based on hegemony but brotherhood because everyone in the community has attained a better existence as a result of cooperation.

Thus, "The Patriarch" becomes a fictional model for an ideal society that seemingly conforms to patriarchy but is actually one which embraces the opposite. Sigourney is able to accomplish this critique of society and provides a model for a new

one through the strategy of parody. She takes patriarchal language and uses it for her own purposes through the guise of a male narrator. She also conflates the traditional male journey archetype and changes it into a criticism of traditional patriarchy. This work showcases Sigourney's ability to work within her culture because, like "The Family Portraits," this selection also seems like a fairy tale on the surface because of its descriptions of what an ideal society should be. However, as with "The Family Portraits," Sigourney incorporates her criticisms of the world around her within this fairy-tale structure.

In conclusion, Sigourney's sketches are significant because they are a lesser-known area of her writing career that serve as vehicle for feminist and cultural expression. From a social and historical perspective, her works echo female concerns of the day such as marriage and the constraints of a patriarchal culture. They are also an example of her ability to transcend her most popular genre. Like her poetry, her sketches are forerunners in the development of a feminist aesthetic. She is an early example of the strategies used by women writers to subvert traditional female stereotypes and communicate strategies of such subversion to her female readers. Such techniques include parody, utilization of a male narrator, use of doubles and situating her characters in threatening or maddening situations. All of these are techniques used to encode a subtext that her women readers will be able to see and recognize. She also uses such techniques to work within ascribed conventions. By adapting herself to male imposed conventions, such as the fairy-tale and the religious sphere, Sigourney is able to raise questions about women's concerns and criticize the structure in which she and other women were encased. She is a model of how women needed to adapt but still remain focused enough to tell their stories. Through her sketches, she is able to draw critical portraits of her world while fashioning the blueprints for strategies of subversion in women's literature.

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