

Spring 2010

“Hers is But the Common Lot of all her Protestant and Infidel Sisters:” Margaret Fuller and the Restrictive Language of Spirituality

LuElla Putnam

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/jostes>

Recommended Citation

Putnam, L. (2010). “Hers is But the Common Lot of all her Protestant and Infidel Sisters:” Margaret Fuller and the Restrictive Language of Spirituality. *Jostes: Journal of South Texas English Studies*, 1(2), 1–16.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of South Texas English Studies* by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

“Hers is But the Common Lot of all her Protestant and Infidel Sisters:” Margaret Fuller and the Restrictive Language of Spirituality

By LuElla Putnam

Edgar Allan Poe[1] quipped that there are three types of people: “men, women, and Margaret Fuller” (qtd. in Watson 109). Fuller’s refusal to fit easily into gendered societal norms was one that even the most literate writers of America’s antebellum period struggled with accepting. Though Poe later asserts that he respects Fuller’s style and intellect in an 1846 review of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, her revolutionary ideas remained somewhat laughable to him. In his review, Poe extends his criticism, writing that Fuller’s book is one “which few women in the country could have written, and no woman in the country would have published, with the exception of Miss Fuller” (72). Poe is not alone in recognizing—and jokingly minimizing—Fuller’s belief that gendered categories should be questioned. Yet he remains one of Fuller’s kinder critics. Orestes A. Brownson[2], another contemporary reviewer, is much more severe, arguing, “Miss Fuller does not know what she wants ... Poor girl! Hers is but the common lot of all her Protestant and infidel sisters ... They are all seeking they know not what, craving what they have not, find not,—now seizing on the this bawble, now on that,—but all to no purpose” (253). Brownson downplays Fuller’s ideas within *Woman*[3], likening the thirty-five-year-old to a “girl.” As a woman, Fuller inevitably represents a child-like figure to Brownson, one who has been “caught” whining because she cannot enjoy the same privileges (construed here as material goods) that men around her possess. Brownson assumes Fuller’s dissatisfaction stems from immature selfishness, and he rejects the idea that Fuller is capable of producing substantial, well-reasoned arguments.

Yet, what inflames Brownson’s fury the most regarding Fuller is the differences in the two thinkers’ views on the divine and its relation to women’s cultural status. Brownson contends that women’s “appropriate spheres are allotted to man and woman by their Creator, and all they have to do is submit, as quietly, and with as good as grace as they can ... God, and not man, has assigned her the appropriate sphere ... [Fuller] says man is not the head of the woman. We, on authority of the Holy Ghost, say he is” (255). Brownson perceives Fuller not only as breaking ties with American society’s norms, but, more significantly, he perceives her as breaking from Christian doctrine. He employs Christian rhetoric to charge Fuller with blasphemy. It is not man’s power Fuller is supposedly threatening with her radical views. It is God’s.

Notably, Brownson’s beliefs about women’s roles dominated during the antebellum period. According to Barbara Welter in her influential book *The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860*,

true women are expected to uphold four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submission, and domesticity. She asserts that “If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up the Cult of True Womanhood, he was damned immediately an enemy of God, of civilization, and of the republic” (152). Brownson’s criticism is understandable in these terms. Clearly, Fuller’s beliefs about spirituality are not aligned with the majority of Brownson’s readers or the majority of Americans for that matter. Brownson’s readers (and the rest of Americans) are the “we” who are judging Fuller against God’s dictates, and Fuller is found guilty of refusing to adhere to accepted Christian standards. Thus, the language of spirituality is often used against Fuller, and her writing can be seen as a direct answer to men’s invectives, claiming that free thinking women are inherently sacrilegious. This paper seeks to interrogate how prevailing perceptions of spirituality in antebellum America were used to confine women and to demonstrate that one of one of Fuller’s missions was to aid women in recognizing and breaking free from those precise types of confinements. Fuller first desires to transform the restrictive boundaries most contemporary discussions of spirituality placed on women. However, she also wants to transform those same restrictive boundaries she deems as being placed on racial minority groups, such as African Americans and Native Americans, as well.

Popular public and religious opinions do not stand alone as contemporary spiritual positions that Fuller tended to reject. Her transcendentalist mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, laid the groundwork for much of Fuller’s philosophy; however, she ultimately found his version of spirituality limiting, too. Emerson stressed that all individuals possess equal access to spirituality. In *Nature* (1836), Emerson writes that “In the woods, we return to reason and faith” (10). According to Emerson, through nature, every individual can attain a transcendental experience. Nature allows humans a conduit to a spiritual realm that they lack if surrounded by everyday distractions. When people turn inward, examine themselves, and reflect on nature, they can discover divinity. Emerson contends that “A little consideration of what takes place around us ... would show us, that a higher law than that of our will regulates events” (“Spiritual Laws” 309). To Emerson, the divine is everywhere. God is in everything, and everything is God. Humans need only to take the time to focus and recognize they are already “part or particle of God” (*Nature* 10). The key to spirituality is to recognize and hearken to the divine compass that is already embedded within every person’s conscience.

For Fuller, these ideas struck a chord. As a woman, Fuller did not feel excluded by Emerson; indeed, his language seems remarkably ambiguous, as if he is encompassing all experiences by relaying his own. Kerry Larson refers to this as Emerson’s “disembodied spirituality” (319). As a writer, Emerson resists definable categories. His language does not appear to delineate between

racial, sexual, and class barriers. Certainly, Fuller felt she, as a woman, was part of the “us” who could experience divinity through Emerson’s guidance. Not surprisingly, one year after *Nature* was published, Fuller sent a letter to her friend, James Freeman Clarke, admitting that Emerson’s “influence has been more beneficial to me than that of any American. Several of his sermons stand apart in memory, like landmarks in my spiritual history” (qtd. in Warfel 582). Emerson represented perhaps the only prominent male voice in the early nineteenth century attempting to be all-encompassing rather than strictly admonishing. Though his followers were perhaps fewer in number than conventional Christian religiosity, within them, Fuller initially found solace.

However, Fuller began to feel Emerson’s philosophy was a bit too broad. He ascribed to an almost overly blind gendered equality. To Emerson, there was a single path to his “universal being,” and gender did not have a part in whether someone could take this route. In 1843, Emerson conveyed his ambivalence about gender differences in his journal, writing, “It is folly to believe that there can be anything very bad in the position of woman compared to that of man” (*Journals* 405). Emerson believed men and women were essentially equal. Though they may play different roles in antebellum society, women’s roles were not lesser than that of man. Social issues regarding gender were simply insignificant in forming Emerson’s thoughts about spirituality. George Kateb writes that “What pervades Emerson’s views is a readiness to detach intellectual gender from biological sex and point the way to an ideal hermaphroditism. Let me add that even when Emerson’s emphasis on mental life, his words on masculinity and femininity expand to cover the whole character” (120). Because of his objective idealism, Emerson’s beliefs fail to consider how America’s stance on women’s rights could influence women’s spiritual aspirations and attainment. He fails to make a connection that Fuller finds vital to her spiritual growth. The same year as Emerson’s journal entry in 1843, Margaret Fuller published *Summer on the Lakes*, a work which signals her first major divergence from Emerson’s spiritual language.

In her travel narrative, Fuller concludes that women cannot obtain spiritual goals in the same ways as men. She believes that women’s position of lesser power in society inhibits their identification with nature which, in turn, inhibits their abilities to examine themselves and thus experience divine transcendence in the same way as men. At the beginning of *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller approaches Niagara Falls with the expectation of experiencing a moment of sublimity, a moment she has read over and over again occurs with men who have visited the area.^[4] Rather than feeling spiritual elation at Niagara Falls, Fuller feels oppressed. She discovers men’s language has scripted her encounter. Their words and experiences have preceded her and attempted to regulate her sentiments toward the falls. Unlike these men, Fuller

only feels “an undefined dread” while at Niagara (72). No ecstatic, culminating moment ensues in which she is able to move beyond this dread either. Jeffrey Steele suggests that Fuller “is not culturally authorized to see the sublime experience as the analogue of creative powers within herself, as are the men who visit the falls. As a woman, she is encouraged to identify with the victims of power not with powerful agency” (xxiv). Fuller’s self awareness in no way mirrors the powerful force of Niagara. She has not been provided the cultural tools to identify with the Falls. She has never possessed overarching power, so she can only sense trepidation when faced with such unrestrained authority.

While on the path to leave Niagara Falls, Fuller witnesses an eagle that has been captured for tourists’ viewing pleasure. She states that “No less strange is the fact that, in this neighborhood, an eagle should be chained for a plaything” (74). Like Fuller, this eagle (another lesser being) is fettered, not freed, while at the falls. The eagle and Fuller have more in common than do she and the powerful cascades of water. Fuller writes, “I saw him a captive, and addressed by the language they [the people watching] seemed to find appropriate for such occasions” (74). Unlike the men around her who heckle and taunt the eagle, Fuller empathizes with the eagle’s subordination and is angered by men’s harassment of the animal. She says that the eagle’s exploitation inspires her to feel “‘silent rages’ of misanthropy” (74). Fuller becomes overwhelmed by compassion for the eagle because she, too, is a captive, controlled by the language men “find appropriate” for her. Yet, amidst Fuller’s feelings of indignation for the eagle’s plight, the bird also manages to arouse her admiration. She writes that while the crowd abused him, “Silently, with head averted, [the eagle] ignored their existence ... Probably, he listened to the voice of the cataract and felt that congenial powers flowed free, and was consoled, though his wing was broken” (74). Perhaps stirred by the eagle’s courage, Fuller thinks to examine how she should handle her own subjugation by men. After all, Fuller states that those before her at the falls “felt the exact opposite to what I myself felt,” indicating she needs new and different language to articulate her experience (72). Like the eagle, Fuller feels she must forge her own path to let spiritual powers flow through her on her own accord, though she cannot automatically alter her symbolically wounded status as a nineteenth-century woman.

Hence, to Fuller, Emerson’s description of spirituality falls short when it comes to women. Yes, because of his “disembodied spirituality,” Emerson provides Fuller a means to begin exploring her relationship to the divine, but his language, like that of Christianity’s, ultimately constricts rather than frees her. In a letter Fuller wrote to Emerson while in his library, she relates, “I am too powerfully drawn while with you ... but when away I have learned something ... I shall often depart through the ranges of manifold being, but as often return where I am

tonight” (qtd. in Warfel 590). Fuller explains that Emerson’s words serve as her guide, her touchstone to begin understanding her own relationship to the world. But Emerson’s philosophy, though seemingly all-encompassing, does not adequately describe Fuller’s life experiences. Inevitably, Fuller believes that Emerson approaches spirituality from the perspective of someone who already holds power, and his philosophy, though useful in instigating her own quest for spiritual transcendence, fails to speak for her.

Fuller, then, thinks women’s spiritual experiences are stifled by the obvious coloring the men who are in power overlay on them. Yet, if Fuller is essentially denied access to spiritual illumination through Brownson and even Emerson (Christianity and transcendentalism respectively), then how does she believe women should address and approach the divine? How does Fuller describe women’s relationship to spirituality? In one of her most often quoted statements, Fuller posits, “The electrical, the magnetic element in woman has not been fairly brought out at any period. Every thing might be expected from it; she has far more of it than man” (55). Traditionally, this passage has been read as indicative of Fuller’s belief that women are more spiritual, that they innately have a closer connection with the divine than men. Since arguably Brownson and other proponents of the Cult of True Womanhood at least concede that women do possess a higher capacity for piety (of course, to a lesser extent than does Fuller) would it not make sense for Fuller, as a feminist, to twist and complicate this notion and attempt to establish women’s power? As aforementioned, Brownson’s beliefs were the most widely held, and Fuller could easily conflate and use them in conjunction with her own feminist inclinations.

Though while on the surface, it may at first seem through this passage that Fuller verifies women’s higher capacity for spirituality, the reason for her belief cannot simply be attributed to staying within the boundaries of prevailing nineteenth-century ideals. After all, Fuller is unafraid to question mainstream society’s accepted beliefs in sum, so why would she so easily accept this belief at all—even if it does raise women’s status in the eyes of men? On the contrary, Fuller is quick to caution women against donning the roles of spiritual symbols, simply because outside forces are telling them they should. She writes that women already seek “too much to act in conformity with those around them,” and she would like for them to shirk altogether their dispositions of blindly pleasing others, especially when it conflicts with a woman’s own desires (55). When Fuller states women possess far more spiritual capabilities than man, she makes it a point to limit the scope of her argument by asserting that women have not been allowed to bring out these capabilities *fairly*. She asserts that women have been treated unequally in the past, altering the meaning of women’s relationship to spirituality. Women have not been afforded the opportunity to exhibit their spiritual powers as they should because they are not yet able to

balance their lives. Women are more spiritual, but only because spirituality, to Fuller, is linked to positions of lesser power. Therefore, anyone of a minority, whether they be women, racial minorities, or even the mentally or physically disabled, are more intimately connected to their spiritual faculties. Fuller identifies with the eagle, not the falls while at Niagara. She identifies with an animal who is literally imbalanced, the eagle, which has a broken wing. Fuller believes her inability to access power in the same way as men marginalizes her capabilities. Because of men's restrictions on them, women cannot lead balanced lives as of yet—spiritual or otherwise. Fuller says, "I think women need, especially at this juncture, a much greater range of occupation than they have to rouse their latent powers" (95). If men refuse to grant them such a range, then women must claim that range for themselves. "I would not have" woman being "content to act ... upon 'the man's notion'" any longer, Fuller declares (95).

To best understand Fuller's beliefs about the restrictions common spiritual precepts placed upon women, it is first integral to define explicitly what womanhood means to Fuller. Throughout *Woman*, Fuller sets up strict dichotomies between masculine and feminine traits. Thus, she appears at first to solidify and perpetuate gendered stereotypes. Near the end of her text, she declares:

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

Energy and Harmony.

Power and Beauty.

Intellect and Love.

Or by some such rude classification, for we have not language primitive and pure enough to express such ideas with precision. (90)

However, to Fuller, these dichotomies (energy and harmony/power and beauty/intellect and love) are not essential to defining, and constricting, what it means to be a man or a woman. She sees these opposing traits as "classifications" which previous generations have supported and antebellum America has decidedly preserved. Rather than referring directly to what woman is or is not, Fuller states, "[T]he idea of woman" is what is clung to "and forcibly represented" by the general population (30). Though Fuller is writing a full one hundred years before poststructural theorists, the seeds are planted for a reading that supports (and perhaps predicated) their ideas. Linda Alcoff writes, "Man has said that woman can be defined delineated, captured—understood, explained and diagnosed—to a level of determination never accorded to man himself, who is conceived as a rational animal with free will ... [Woman] is always construed as an essential *something* inevitably accessible to direct intuited apprehension by males" (426). As a poststructuralist, Alcoff aspires to identify and deconstruct the essentialist

impressions of what womanhood entails. She desires to break down barriers she recognizes as blocking women from acquiring full freedom when forming their identities.

Fuller, too, questions whether men should be defining what women are and even should be. She pronounces:

As to men's representing women fairly at present ... no, not [one] in the hundred million, can rise above the belief that woman was made *for man*, when such traits as these are daily forced upon the

attention, can we feel that man will always do justice to the interests of woman? ... The lover, the poet, the artist, are likely to view her nobly. The father and the philosopher have some chance of

liberality; the man of the world, the legislator for expediency, none. (15)

Fuller believes women are not allowed to conjure and implement their own identities. Instead, they are reliant on society, on men, to ordain to them how they should act. Since men inevitably want to keep the current power hierarchy intact, it is a rare occurrence that a man would allow a woman to define herself beyond what he distinguishes as her limitations. Fuller's goal in writing *Woman* is to collapse the boundaries she sees bolstering the current dichotomies between men and woman. She writes, "Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens into solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman" (62). Fuller does not want some traits to be privileged above others; nor does she perceive any traits as essential to men or women. Rather, Fuller wants Americans to allow individuals, male or female, the most agency possible in fostering their senses of selves. Traditional male and female traits to Fuller are "fluid," pouring and mingling into each other until they are no longer recognizable. Once a transformational process happens in which male and female traits become indistinguishable, a process that defies essentialism, a true individual is born.

As it is apparent that Fuller does not believe there is one, true concept of what a woman is (or what it means to be a woman), it becomes possible to examine her beliefs about how the rhetoric of spirituality is often used against women. Fuller claims that "the spiritual tendency is towards the elevation of woman, but the intellectual by itself is not so" (354). Stated simply, most women were expected to be spiritual, but not intellectual. So, it becomes easy to comprehend that societal expectations foster women's spirituality in a way that it did not men's. "This is commonly expressed," Fuller claims, "by saying that [woman's] intuitions are more rapid and more correct" (55). If there is no real, innate distinction between man and woman, then why is woman thought to have a greater sense of intuition? Fuller cites imbalance as the problem, and

she asserts that this imbalance is actually dangerous to women. Because women are expected to cultivate certain traits within themselves, other traits naturally deteriorate. Fuller insists women “more than men, are likely to be enslaved by an impassioned sensibility. The world repels them more rudely, and they are of weaker bodily frame” (55). Being ostracized by others is not the only problem imbalance causes. “Sickness,” Fuller asserts, is another “frequent result” (55). Women who maintain societal norms hurt themselves. If they do not recognize men’s power over their spiritual lives, they not only harm themselves but they could potentially harm their families, as well, by taking away a potentially healthy wife, daughter, sister, or mother. These women become enervated and vulnerable as control over their own lives dissipates.

Fuller suspects that women’s spiritual imbalance, encouraged by men, places them in physically precarious situations as well. In *Woman*, she writes that “the phenomena of magnetism, or mesmerism, as it is now often called, [is] where the trance of Ecstatica purports to be produced by the agency of one human being on another, instead of ... direct from the spirit” (56). Mesmerism was increasingly popular in the nineteenth century, and Fuller practiced it herself. Mesmerists claimed to possess an ability to cure chronic ailments through the redistribution of the nervous fluid circulating through a patient’s body. In doing so, mesmerists often induced a trance-like somnambulistic state. To Fuller, though, the power structure is achingly obvious when it comes to the practice of mesmerism. Rather than women finding spiritual empowerment through their own volition, mesmerism asked them to find it first in men. In the nineteenth century, the practice of mesmerism most often involved situating a young woman in a position alone with a male magnetizer. This magnetizer would have complete control over the female subject, encouraging her to submit her will to him. In *Mesmerism and the Cure of Souls*, Robert C. Fuller writes that, contrary to the mesmerist’s supposed objectives of healing, “time after time he had been unable to resist the seductive appeal of beautiful women utterly subjecting themselves to him while grasping his hand and gazing trustingly into his eyes. By skillfully employing his mesmeric powers, he had succeeded in stirring their passions toward him to such a degree that they became willing to commit indecencies” (33-4). Women who were anxious to please men before themselves would clearly be in danger in this type of situation. Fuller herself often frequented female magnetizers and “prompted her own magnetic trances” rather than being constantly at the mercy of a man for spiritual liberation (Manson 316). Though Fuller may perhaps be faulted for believing in the innate power of this pseudoscience, she cannot be faulted for allowing men to control her religious experiences.

Nor did she desire other women to experience such subordination. She believed women who were not afforded intellectual stimulation would easily become prey to male mesmerists, and she

disdained the damaging stereotypes women were beginning to embody through the practice of mesmerism. According to Fuller, “The worldling has his sneer ... at the services of religion ... ‘Show me a man in one of your magnetic states, and I will believe,’ he says” (56). In this scenario, women are “sneered” at for being open and susceptible to mesmeric trances. In a “worldly” man’s eyes, mesmerism cannot be believed for lack of scientific evidence, but merely because women are the ones who are supposed to feel its effects. Only men can validate religious experience and mesmerism thus works to subordinate women in two ways. First, men encourage it because it supposedly brings out the spiritual side of womanhood that they claim to revere. Yet, simultaneously, Fuller notes men use it against women as a way to scoff at them because they believe in such foolishness. Fuller observes that, in reality, women cannot escape the negative diatribes men impose on them, no matter their decisions regarding spirituality. Consequently, women cannot be in a situation in which she is in power unless she decides to balance her own skills, to make herself as “worldly” as she is “spiritual.” Women must be able to exert their own judgment, as Fuller is unafraid of doing. At that point, men’s constant, disapproving labeling of them becomes obsolete. When they possess their own balanced judgment, women can label themselves.

Fuller does not fear for women’s safety alone; after all, she equates the socialization of women’s subordination to that of others whom she sees as disempowered as well. Thus, she establishes the nineteenth-century women’s movement’s relationship to other minority rights issues. Clearly, slavery was at the top of her list. She writes that “It may well be an Anti-Slavery party that pleads for woman, if we consider merely that she does not hold property on equal terms with men; so that, if a husband dies without making a will, the wife, instead of taking at once his place as the head of the family, inherits only part of his fortune, often brought him by herself, as if she were a child, or word only, not an equal partner” (11). Fuller points out here that women are often likened to children, just as Brownson likens her to one. Women are considered impulsive and have just as few rights. In a much larger move, though, Fuller also makes the leap that women are also considered on par with enslaved African Americans. Like slaves, women possess no property rights. They are property. Men use them, taking everything of monetary value brought to them by their existence. Women, Fuller asserts, are thus naturally the ones to take up the language of the anti-slavery movement—of freedom. After all, Fuller contends that women undergo the same injustices that slaves endure: “For woman, if by a sympathy as to outward condition, she is led to aid the enfranchisement of the slave” (9).

Just as the language of spirituality was used to constrict women, it was also used to perpetuate slavery. Women were asked to stay in their homes because they had a moral, spiritual connection

to God that men lacked. Supposedly, women were best suited to train children and provide moral advice to men. Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, used God to justify slavery as well, exhibiting that institution as yet another form of patriarchal limitation bolstered by spiritual rhetoric. Davis argued that slavery “was established by decree of Almighty God ... it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation ... it has existed in all ages, has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts” (qtd. in Rowland 286). Slavery, to Jefferson and other anti-abolitionists, was critical to maintaining what he considered a civilized, hierarchical, God-fearing society, much like women’s limited roles were also critical in maintaining that same type of structured society. Fuller recognized that spirituality was often used as a ruse to enable the propagation of slavery, to keep those in power who already held it. When speaking of men’s actions in antebellum America against both women and slaves, she presents the analogy that men are like the Jews who refused to follow Moses’ decrees—that they are doing all they can to “hinder the promise of heaven from its fulfillment” (9). They hear God, but they misconstrue his words because they are trying to make their lives easier. Men attempt to keep women and slaves (and also, by extension, though they may not realize it, themselves) from the reward equality brings to humankind. Fuller asserts that:

The name of the Prince of Peace has been profaned by all kinds of injustice toward the Gentile, whom he said he came to save. But I need not speak of what has been done towards the red man, the black man. Those deeds are the scoff of the world; they have been accompanied by such pious words that the gentlest would dare to intercede with “Father, for forgive them, for they know now what they do.” (*Woman* 9)

To Fuller, Jesus’ words are ones of equality. They are peaceful and, if read truly, suggest that all people should be afforded the same opportunities for spiritual fulfillment, no more or no less. However, Fuller cites that the language of religion, of spirituality, has been used to justify the status quo. To the rest of the world, this hypocrisy is evident but Anglo-American men continue to cling and subordinate not only women but African-American slaves. Fuller does not contain her argument of collective injustices by discussing the similarities she sees between slaves and women alone; she also believes Native Americans have been targeted by the hypocritical lens of spirituality. Just as the anti-slavery movement is intimately connected to the cause of women’s rights, Fuller believes the “Indian Question”^[5] is as well.

In *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller most eloquently displays the interconnections she sees as joining women, Native Americans, and spirituality. When she is at Mackinaw Island in Michigan, she encounters the Ojibwe tribe of Native Americans and expresses a feeling of

automatic connection with them. She writes that “There is a language of eye and motion which cannot be put into words, and which what words never can. I feel acquainted the soul of the race” (222). Because of their linked oppression by white men, Fuller feels she has an exceptional bond with Native Americans. Women can feel the souls of Native Americans simply because they both have undergone oppression by the same patriarchal force. Christina Zwarg asserts that “When Fuller chose to write about her trip to the Midwest, she knowingly invited an examination of the conflict between her perspective and that of the men and women living on the frontier, as well as the conflict between Anglo-American and Native American cultures” (116). Fuller realized her account would be one of “otherness” and encouraged a reading from that viewpoint. She is an “other” on the frontier. Not only is she from Boston, but she is also a woman, someone who is not usually permitted the chance to travel at leisure. Bringing up her difference from the Midwesterners sparks conversations about differences between Anglo-Americans and Native Americans. Rather than feeling an inherent difference, Fuller again believes the differences between the races are only marginal. Like gender, race is not a boundary that separates people based on essential characteristics. Native Americans have been oppressed but only because they are deemed as different by society; they are not essentially inferior.

Because of their perceived inferior status, it is not surprising that Fuller considers that Native Americans, like women, are imbalanced. They exhibit an increased inclination toward spirituality because they have been encouraged to cultivate that side of themselves by white men. Fuller writes, “By fasting and prayer they make ready for all important decisions and actions. Even for the war path, on which he is likely to endure such privations, the brave prepares by a solemn fast. His reliance is on the spirit in which he goes forth” (197). Fuller sees Native Americans as relying on spirituality first in all facets of their lives. By not using their intellect in balance, Fuller thinks Native Americans have begun to contribute to their own lessening of power. White men, Fuller contends, are fully aware of their manipulations, too. For instance, Fuller writes of the “white man’s views of the most decided sorts” toward Native Americans, which in one case “recommends that the tribes be stimulated as much as possible to war with each other, that they may more easily and completely be kept under the dominion of the white” (202). Fuller suggests here that Anglo-American men have concocted various stratagems to preserve and expand their power. Through incendiary language, white men aspire to incite reactions in Native American communities that they hope can contribute to the tribes’ future destructions.

To exert their power further, white men have also conflated Native Americans with women. And as such, Native Americans are often depicted as childlike. Fuller writes in *Woman* that

“The common phrase, ‘Tell that to women and children,’” is indicative of men’s associating women with others of inferior statuses, such as “slaves” (14). And, in her travel narrative, she points out that Native Americans are often referred to as “children of different colors” (192). Once again, the same diminutive language which subordinates Native Americans parallels the language used when discussing women. Vine Deloria affirms Fuller’s position, stating that the “stereotype of the friendly childlike Indian” is embedded in American consciousness, writing that actions of Native Americans began to be “passed off as the prattling of children who could not possibly do anything without instructions from their white friends” (202). Just as women supposedly need white men’s intellect to guide them, so, too, do Native Americans.

While Fuller believes Native Americans are more apt to understand and rely on spirituality, white men, in contrast, have allowed their spiritual selves to deteriorate. Fuller pinpoints European men’s spiritual imbalance as the most defining factor in the violence incited when these two cultures met. She writes that “The Europeans, who took possession of this country, felt themselves justified by their superior civilization and religious ideas. Had they been truly civilized or Christianized, the conflicts which sprang from the collision of the two races might have been avoided” (212). Because they lacked selflessness and caring, two of the driving tenets of Christianity, Europeans neglected their spiritual selves. Instead, they relied on their material desires to guide them. While they may have cited Christianity as part of their discourse of conquest, they used it as a mask to hide their true intentions. Again, the language of spirituality, but not the real precepts of it, allowed white men to oppress those they saw beneath them. Fuller exposes the irony of the white men’s beliefs: “Let the missionary, instead of preaching to the Indian, preach to the trader who ruins him, of the dreadful account which will be demeaned of the followers of Cain, in a sphere where the accents of purity and love come on the ear more divisive than in ours” (212). In Fuller’s mind, white men are the ones to blame for the majority of the problems plaguing Native Americans, a revolutionary idea in antebellum America.

Women, Native Americans, and spirituality were connected in another, more surprising way in nineteenth-century America, too. The romanticized image of Native Americans and their spiritual identity was one not lost, and subsequently capitalized on, within the burgeoning field of mesmerism. Representations of Native Americans played a significant role in the nineteenth century pseudoscience. Mesmerists often called on spiritual guides to aid them, and often these guides would be identified as Native American. Rayna Green argues that “No doubt this was connected with several important notions: that Indians inhabit the Spirit World ... that Indians are wise and skilled in healing, and that a medium directed by a guided spirit of some order can speak or instruct others. In the accounts of spiritualist practice ... story after story of Chief So-

and-So Princess Such-and-Such appears” (40). Just as women were assumed to be more spiritual, so, too were Native Americans. And just as mesmerism victimized women, Native Americans were often stereotyped and used as a means for mesmerists to garner more money and attention. Invoking Native American language seemed to add credence to mesmerists’ claims. Unlike women who could find their own mediums to guide them, Native Americans could not, though. Their power in this scenario was thus less than that of women, but perhaps because of their physical distance, they suffered less obvious material consequences as well. Fuller notes that Native Americans are victims of white “inherited prejudice” and all they need, like women, is to be “left to act unimpeded” (*Summer* 92).

Hence, Fuller believed that all those oppressed by Anglo-American patriarchy were similarly restricted by contemporary discussions of spirituality. In *Woman*, Fuller encourages women especially to begin helping themselves by changing how they view their relationship to spirituality. Because they currently do not exert balance in their lives, Fuller argues that women become “the easy victims of both priest-craft and self-delusion” (56). Yet, she is very quick to qualify this statement, saying “this would not be, if the intellect was developed in proportion to the others powers” (56). Fuller’s feminist manifesto can be read as a treatise advising women not to allow themselves to become victims of spiritual lopsidedness, not to allow their spiritual powers to blossom at the expense of other characteristics. Fuller believes imposed spiritual limitations translate to cultural limitations. In other words, by refusing to allow patriarchal versions of spiritual piety alone to define them, Fuller asserts that women automatically make a move to establish political power. “I have urged on woman independence of man,” Fuller says, “because woman has [been] led to an excessive devotion ... She [should] not make an imperfect man her God, and ... sink into idolatry” (95). In the past, women have not really been spiritual in that they exhibited a closer connection to the divine. Instead, they have been brainwashed; they have been worshipping men and men’s definitions of them. Their goal should be to exert their intellectual capacities and thus discover their own spiritual and intellectual paths for themselves. In accordance, women can bring these same goals to African Americans and Native Americans, groups she believed were implicated within and connected with the plight of women. Fuller believed that if women decide to take her path, they can emerge from behind the curtain of their homes and make strides toward a true, fully balanced equality between the sexes and the races.

[1] Within the last ten years, Poe's political ideology has been sharply questioned, and many scholars no longer assume that Poe intentionally separated himself from the major political movements of the nineteenth century. Leland S. Person has an insightful chapter about "Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions" in the 2001 book, *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe* (Oxford University Press). This chapter mentions Fuller's relationship to Poe and is a good starting point for further questions regarding Poe's thoughts on gender.

[2] Brownson's criticism was published in *Brownson's Quarterly Review*. Brownson founded this magazine after subscribers' outcries barred his contributions to *The Democratic Review*, a magazine devoted to the ideas of Jacksonian democracy. Brownson's magazine served as a mouthpiece for his Catholic thought and was one of the most popular magazines distributed in antebellum America. He suspended the religious publication in 1864.

[3] Going forward, all references to Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* will be shortened to *Woman*.

[4] In his 1998 book, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Massachusetts Press), John F. Sears provides a cogent overview of how nineteenth-century men approached Niagara Falls. In his chapter, "'Doing' Niagara in the Nineteenth Century," Sears explains that visitors to the Falls believed they would be provided with "an intense emotional and religious experience ... In the immensity, force, and infinite duration of the Falls, the spectator[s] confronted the power of God" (13-14).

[5] In her 2008 book, *Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature* (University of Massachusetts Press), Laura Mielke defines the "Indian Question" as "the name given to problem of the American Indian presence within and just beyond the borders of the expanding young nation" (1). Chapter Five of her book, "The Book, The Poet, and the Indian" focuses on how she believes Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau's transcendental voices approach and contend with the Indian Question.

Works Cited

Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis Feminist Theory." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Francis Bartkowski and Wendy K. Kolmar. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005. 426-36. Print.

- Brownson, Orestes A. "Miss Fuller and the Reformers." *Brownson's Quarterly Review* 7 (1845): 249-57. Print.
- Deloria, Vine. *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1988. Print.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911. Print.
- . "Nature." *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*. Ed. Joel Porte. New York: The Library of America, 1983. Print.
- . "Spiritual Laws." *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*. Ed. Joel Porte. New York: Library of Congress, 1983. 305-23. Print.
- Fuller, Margaret. "Summer on the Lakes." *The Essential Margaret Fuller*. Ed. Jeffrey Steele. Piscataway: Rutgers UP, 1992. 69-225. Print.
- . *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999. Print.
- Fuller, Robert C. *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1984. Print.
- Green, Rayna. "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe." *Folklore* 99 1 (1988): 30-55. Print.
- Kateb, George. *Emerson and Self-Reliance*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995. Print.
- Larson, Kerry. "Emerson's Strange Equality." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 59.3 (2004): 315-39. Print.
- Manson, Deborah. "'The Trance of Ecstatica': Margaret Fuller, Animal Magnetism, and the Transcendant Female Body." *Literature and Medicine* 25 2 (2006): 298-324. Print.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Literati of New York City—No. Iv. Sarah Margaret Fuller." *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (August 1846): 72-5. Print.
- Robinson, David M. "Margaret Fuller and the Transcendental Ethos: Woman in the Nineteenth Century." *PMLA* 97.1 (1982): 83-98. Print.
- Rowland, Dunbar. *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches*. Vol. 1. 10 vols. Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923. Print.
- Steele, Jeffrey. "Introduction." *The Essential Margaret Fuller*. Piscataway: Rutgers UP, 1992. xi-xlvi. Print.
- Warfel, Harry R. "Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson." *PMLA* 50.2 (1935): 576-94. Print.
- Watson, David. *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. Print.
- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151-74. Print.

Zwarg, Christina. *Fuller, Emerson, and the Play of Reading*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.
Print.

Copyright of Journal of South Texas English Studies is the property of Journal of South Texas English Studies and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.