

Quotation, Simile, Photograph: *Margaret Fuller on* The French in Algiers

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The taste for quotations (and for the juxtaposition of incongruous quotations) is a Surrealist taste. Thus, Walter Benjamin – whose Surrealist sensibility is the most profound of anyone’s on record – was a passionate collector of quotations.¹ (Susan Sontag, *On Photography*)

The recent alarm about the withering of newspapers from our world makes it timely to consider again Margaret Fuller’s engagement with this cultural form in its early stages, particularly her contribution to the *New-York Daily Tribune* during the 1840s. Experimenting with the newspaper as it was evolving into an international organ, Fuller’s work relates to experiments with new technologies on the global scale today. Fuller published many entries that remain unread, and I’d like to focus here on one obscure 1845 column entitled “The French in Algiers,” written roughly two weeks before her well-known review of the slave narrative by Frederick Douglass. As is typical of Fuller’s work throughout her career, including the Douglass review, the essay involves extensive quotation, though in this instance we have an extreme case, where more than half of the report consists of two lengthy passages reproduced from the translation she reviews.² Lengthy citations were often used by reviewers of the day and Fuller shared in that habit. My argument in this essay is that Fuller experiments with this familiar format. By keeping her commentary to a few well-chosen phrases, she maximizes the explosive and critical

relationship between the passages she posts. Taken together, her citations involve an ongoing determination to reorient practices of cultural translation, such as the one under review. Moreover, the quotations juxtaposed in this column have about them a visual or dramatic quality, as if Fuller reaches forward toward the inclusion of the photograph in newspaper reports or backward toward the narrative disruptions of the epic simile to make her point.

My sense is that Fuller's quotations in "The French in Algiers" move in *both* directions at once. They are translations of the newspaper's status as medium in the changing publishing world and indicative of her restless approach to all familiar forms available to her. Fuller's way with citation prompts me to consider how she writes through the moment when Walter Benjamin's famous "aura" was losing ground against modern modes of reproduction such as the newspaper, the daguerreotype, and finally photography itself. If Fuller's use of quotation functions as a harbinger for the newspaper photograph, one might wonder if she is already contributing in a kind of future anterior to the rapid flow of sensational information for which Benjamin later condemns the story-less news.³ Yet given the "juxtaposition" of the "incongruous" upon which her passages also rely, we discover the tug of a retrospective tendency as well. The inclination to find similarity where it may not at first appear applies to the traditional epic use of simile even as it participates in the emergent domain of surrealism that Susan Sontag observes in our epigraph. Exceeding in length the words of her own column, Fuller's two citations animate a vision also designed to jolt the sensibilities of her reader. As I will argue, these shocks in turn resemble the traumatic mimesis to which she has been attending in her survey of Fourier's crisis state, the utopian adaptation of Mesmer's magnetic pass.

A great deal is at stake in these associations, both for our understanding of Fuller and for our thinking about the critical tools of Walter Benjamin, whose reading habits blend nicely with Fuller's earlier fascination with German and French writers. Fuller writes in the historical moment to which Benjamin continually returns, a fact which lends a tempting temporal and telepathic relay to their thinking: Benjamin might be said to depend

retrospectively upon the forward glance of thinkers like Fuller, though of course he never returns the favor by reading her. Both critics took a particular interest in the utopian theories of Charles Fourier as well as certain strains of socialism and Marxism, both found efficacy in the task of the translator, and each geared their social critiques to seismic shifts affecting cultural productions of their day. Perhaps most tellingly, it is possible to take from these overlapping interests a lesson in the work of trauma, separately engaging both Fuller and Benjamin throughout their careers.⁴

Let me begin by describing the column. On 22 May 1845, Fuller reviewed *The French in Algiers* in her regular space on the front page of the paper. Published under the guidance of Elizabeth Peabody by Wiley and Putnam in their "Library of Choice Reading," the book contains two separate narratives selected by its translator Lucie Duff Gordon.⁵ Clemens Lamping from Germany authored the first tale entitled *The Soldier of the Foreign Legion*. Described in Duff Gordon's preface as a lieutenant of the Oldenburg garrison, Lamping sought adventure by enlisting with the French to fight against the insurgents in Africa. Lamping records his eventual disillusionment with this colonial experience but not before giving testimony to the "total war" tactics being deployed by the French military. Ernest Alby, identified on the title page as a "lieutenant in the French Army," writes the second account.⁶ Later thought to be fictitious, *The Prisoners of Abd-el-Kader* reports on five month's imprisonment by the Amir and his men. This captivity narrative reflects the European horror and fascination with the *jihad* against the French led by the famous freedom fighter Abd-el-Kader. After the French reluctantly took over Algeria in 1830, they quickly adopted a full colonialist posture; a powerful fifteen-year resistance developed under the remarkable leadership of the Amir. Abd-el-Kader's early successes shocked the French military, leading to the scorched earth policy of Thomas Bugeaud.⁷

Fuller quickly dismisses *The Prisoners of Abd-el-Kader*, and her disdain hints that she may have suspected its fictive status. Fuller nevertheless makes a point of saying that the description of Abd-el-Kader in *Prisoners* is "not without interest" in the larger context of the "official

bulletins” and “newspaper scraps” covering his ongoing resistance to the French, some of which include brief mention by Engels in the *Northern Star* of 1844.⁸ By the time of Fuller’s review, Abd-el-Kader had met with his first set of real defeats, though his final surrender would not come for another two years. Whether Fuller knew Engels’ shifting position toward Algeria over this period is uncertain, though she elsewhere follows some of his work, as we know from her translations in the *Tribune*.⁹ On these matters such “scraps” about Algeria more likely came available to her in the *Courrier des Etats-Unis*. Whatever her source, Fuller grasped enough about Abd-el-Kader to encourage her reader to mine the fragmentary insights about him that emerge from both tales, despite their obvious focus on the French position.¹⁰ Even then, Fuller appears not to have found a quote from *Prisoners* worth repeating, and this likely reflects her resistance to the especially sensational nature of Alby’s writing.

The French colonial project in North Africa always produced complex cultural results, as when the dangerous military situation in Algeria enabled the first production of the Berlioz Requiem. Berlioz did not compose for the occasion; indeed, the government had suspended his work, already finished. But Berlioz eagerly took advantage of the French decision to honor a French general killed in an 1837 attack on Constantine when he quickly offered his work for staging (Locke 96-107, 102). Lucie Duff Gordon also took advantage of the ever-increasing interest in the French occupation when she assembled and translated these texts from German and French under the title *The French in Algiers* during the early 1840s. As we shall see, the commercial impetus underwriting the set of translations in this edition stirs Fuller to redirect the sensational gaze of its implied audience.

Duff Gordon’s preface exposes something of her own prejudice against the Arabs and the Berber Kabyles, whom she oddly labels the “infidels.”¹¹ Fuller never mentions Lady Duff Gordon, making indirect reference to her translations by describing the narratives as “inartificially put together.” Fuller’s neologism suggests the utility of Duff Gordon’s comparative ambition; if the naïve association of the two tales about the French and Germans in Algeria lacks pretense, the resonances generated through their

proximity will become anything but artificial to the discerning eye. As I hope to show, Fuller's selection of two quotes from the German tale by Lamping reproduces this strategy, "inartificially" putting together items that become productive through their clever juxtaposition.

Fuller displays her typical shorthand here as she barely describes these accounts for her reader. She nevertheless alludes to their content by encouraging her audience to read against the prejudices so evident in both and stipulating how they "bring home to us scenes before known" only "vaguely or scantily." Those taking the trouble to survey the book, quickly discover each author's tendency, marked by Fuller, to focus on the "brutal and ferocious" traits of Arabs in general and Bedouins in particular. The captivity narrative makes for especially odd reading at this moment, since it often alludes to the naturalized system of slavery among the Arabs while assuming that the reader will focus on the trials of the European hostages.¹² Alby's narrative bristles with many harsh descriptions of decapitations and rapes, including among them not only abusive attacks on European women but also an overheated and detailed description of the sale of "a beautiful black girl of about fourteen" for sexual purposes.¹³

Of course, the two tales in *The French in Algiers* are written from the European perspective, and Fuller openly exhibits her impatience with both authors. As Fuller notes, these men are of "the very commonest stamp" despite their relative privilege, and are perhaps most dangerous for the fact that they are "half-cultivated." At the same time, Fuller finds in their lack of self-understanding something particularly useful, as if a *failure* of circumspection allows their sheer *contact* with the world to be especially productive. In this sense, these men perform like the inert plate of a camera, absorbing the aura of a world they cannot understand through their unwitting exposure to the returning glance of alien cultures.¹⁴ Given the sensational drift of both narratives, both depict vivid and visual scenes with unexpected detail, especially the tale by Lamping. Choosing two passages from Lamping's narrative, Fuller attends to what Benjamin would later call the "optical unconscious."¹⁵

Here I am using Miriam Hansen's understanding of aura in Benjamin, which is not restricted to the familiar aesthetic reading of the loss of a

“beautiful semblance” (Hansen 336-75). In reviewing Benjamin’s work, Hansen notes the variety of sources informing Benjamin’s problematic term, some of which return to issues enlivening Fuller’s world. Of course, Benjamin generates much of this critical confusion himself. Even though he first introduced the term through his experiment with Hashish (perhaps like Baudelaire’s, supplied from Algeria!), Benjamin’s aversion to the cheapened spiritualist sense of the word caused him to repress the broader historical understanding underlining the *structural aspects* of the concept as they function in his thinking. These aspects include: 1) the uncanny sense of nearness and distance strangely aligned and 2) the return of the gaze from the object being observed and reproduced. In Hansen’s reading, “aura” contains layered meaning that applies to his ongoing search for the positive value of technological advances. That is, Benjamin’s concern for the atrophy of a certain type of experience (*Erfahrung*) brought on by changing modes of production was matched by his constant search for suitable tools, including technologies like film, for a new collectivity of experience. An enlarged understanding of aura aligns more readily with the other terms Benjamin came to use, including the “optical unconscious,” and reflects his messianic sense of history, one that Fuller seems to share as she writes this review.¹⁶

Fuller’s recognition that even an inferior witness can provide valuable information for critical analysis has a long history in her work and can be said to motivate a great deal of her own translation choices, including most notably her translation of *Eckermann’s Conversations with Goethe*. Part of Fuller’s fascination with translation has to do with her intuition that translation was itself a technology for social transformation; the transfer of ideas across the barriers of culture might yield important changes in the host culture.¹⁷ In this sense, Fuller works continuously toward the idea that the imperative of translation has to do with the demand it places on the host language.¹⁸

In this instance, however, Fuller is not preoccupied with translation *qua* translation, for she does not have access to the original French or German texts. Instead, Fuller’s citations from Duff Gordon’s work perform a meta-

translation of the very idea of "The French in Algiers," establishing an implicit critique of Peabody's decision to publish the book in this form. Fuller's column targets those attributes for which Benjamin will later fault the newspaper itself: the reduction of life's collective texture and experience to mere "information" meant for shallow consumption rather than absorption and repetition in storied form.¹⁹ In Fuller's day, the newspaper's function as switchboard across print culture had not yet been restricted. But isolating commercial forces were already at work in the publishing project of Wiley and Putnam responsible for Peabody's edition. Fuller's strategy here is to counter the new but reductive reach of book production with her own inventive transformation of the newspaper article. Because the two works wedded together by Duff Gordon are themselves attempts at cultural translation, Fuller allows them to function as tools registering far more than the authors could control, as if they had the same indexical quality that would become photography's trademark.²⁰ To better explain this process and to show how Fuller selects her citations to provoke a crisis in the sensational information of Duff Gordon's translation, I first want to return to the idea of the Homeric simile.

Homeric Simile

Initially selected like photographs with unintended "spark[s] of contingency," Fuller's two quotes also function together like one of Homer's extended similes.²¹ Clemens Lamping often describes as Homeric the consequences of the military strategy in *The Soldier of the Foreign Legion* and his frequent though inept classical references may have influenced Fuller's approach. As a soldier returning home, Lamping correlates his experience with that of Odysseus on several occasions. In the initial paragraph of his work, for example, Lamping greets his reader with the boast that "the dangers and sorrows of the noble, much-enduring Odysseus [...] are mere child's play in comparison to my own." Fuller often alluded to the *Odyssey*, and she likely found Lamping's opening sally both arrogant and inciting. And, as we will see, one of the quotes describing a military massacre that she takes from his work does bring to mind a

powerful moment in the *Odyssey*, but only when juxtaposed with a second passage that allows for an “ethic of similitude” to take effect.²²

Homer scholar Sheila Murnaghan uses this phrase to explain how the extended simile in Homer deliberately calls attention to its labor, luxuriating in its unanticipated resemblance as it digresses from the story in which it is embedded.²³ In one sense, the Homeric simile stores narrative energy like a battery.²⁴ Often, as in the example that follows, the simile emerges like some collective flashback in a traumatic history. If it does not immediately reflect the psychology of the character to which it refers, it can attempt to weave together the tattered fabric of his or her world through an appeal to the audience. In this sense the simile invariably emphasizes the collective status of the story in its making.²⁵

How else to read the simile that erupts when Odysseus asks Demodocus, the bard in the palace of Alcinous, to recount the tale of the Trojan horse? Odysseus is being vain here, for he is asking for a narrative that will make him responsible for the victory in Troy.²⁶ But when the bard sings, Odysseus gets more than he bargains for and quickly swoons in a fit of passion. Significantly, we never hear what the bard sings; we only get the response of Odysseus. More remarkable than the grief Odysseus suddenly experiences is the simile that Homer selects to describe it:

And Odysseus wept. Tears
Welled up in his eyes and flowed down his cheeks.
*A woman wails as she throws herself upon
Her husband's body. He has fallen in battle
Before the town walls, fighting to the last
To defend his city and protect his children.
As she sees him dying and gasping for breath
She clings to him and shrieks, while behind her
Soldiers prod their spears into her shoulders and back,
And as they lead her away into slavery
Her tear-drenched face is a mask of pain*

So too Odysseus, pitiful in his grief. (8.564-75)

The tears of Odysseus, here compared to those of the “war’s most

wretched survivor," do not necessarily suggest that he understands the full nature of his assault on Troy.²⁷ If anything, the "ethic of similitude" being played out is one that offers insight into the traumatic experience Odysseus cannot yet work through. Yet the abrupt characterization of such sorrow at this very moment encourages us to imagine a type of alternative *Odyssey* where such knowledge might be possible.

Odysseus attempts to use the song of the bard to aid in his remembrance of the war, assuming that such a memory would bring him satisfaction if not comfort. But such conscious acts of memory invariably fail to bring about the richness of what Benjamin would go on to call "absolute experience."²⁸ In his view, only those involuntary memories that Proust made so famous were likely to hold the promise of the type of experience we all covet.²⁹ Here, of course, the extended simile provides us with an involuntary memory, yet it is one that belongs to another order altogether than the isolated experience of Odysseus. The wonderful and abrupt figuration of Odysseus as a woman at war's most brutal core returns us to the promise of such a comparison, though not one that Odysseus can use alone. As such, the experience lingers in the collectivity that is the intensive afterlife of the poem itself.³⁰

Incongruous Quotations

This striking simile comes to mind when we look at the two quotes Fuller chooses to reproduce for her reader. Allowing for "motives and influences," Fuller considers Lamping "from the position in which he stands," taking note of the two terms, danger and sorrow, with which he compared himself to Odysseus. The enactment of sorrow that Fuller chooses to reproduce has to do with the loss of Lamping's "only friend" in Algeria. Lamping no doubt is confident that his reader will sympathize with this personal loss because of the dangerous military engagements he has already depicted with such brio. Yet Fuller's column complicates the sorrow that the passage solicits by placing it directly after Lamping's description of the massacre of a Berger village. Like Odysseus calling for the tale of the Trojan horse, Lamping expects his audience to approve of

the deadly efficiency of the French Foreign Legion. But like Homer, Fuller wants the war victims to have their experience integrated into the extended cultural memory of this event, including the recollections of the French and German soldiers.

Lamping clearly does not intend there to be any similarity between the two passages, separated as they are by several pages in his narrative. Yet, in Fuller's alignment, both passages are deathbed scenes and highly visualized in their effect. One, violent and noisy, the other silent and subdued, both passages depict danger and loss from varying perspectives, not always in line with the author's initial intention. Ultimately, then, Fuller's citations highlight certain incongruities underwriting Lamping's cultural perspective; in registering the contradictions of the French colonial encounter the goal is to make "something happen" to the colonizing culture, rather than the other way around.³¹ In Fuller's view, those readers who might have felt sympathy for Lamping without considering the broader cost of their emotional response need to be shaken from their lethargy.

The first scene depends upon the irruption of violence into routine domestic activity for its effect: Berber women witness the slaughter of the men of their village as they awaken from sleep. Despite the carnage, a tacit sense that his reader will align with the soldier's professional activity frames Lamping's discussion.³² Fuller chooses instead to introduce the passage by asking how anyone could find in the events depicted there a test of "manhood." The tension in this vivid passage no doubt attracts Fuller, for the excessive force used by the French easily answers her question in the negative:

After a short rest we started again, and the first glimmer of light showed the huts of the tribe straight before us. An old Kabyle was at that moment going out with a pair of oxen to plough; as soon as he saw us he uttered a fearful howl and fled, but a few well-directed shots brought him down. In one moment the grenadiers and *voltigeurs*, who were in advance, broke through the

hedge of prickly pear, which generally surrounds a Kabyle village, and the massacre began. Strict orders had been given to kill all the men, and only to take the women and children prisoners: for we followed the precept of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.'

A few men only reeled half-awake out of their huts, but most of them still lay fast asleep; not one escaped death. The women and children rushed, howling and screaming, out of their burning huts, in time to see their husbands and children [brothers] butchered. One young woman, with an infant at her breast, started back at the sight of strange men exclaiming, "Mohammed! Mohammed!" and ran into her burning hut. Some soldiers sprang forward to save her, but the roof had already fallen in, and she and her child perished in the flames.³³

Fuller's example exhibits what would become Thomas Bugeaud's trademark strategy, where soldiers slaughtered entire populations, burning villages and crops in offensive military actions. Lamping naturally tries to assume full control of the event he recalls, reminding us of the "well directed shots" killing the old Kabyle and depicting with eerie coolness the fiery death of the young woman with her baby. Yet the almost neutral tone of the word "massacre" generates a chilling context for the oddly repetitive biblical citation ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth") that Lamping summons to explain their military orders. And the "hedge of prickly pear" meant to protect the Berber village proves no match against the modern advance of the "grenadiers and *voltigeurs*." Such unwitting details catch Fuller's eye, as the unconscious shimmer reflecting back through Lamping's tableau.

Fuller intuits that some of the young men being killed are also sons, or perhaps she simply wants to emphasize the uncontrolled nature of the slaughter; for whatever reason, as she quotes, Fuller substitutes "children" for "brothers" in the sentence describing the people being murdered before their women. Fuller attempts, in other words, to enlarge the narrow

understanding of experience being reported. In effect, she injects subjectivity into the various objects of Lamping's image, enabling them to "look back" at the reader. Lamping hardly allows for such empathy, refusing as he does to elaborate on the multiple deaths these women abruptly witness against their wills. Indeed his language concerning the men haunts us through its unwitting numerical reversal, for we learn "not one escaped death."

In a way that Lamping does not, Fuller takes account of the traumatic costs of such an experience, not only for the Kabyles, especially their women, but also for the soldiers witnessing and participating in the event. To emphasize the cost for the soldiers, Fuller quickly turns her reader's attention to the passage concerning the death of Lamping's "only" friend. This quiet scene comes four pages later in Lamping's account, after the slaughter of more Kabyle men at a livestock watering hole. In the spirit of Lamping's description of his experience throughout as "Homeric," though in a different register altogether, Fuller captures the aura of modern warfare through the rapid juxtaposition of her two citations. She connects the passage of the massacre to the second passage by observing how Lamping's Berlin friend must have been affected by "such experiences":

I have suffered a severe loss; the only friend I had found here died a few days ago. Similar tastes and a like fate had drawn us together. He was of a good family at Berlin, as the high cultivation of his mind sufficiently proved (!!) but an unfortunate longing for excitement and adventure had driven him from home. I am convinced that he died of homesickness. He had never served before, and could not, therefore, brook this brutal and savage life so well as I could, and a fever hastened his death. He had written his father for money to obtain his discharge, under the conviction that he could not endure his life here, and was in the daily expectation of an answer. His imagination already transported him back to his Family; but he grew weaker every day, and at length had to be carried to the

hospital, where I visited him daily when my turn of service did not prevent me. When I went yesterday and inquired after him, one of the attendants pointed to the bed; on approaching it, I found him dead. No one, not even his next neighbor, had heard him die. He was buried the next morning with no kind of ceremony and I followed him to his grave alone. It is well for him that he is at peace! His spirit was too gentle to bear the sight of all this cruelty and wretchedness. One must case one's heart in triple brass to bear existence here at all.³⁴

While offering that his friend was "too gentle to bear the sight of all this cruelty," Lamping makes no direct connection between the scene of the massacre and his friend's death. He does close with an allusion to Horace when he speaks of encasing "one's heart in triple brass," yet this finishes with a tone as chilling as that in his earlier passage when he summoned "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."³⁵ Lamping appears more focused here on his own "severe loss," and he clearly expects his reader to find moving the forlorn isolation of his friend's passing. Given the status of death's anonymity in the first quote, however, Fuller proffers a different reading, acidly remarking upon the European subjectivity at work: "'Tis pity, indeed, that in the age of Hegel a young man should thus throw away in so absurd a manner, life and its glorious chances, through the attempt to become self-conscious."³⁶

Segregated by mood and content in Lamping's rendering, these two passages create an "ethic of similitude" when brought together. Fuller's association highlights the tableau of death in each: the first solicits a firm resolution that tough professional duty is being performed, while the second draws upon responses more familiar on the home front. The death of Lamping's friend is initially framed through the analytic of nostalgia, or homesickness. But by associating the cruelly belated death-scene with the cruelty of the massacre itself, Fuller transforms Lamping's hackneyed rendering of each, emphasizing the wastefulness and brutality of the entire colonial apparatus. And bringing together scenes with radically different

speeds suddenly allows for a recalibration of the pacing in both events. The uneasy deliberation of death in the second tableau gets superimposed on the haste with which death is dismissed in the massacre; as in an extended simile, the rapid flip from the first frame to the next invites a backward glance protracting our reading of the personal dynamics in each. Moreover, aware that Lamping sought adventure in the French Foreign Legion out of boredom, Fuller mimics his hardboiled style and writes: "Is it not very sad [...] when all true warfare is moral and mental, and a hundred good causes at every step plead for defenders to see a young man go to Algiers to chase Arabs to their dens, and help poor mercenaries die of heat and fatigue."

Boredom, Repetition, and Traumatic Mimesis

As we know from her other columns in the *Tribune*, Fuller wrote about the conditions changing experience all around her. Like Benjamin, she believed the diminishing place for "pastime" or "boredom" was damaging the potential for significant haptic experiences, particularly for the industrial worker.³⁷ But Lamping was a class removed and the boredom motivating his turn of duty in the French Foreign Legion is something that Benjamin would later recognize as phantasmatic.³⁸ Fuller's citations work to breach the protective surface of that dream-state. Or, put another way, Fuller attempts to shock the cultural trance sometimes experienced as boredom by emphasizing its destructive energies. At the same time Fuller's sense that "all true warfare is moral and mental" reflects the utopian cast of her critique. Fuller's fascination with Charles Fourier in particular shows through here since she mocks the "age of Hegel," often defined by the urge "to become self-conscious."

In the work of both Benjamin and Fuller, Fourier's appeal had to do with his rejection of isolated experiences generally; his utopian fantasy of universal harmony based itself on the premise that it took an entire phalanstery to liberate the vital passions of each individual. Significantly, Mesmer's animal magnetism remained at the center of Fourier's theoretical world. Mesmer's theory of magnetic waves permeating the universe inclines Fourier toward a positive sense of man's potential

interaction with the inert properties of the environment.³⁹ That is to say, Fourier adapted Mesmer's notorious magnetic passes as the motor for change in his utopia; the "crisis state" induced in the mesmeric relay became the condition to which all of civilization needed to be transported for an "explosion" of phalanstery living to occur. The dynamite at the center of such a process could only be set off by deployment of a traumatic mimesis whereby the conditions forming the problem were recast as part of the solution. In simplest terms, a mechanical reproduction of the crisis was needed to open its potential.⁴⁰

This method, particularly as it pertains to technological innovations, fascinated Benjamin sufficiently to place Fourier at the heart of his *Arcades Project*. For Benjamin, Fourier's dreamscape fast-forwarded a missed opportunity, one to be found in a revolutionary "innervation of the technical organs of the collective" (631). Benjamin goes so far as to compare the fantastic utopian vision of Fourier to the mimetic authority of Mickey Mouse. In fact, much of Benjamin's focus on "the dynamite of a tenth of a second" appears to borrow from the way Fourier integrates the shifting modes of production into his utopian fantasy (635). Thus we see Benjamin writing:

The phalanstery can be characterized as human machinery. This is no reproach, nor is it meant to indicate anything mechanistic; rather, it refers to the great complexity of its structure (*Aufbau*). The phalanstery is a machine made of human beings. (*Arcades Project* 626)

The early mesmeric encounter often had a collective quality, not lost on Fourier, who adapted that attribute for his social vision, incorporating the mechanism of the mesmeric "crisis" as his vehicle for change. Significantly, this "crisis state" was an early mechanical reproduction of sorts with therapeutic possibilities: it was not merely symptomatic as most people imagine, but a mimetic reproduction, designed to open up a recalibration of the forces generating the symptom in the first place.⁴¹ Both Fuller and Benjamin were attracted to this system by virtue of their recognition of the traumatic practices at the center of culture itself.

The idea of crisis harkened back to ancient medical terminology, suggestive of a moment when a patient's symptoms might resolve for better or for worse. As such, the idea of "crisis" contained within it a temporal theory. Given Benjamin's complicated use of time in his famous "dialectical image," this sense of crisis overlaps with the repressed sense of aura to which he keeps returning, since the anticipatory structure of "crisis" held both positive and negative possibilities.⁴² This temporal use of crisis speaks to Fuller's dual energy in her column. While she selects her lengthy passages from Lamping with an eye for allowing objects within them to "look back" at her reader, she also presses both images into mutual service. Such a process creates a little machine involving an explosion of its own between the frames. As in the extended simile, Fuller generates a moment when two temporalities are available simultaneously, suggesting a reposition in the sequence and meaning of the events in each.

Also at stake here is a process later described by Benjamin that involves the repetition of a shared labor. Thus the storyteller depends on the listener's distracted attention, whereby the collective value or experience (*Erfahrung*) can be said to reside in prospective form. The value of the tale involves not only the talent of the speaker but also the contact with the listener mediated there. The goal is memory's transmission, though not in isolated form, since the goal of all storytelling is in fact repetition.⁴³ For Benjamin, the conditions pressing on those living in Fuller's time were transforming the way that experience itself could be *related*, in part because repetition itself was being transformed. Once a sign of craft, where each application of the hand or story would blend into the experience of work itself, repetition was becoming mere compulsory effort, or industrial training, as empty as the jolts of the bumper cars in an amusement park.⁴⁴

While Fuller still finds potential in the newspaper as she writes, she also attends to certain experiences being withered by technologies claiming to bring together those separated by distance and culture, in this case the technology of translation itself. *The French in Algiers* provokes Fuller to turn around the oddly compulsory nature of Lamping's boredom,

as if his duty with the French Foreign Legion had been the product of an empty gamble or dare. Perhaps the constricted nature of repetition is nowhere better manifest than in Lamping's own use of citation in each passage: first his reference to "an eye for an eye" and then his allusion to "triple brass" from Horace. Fuller's struggle is to generate out of Lamping's superficial and repetitive account a story to pass on. This challenge involves a recalibration of the familiar work of mourning so as to expose the cultural assault it proves to be; in Fuller's own repetition, encasing one's heart in "triple brass" now becomes the dialectical image of the explosives fired by grenadiers and voltigeurs into sleeping Berber villages. Such shared labor is the work of trauma where the critical burden shifts from the private sense of loss always at the center of traumatic experience to the unthought possibilities stored within the collective environment of the event itself. With her two citations, now taken from conventional prose and reordered to reflect upon each other, Fuller broadens the event in an effort to clear a space for such emergent possibilities.

In the end, Fuller makes the crisis of Lamping and the mercenary soldier a crisis of culture rather than a crisis of self-consciousness. Thus Fuller calls for another type of labor altogether, beseeching "thoughtful men" not to "grow weary of repeating again and again, thoughts proper to the present day, fancying they are familiar by this time to everyone." Fuller then repeats herself by writing, "Thoughtful men! Be not weary! Ye who are the salt of the earth; every where it needs your savour yet."

In their rhetorical ambiguity, Fuller's closing remarks are typical of her reviews for the *Tribune*. As such, her decision to comment upon *The French in Algiers* reflects her gathering determination to enlist readers in a type of counter memory or archive of "thoughts proper to the present day." Ever since her 1843 trip to the Midwest, the efficacy of certain modes of analysis had come under scrutiny in her work. It is likely, moreover, that Fuller was reading the narrative of Frederick Douglass along side the accounts of Lamping and Alby. Certainly she would have read the beating of Aunt Hester, or what has been called the primal scene

of his narrative, in the context of these other sensational accounts.⁴⁵ Fuller's sense that Douglass could write evenly about those who had injured him may of course reveal a wish that her own belated turn to abolitionist concerns might be forgiven.⁴⁶ Yet looking again at the *French in Algiers*, her argument that Douglass "knows how to allow for motives and influences" provides a particularly apt description of the psychological sophistication of his work. Knowing how "thoughts proper to the present day" were not "familiar by this time to everyone," Douglass repeats himself "again and again," throughout his life, knowing that repetition and change were inextricably, if also problematically, bound.

Like Fuller in her career, that is, Douglass is well aware that repetition is central to his work, both as a writer and as a public advocate. In comparing his lecture career with that of the Irish "Liberator" Daniel O'Connell, Douglass recalls that O'Connell playfully observed, when asked for new lectures, how "it would take Ireland twenty years to learn his old ones" (Douglass, *Life and Times*, 376). Repetition particularly informs the life writing to which Douglass returns throughout his career. His 1845 slave narrative, not quite one hundred pages, swells to more than twice that size when incorporated into *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855. By the time it appears again in the 1881 and 1892 editions of *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, his narrative concerning slavery and its aftermath is close to six hundred pages long. One might say there is a compulsive quality to this pattern of return. Indeed, many have read *Life and Times* with a negative sense of that quality in mind. Yet because of the complex traumas involved, Douglass has a better sense of the social relations at work in this process of repetition and elaboration. Certainly as Douglass later makes clear in his description of John Brown's bloody career, one often needs a "terrible remedy for a terrible malady" (*Life and Times* 303).

Challenged today by the rapidly transforming technologies of the internet, the newspaper is experiencing a crisis. Yet photography and film, once thought progressive developments, now enjoy what Miriam Hansen has called a "queered" relation as new understandings of their interactive potential emerge.⁴⁷ In the same way, newspaper and internet technologies

may find a productive future together when their own queer relation is understood. But it will not be without risks, as the extended histories of photography and film in their most reductive and sensational uses also reveal. Fuller appears to have been experimenting with the limiting qualities of commercial forces in the publishing world before they precipitated out in the developing global reach of the newspaper. Moreover, her own attempt to translate the "scenes known vaguely or scantily through official bulletins or newspaper scraps" is typical of her critical intuition about impending problems. And her demand for the repetition of "thoughts proper to the present day" is a harbinger of the method someone like Douglass will take up productively in the body of his work.

In this sense, Douglass becomes the nineteenth-century storyteller Walter Benjamin could not quite imagine. Certainly in 1845, only Margaret Fuller appears to have made it possible for the dreams of Abd-el-Kader and Frederick Douglass to flash up momentarily in each other's company, and it is significant that they do so on the front pages of the *New-York Daily Tribune*.

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Notes

¹ Sontag, "Melancholy Objects," 68.

² As I have often noted, Fuller would have loved modern technologies. What is *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* but a Google search *avant la lettre*?

³ Benjamin writes "Every morning brings us news from across the globe, yet we are poor in newsworthy stories." See "The Storyteller," 143-66, 147.

⁴ See Zwarg, "The Work of Trauma," 65-88.

⁵ Fuller reviews an edition published by Wiley and Putnam, presumably in 1845. This edition is now available on-line as a "Google" book. I also found an 1848 edition of the same work printed in New York by Leavitt, Trow & Company. The publication history itself is interesting and no doubt related to events in Algeria at the time.

⁶ François Antoine Alby, who went by the name Ernest. Lamping's name is incorrectly printed "Lampiny" in Fuller's review. The full title of

the second narrative is: *The Prisoners of Abd-el-Kader, or, Five Months' Captivity Among the Arabs* [*Les prisonniers d'Abd-el-Kader: ou cinq mois de captivité chez les Arabes*]. The translator, Lucie Duff Gordon will go on to publish *Letters from Egypt* in 1865 after her seven-year stay in that country. For more on Duff Gordon, see Frank.

⁷ For more on this topic, see Reid, "Total War," and Rudy, "Pros and Cons: Americanism against Islamism in the 'War on Terror.'"

⁸ *The Northern Star*, No. 344, 15 June 1844.

⁹ Engels goes on to alter his position in 1848 when he argues that the fall of Abd-el-Kader was inevitable (see next note), but he later changes his mind and again supports the resistance to French Colonial rule in Algeria in his article "Algeria" in the *New American Encyclopedia* (1857). See *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 3, 528-29, Volume 6, 469-71.

¹⁰ Fuller deploys a few quaint if well-meaning stereotypes herself, though always in the service of critique. Thus she admits "there is something refreshing in reading of men of instinct, such as the Bedouins, even when the half-cultivated men who write know how to see nothing so clearly in them as their brutal and ferocious traits." Given his own reflections on the Bedouins, Engels may have read *The French in Algiers*. In 1848, for example, Engels notoriously judged inevitable the fall of Abd-el-Kader by observing: "we must not forget that these same Bedouins were a nation of robbers, – whose principal means of living consisted of making excursions either upon each other, or upon the settled villagers, taking what they found, slaughtering all those who resisted, and selling the remaining prisoners as slaves." *The Northern Star*, 22 January 1848.

¹¹ See Duff Gordon's Preface.

¹² In reading over this material one sees how it will soon inform Fuller's appreciation of the balance used by Frederick Douglass in describing similar abuses. Fuller later observes in her review how "Douglass himself seems very just and temperate. We feel that his view, even of those who have injured him most, may be relied upon. He knows how to allow for motives and influences." *New-York Daily Tribune*, 10 June 1845. In Alby's narrative Fuller does not find any sensitivity toward those who have injured him the

most, despite the fact that the narrator has enlisted to crush the resistance fighters among whom he finds himself.

¹³ *The Prisoners of Abd-el-Kader*, 125.

¹⁴ For more on the significance of contact in Benjamin's work on photography, see Taussig.

¹⁵ For "optical unconscious" see Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," 510.

¹⁶ Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," 512.

¹⁷ Zwarg, "Feminism in Translation: Fuller's Tasso and G nderode," in *Feminist Conversations*, 59-96.

¹⁸ The same idea later emphasized by Benjamin in his work on translation famously captured in his citation from Rudolf Pannwitz: "The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue [...]. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language. It is not generally realized to what extent this is possible," "The Task of the Translator," 262. For another take on US writers, see Boggs.

¹⁹ Benjamin writes on these themes continually. See especially his approach in his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 313-355.

²⁰ The concept of the index is used in theories of photography, derived from the work of Charles S. Peirce. According to Peirce, an index "acts upon the nerves of the person addressed and forces his attention" yet carries no specific meaning (Peirce, 5).

²¹ Benjamin, "Little History of Philosophy," 510.

²² Lamping, *The Soldier of the Foreign Legion*, 2. For Fuller's use of the sirens passage, see "Fuller's Scene before the Women: *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*," in *Feminist Conversations*, 181-188. The phrase, the "ethic of similitude," comes from Murnaghan's introduction to Stanley Lombardo's translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, xlix. I use Lombardo's edition in my discussion.

²³ For more on this topic see Moulton, Scott, Lateiner, and Gaca.

²⁴ Some classical scholars have suggested that the very rhythm in the

recitation of the poem may have changed pace when these similes were encountered.

²⁵ This collective quality is at the heart of Benjamin's preference for the epic over the novel.

²⁶ Murnaghan, lxiii.

²⁷ Murnaghan, xxiii.

²⁸ The phrase "absolute experience" comes from Gershom Scholem. For an excellent reading of the complex notion of "experience" in Benjamin, see Jay.

²⁹ This idea plays out especially in his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 315-19.

³⁰ Sophisticated theorists find an association between translation and the healing work of psychoanalysis and argue that the drive to translate is not recoverable in the meaning of the original but in the power of that which remains untranslatable there. This is another way of saying that the most powerful imperative of translation is that which hovers unthought in the original. Influenced by Benjamin, Jean Laplanche writes, "authentic translation ought to be nothing but a moment in the very after-life of the work; the *Trieb zur Übersetzung* [the drive to translate] doesn't come from the translator, but from the work itself" (202).

³¹ Derrida, *The Monolingualism of the Other*, 51.

³² Indeed, Lamping considers their efforts against the Kabyles "truly Homeric," *The Soldier of the Foreign Legion*, 27.

³³ Here I compare Fuller's citation with the translated version of Lamping's narrative from Duff Gordon. This quote occurs on page 26 of his narrative.

³⁴ Again, I compared Fuller's citation with the passage on page 29 in Duff Gordon's translation of Lamping's narrative. For emphasis, Fuller adds the set of exclamation points early in the passage.

³⁵ Lamping alludes to a famous passage in Horace where he uses the phrase "aes triplex" (Horace, *Odes* I.3.9).

³⁶ Here Berlant's discussion of anonymity and the universal subject is

right on target. See "Trauma and Ineloquence."

³⁷ Zwarg, "Reading Before Marx" in *Feminist Conversations*, 189-220.

³⁸ Benjamin called it the "external surface of unconscious events," *The Arcades Project*, 106. Benjamin has a whole "convolute" on "Boredom, Eternal Return" [D]. Of course, in "The Storyteller," by contrast, Benjamin calls boredom "the dreambird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling of the leaves drives him away." *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, 149.

³⁹ For Fourier and Fuller, see *Feminist Conversations*. For an excellent review of the relationship between Fourier and Mesmerism, see Darnton.

⁴⁰ Benjamin has a convolute devoted to Fourier in his *Arcades Project*. Benjamin appears particularly fascinated by Fourier's notion of "explosion": "The propagation of the phalanstery takes place through an 'explosion.' Fourier speaks of an 'explosion du phalanstère'" (*Arcades Project*, 625).

⁴¹ For more on Mesmer's "crisis state," see Gauld.

⁴² Benjamin's aura carries with it the ancient medical sense of premonition: one's "aura" functioned like a symptom in formation, and, as such, contained within it a temporal theory. See Hansen, 342.

⁴³ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 149. "Storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to." Here Benjamin bemoans the withering of "boredom" itself, though he is well aware that another form of boredom such as that experienced by Lamping has rushed in.

⁴⁴ The simile is Benjamin's. See "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 329.

⁴⁵ Hartmann, *Scenes of Subjection*, 4. See the excellent reading of the significance of this scene by Franchot. I use the name "Hester" here because that was the name in the narrative Fuller reviewed. All future references are to Esther, which remained the name of choice in editions after 1855.

⁴⁶ See McBride's reading of Fuller's review of Douglass's *Narrative*,

75-78. For an alternate reading, see Stadler.

⁴⁷ For an excellent description of this queer relation, see Hansen, 348-49.

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