

Review Essays

The Impersonal Lives of Margaret Fuller: A Problem of Biography

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John Matteson, *The Lives of Margaret Fuller* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012), xvi + 520 pages, \$32.95 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

Megan Marshall, *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), xxi + 474 pages, \$30 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

*I*n 1852, two years after Margaret Fuller's death, Emerson, Channing, and Clarke published her first biography, and arranged the text in such a way that it could be read as her autobiography. The *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* is a pastiche of Fuller's journal entries, letters, and excerpts from her published and unpublished works, interspersed by the editors' explanatory commentary, and supplemented

by their own lengthy impressions and memories of her. The Margaret Fuller that emerges from this patchwork is a sickly, asexual woman, confused about her religious allegiances, intellectually stellar, but often misunderstood. In 1884, Fuller's brother Arthur added an Appendix and a Preface to the second edition of the *Memoirs* in which he claimed that "[Margaret] never would have published the sketch [which portrays their father as a "stern and exacting" disciplinarian] without such modifications as would have shown our father to have been a most judicious and tender one."¹ The editorial method of the *Memoirs*, which compiles Fuller's life narrative from her first-person material and offers it as the personal memoirs she never wrote (and would have probably "modified") raises an important question about genre: should the titular memoirs refer to Margaret's own memories of her life, or to the editors' and her brother's memories of Margaret?

The question has become emblematic in the field of Fuller biographies: which Margaret Fuller is given in the *Memoirs* or in any of her subsequent biographies?² As John Matteson, one of Fuller's recent biographers, points out, Emerson, Channing, and Clarke "had access to innumerable documents that either vanished or were destroyed after they used them," hence "some of their well-meant obfuscations are now permanent," and have become "the accepted version of Fuller's life."³ The tendency toward biographical reductionism, characteristic of the *Memoirs*, is especially problematic given the many and mutually contradictory aspects of Fuller's life. A child prodigy, the first woman editor, one of the first reporters on the expansion of the American West, an activist, and a war correspondent from the revolutionary Europe of 1848, Fuller comes across as a strong and ambitious figure. Yet, her journals and letters introduce a person often overwhelmed by poor health and paralyzed by the pain of violent headaches. In her writings she was as versatile: in some she advocates for the emancipation of women; in others she calls for the dissolution of any form of identity. In order to tame this psychological and intellectual abundance into a coherent narrative, Fuller's biographers

commonly follow Emerson, Clarke, and Channing, and emphasize one aspect – Fuller's feminism or ill health for example – at the expense of others.⁴

The two most recent biographies, John Matteson's *The Lives of Margaret Fuller* and Megan Marshall's *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life*, stand out in this regard. While chronicling a life that emphatically resists being squared into a single course, they manage to include this resistance in their respective accounts of it. Although in using Fuller's elusiveness as the representational focus of their narratives Matteson and Marshall are sometimes as reductive as other biographers, their approaches are nonetheless productive in that they urge Fuller scholars to translate the multifariousness of her *life* onto her *work*. They register the ways in which the elusiveness of her many identities is reflected in her philosophy of the self.

Matteson references his anti-identitarian approach already in the title. Fuller's life was not singular but multiple, a succession of fourteen overlapping and mutually generating identities. Viewed together, they prevent any "single label" from solidifying into a definitive persona: "Because the very essence of Fuller was her changeability – she referred to herself as a chameleon – no single snapshot can suffice. [...] She embodied a kind of power that defies reduction to the printed page."⁵ Matteson therefore resorts to what he calls a "prismatic" method: "In an attempt to recapture the complexity of its subject, this book represents Fuller as a series of identities," but demonstrates that "her various identities did not arise in a tidy succession, and often overlapped."⁶ Marshall's approach, on the other hand, is spatial: Fuller's life is seen as a succession not of identities but of the places that shaped them. From Cambridge, Groton, and Providence, to Concord, Boston, and New York, from Europe to her last journey back, Fuller's trajectories outline a series of topographic personas, connected by the impersonal geography of movement rather than by a fixed psychological structure.

The two biographies are different in their inflections. Matteson, for instance, emphasizes the role of Fuller's father, and begins his

story of Margaret's life with a short biography of Timothy Fuller. Margaret's erotic, romantic, and intellectual relationships with men (especially with Emerson) are thus seen as an echo of the complicated power dynamic she had with her father. Marshall, on the other hand, opens the book with Fuller's letter to her father, thus enfolding Timothy, and all other prominent figures, into Margaret's correspondence and communication with them – written or otherwise. In thus immersing Fuller into her social circle, Marshall presents the many ways in which Fuller's life was shaped by personal and professional relations, largely with women. Marshall, for example, is the first biographer to thoroughly explore the impact of Sophia Peabody on Fuller, especially her teaching at Bronson Alcott's school, and one of the rare scholars to interrogate Fuller's relationship with her mother. The two biographers also differ in the way they treat Fuller's intellectual work. Matteson is more of an interpreter than a recorder, inclined to psychologize Fuller's writing as an expression of her emotional life. Marshall, on the other hand, meticulously traces everything that Fuller read, as well as the way the readings impacted some of her important decisions. She also painstakingly records every piece of writing that Fuller undertook, whether published or not. This aspect of her study, along with the impressive index of citations and references, recommends Marshall's biography as more suitable for scholarly research than Matteson's.

While Marshall conjures up a Fuller shaped by social and spatial relations, Matteson reads her many personas as having been generated out of necessity and by choice ("She had always accepted that constant change was a criterion for a life well lived. Henceforth, many of her reinventions would come as acts of will, actuated by worldly necessity").⁷ As different as they may seem in their articulation of these experiential nuances, both works encourage us to examine how the multitude of Fuller's idiosyncratic identities mirrors her work, or how, as Marshall puts it, we recognize "the personal in the political."⁸ In the remaining part of this essay, I unfold the consequences of Marshall's and

Matteson's initial premise – a premise according to which the singleness of Margaret Fuller is dissolved into her many faces – in order to investigate the instrumental role this impermanence of identities plays in engendering Fuller's most original philosophical project: the theory of impersonality.



Fuller's philosophy of a self dislodged from personal identity emerged out of her life-long experience of unrelenting bodily pain. From as early as childhood, as her letters and journals corroborate, she suffered from violent attacks of so-called "nervous headaches" which often incapacitated her for any kind of activity, and sometimes left her entirely paralyzed.⁹ These headaches were a popular name for *tic douloureux*, a chronic pain condition known today as trigeminal neuralgia. The condition involves an irritation of the trigeminal nerve that triggers spasmodic attacks of harrowing pain in the head, face, jaw, and neck, and can last hours, even days. In the nineteenth century, trigeminal neuralgia was treated with rudimentary, often ineffective remedies. Fuller experimented with a number of them – from wet towels and cold patches, to various ointments, acids, bleeding, opium, and mesmeric treatments. One of her accounts tells just how helpless this condition made her even when she had recourse to strong medications:

I have been very ill; last night the pain in my neck became so violent, that I could not lie still and passed a night suffering and sleepless. There were in the house no remedies and none to apply them. I went crying into town this morning, my nerves all ajar and the pain worse than ever; it was a sort of *tic douloureux*. – I brought out a very strong remedy and since applying it, have been asleep. Now, waking almost free from pain, earth seems almost as good as heaven. Still, it hurts me to lean on my head and write. I must look rather out of the window on the soft shadowy landscape, which still me.¹⁰

With or without medications, she can't think: when medicated, she is asleep; when in pain, she is unable to concentrate; and the aftereffect of a strong remedy is such that, when awake, she is neither entirely free from pain, nor focused enough to think. The monotonous sameness of the "soft shadowy landscape" may calm her neuralgic attack but it is no mind-set conducive to intellectual work.

Since the available medications provided either no relief or the kind of relief that disabled any activity, Fuller was forced to look for the cure elsewhere. Gradually, she found it in a peculiar procedure which involved inducing a trance-like state through bodily exhaustion that dimmed consciousness and abolished the sense of self-presence. By wearing down the body through a set of repetitive practices, Fuller would wear down the mind's ability to unify the perceptions into a coherent whole, which would in turn allow her to displace herself from pain. In other words, instead of weakening the headache, her alternative pain-management method consisted of allowing the pain to go on, while the self's capacity to feel was weakened. Over time, Fuller's stupors solidified into a procedure that enabled her to temporarily abstract the self from itself – from its personal perspective, individual desires, expectations, values, hopes. During one such trance-like exercise, the self would be disappropriated from its singular properties, and dissolved into its component sensing elements with no unifying structure of self-presence (consciousness) to hold it together.

Mysticism recognizes this state as ecstasy, and Fuller explicitly identified herself with the mystical tradition. Yet, despite the many references that point to her explorations of ecstasy, critics rarely give them the serious consideration they merit, choosing instead to identify it with a type of spiritualism, individualism, or idealism. The diagnosis Larry J. Reynolds passed more than a decade ago – that Fuller's "intense inner life, her mystical transports, her erotic fantasies, her prophetic visions, her moments of rapture, her 'wildness'"¹¹ had not been given the proper scholarly attention – still stands. Even the critics Reynolds praises as exceptions in this regard, Cynthia Davis and Jeffrey Steele, understand

Fuller's mysticism either as her way to spiritually transcend the contemporary notions of gender, or as the means of transforming "her personal grief, especially over the death of her father, into expressions of political grievance for all women."¹² In both cases her mysticism is normalized and, finally, trivialized – turned into a tool in the service of a larger political agenda.

The prevalent normalization of Fuller's mysticism is hardly surprising given the ostensibly counterintuitive yet essential link between her ecstasies and the pain of headaches.¹³ The link seems illogical because physical pain is centered in the body, whereas ecstasy is commonly understood as the spiritual endeavor of *doing away* with the body. But in Fuller's ecstatic trances the mind (spirit) is collapsed into the body and rendered corporeal – a procedure of doing away not with the body but with the ideal structure of the self (person, identity). This seemingly implausible affiliation of ecstasy with pain emerged from Fuller's equally unorthodox belief that her headaches were caused by the physical labor of thoughts on the mind. In her letters, journals, and some semi-autobiographical works of fiction (*Summer on the Lakes*, for example), she writes about agonizing, debilitating headaches, and often understands them as having been aggravated by the operation of thinking that is, in turn, immobilized by pain. In the "Autobiographical Romance," she explicitly traces the origin of her headaches to strenuous childhood discipline, through which her father strove to "bring forward the intellect as early as possible" (MMF 1:15). The rigorous daily regime he imposed kept her "feelings on the stretch," "nerves unnaturally stimulated," and the mind constantly agitated and "over-excited." The routine finally led to

a premature development of the brain, that made me a "youthful prodigy" by day, and by night a victim of spectral illusions, nightmare, and somnambulism which at the time prevented the harmonious development of my bodily powers and checked my growth, while later, they induced continual headache, weakness and nervous

affections of all kinds. As these again re-acted on the brain, giving undue force to every thought and every feeling, there was finally produced a state of being both too active and too intense, which wasted my constitution and will bring me – even although I have learned to understand and regulate my now morbid temperament – to a premature grave. (MMF 1:15)

Although she knew that headaches were triggered by the irritation of a nerve (this is why they were called “nervous”), Fuller understood them to be inseparable from the activity of thinking. She associates an aching head with oversized thoughts, thoughts too big or too many to fit her small head. The brain seems to swell under the pressure of physically heavy thoughts, or else it aches when thoughts impress themselves on it, as when, while reading *Romeo and Juliet* at a very early age, the story and its characters “thronged and burnt my brain” (MMF 1:27); or when, after reading Plato for days on end, her head begins to hurt: “*Theatetus* I read with attention and great profit. In the midst of *Philebus* I was compelled to stop. My mind seems to be revenging itself for the force it was kept under so long by all sorts of freaks.”¹⁴ The “freakish” thoughts that swarm and linger in her head ache by touching the mind which, in turn, hurts itself and produces headaches.

The same sensorial quality ascribed to waking thoughts is attached to dreams – they, too, can cause headaches. In one of her journal entries Fuller recounts how she “went to bed with pain in the right side of [her] head. Could not sleep for a long time but when I did, dreamt that [a giant butterfly] settled on the *left* side of my forehead; I tried in vain to drive him away; he plunged its feet, bristling with feelers, deeper and deeper into my forehead till my pain rose to agony. I awoke with my hand on the left side of my forehead to which the pain had changed.”¹⁵ In Fuller’s view, vivid images can cause pain, or cause it to move from one part of the body to another, by being impressed on the mind. But, importantly, this happens when consciousness is absent. The butterfly dream, Fuller continues, seemed “very illustrative of the influence of the body on the

mind when *will* and *understanding* are not on the alert to check it."¹⁶ Two points are worth singling out: that the dream depicts the situation in which consciousness is absent; and that the mind and the body, rather than being rendered separate, are seen as identical in situations when consciousness, or self-awareness ("will and understanding"), is absent. In being thus perceived as exerting physical pressure on the mind – dreams, thoughts, images, and ideas are given corporeal quality. But for thoughts to be impressed on the mind, the mind too must be understood to be corporeal.

Such a peculiar materiality of thought and mind undermines the ideal, spiritual quality of the self, while fundamentally questioning the notion of consciousness or self-presence, as the all-encompassing structure that unifies the self and makes sense of its disparate sensorial experiences. But by reformulating the place of the mind in the hierarchy of the self, Fuller puts the mind on a par with the other five sense organs, thus effectively deposing consciousness as the foundation of personal identity. Hence, if thoughts are corporeal and if the self is not ideal, the necessary question is – *who* thinks? And if thinking is but a result of organic sensation, shouldn't the self be understood as a collection of disparate sense perceptions, unified by nothing natural, but by a narrative construct we commonly call "experience"?

Fuller's redefinition of the self has radical epistemological and ontological consequences. Certain states, she discovered – like sleep, physical exhaustion, loss of consciousness, ecstasy, or mesmeric trances – forcefully demonstrate the fact of the mind's materiality because in those states the sense of self-presence is dismantled and the "I" that appropriates the body and its sensorial experiences is diffused. With no self to take possession of a given experience, the latter ceases to be experience at all, becoming instead a pure, unattributable affect. In those states, the self temporarily dies and the perceptions are freed:

In moments of profound thought or feeling, or when,
after violent pain in the head, my exhausted body loses
power to hem me in, I have felt changes more important

than then. I believe that the mere death of the body has no great importance except when it is in no sense accidental, that is, when the mind, by operations native to it, has gradually cast aside its covering, and is ready for a new one. But this is very seldom the case. Persons die generally, not as a natural thing, but from extraneous causes; then it must be a change only one degree more important than going to sleep.¹⁷

Removing the “covering” of consciousness is rare, Fuller asserts, yet it is a natural procedure that the mind habitually enacts in certain situations. Interestingly enough, since Fuller understood mind and thoughts to be equated with the senses, she realized that in those states of mental eclipse the process of thinking, too, is freed. In one of her journal entries she records what seems like an ordinary day:

A terrible feeling in my head, but kept about my usual avocations. Read Ugo Foscolo’s *Sepolcri*, and Pindemonti’s answer, but could not relish either, so distressing was the weight on the top of the brain; sewed awhile, and then went out to get warm, but could not, though I walked to the very end of Hazel-grove, and the sun was hot upon me. Sat down, and, though seemingly able to think with only the lower part of my head, meditated literary plans. (MMF 1:154)

It is only after a walk, which properly fatigues the body, that thoughts can literally be pushed to the other, “healthier,” side of the head. Hence, even if pain can’t be removed, thinking can go on.

This revelation was transformative, because it allowed Fuller to do two things at once: avoid the headache and continue to think. Even though thoughts, material as they are for her, continue to bruise the brain, thinking can be liberated from the mind’s interpretative agency. And since neither the pain nor the thoughts will be appropriated by a single processing structure, they will be given the freedom of spontaneous movement. Mental eclipse could be achieved through sleep, some

comatose states, hypnosis, meditation, or ecstasy, and Fuller practiced all of them. Most often, however, her goal was to wear the body down while staying awake so that the operation of thinking can continue: "I had headache two of the three days we were [in Nahant] ... I went out about six o'clock, and had a two hours' scramble before breakfast. I do not like to sit still in this air, which exasperates all my nervous feelings; but when I can exhaust myself in climbing, I feel delightfully, – the eye is so sharpened, and the mind so full of thought."¹⁸ Fuller doesn't say whether her headache was removed, but the mind, after the body has been jaded by climbing, thinks clearly.

At the age of twenty-one Fuller experienced a strong ecstatic trance. Most biographers see in this event a passage from Fuller's self-centeredness toward her care for those around her. Despite their insistence on Fuller's essential volatility, Marshall and Matteson adopt a similar strategy. They interpret the trance as an existential breaking point after which Fuller moved from individualism to communal, universal, or feminist concerns (a "commitment to duty, the care of her mother and siblings").¹⁹ In view of Fuller's unusual but systematically developed conception of a depersonalized self, we must take Marshall's and Matteson's positions a step further, and claim that this particular event made such a profound impression on Fuller that it ultimately altered her relation not only to pain, but to the problem of individual personality as well. It made her realize, years later, that the ecstasies she had been enacting inadvertently were in fact *a way out* of personalized suffering. In a journal entry from 1840 she describes how nine years earlier she left the church feeling "wearied out with mental conflicts." Seeking fresh air and respite from discomfort, she began to walk fast in the field:

This was my custom at that time, when I could no longer bear the weight of my feelings, and fix my attention on any pursuit; for I do believe that I never voluntarily gave way to these thoughts one moment. The force I exerted I think, even now, greater than I ever knew in any other character. But when I could bear myself no longer, I

walked many hours, till the anguish was wearied out, and I returned in a state of prayer. To-day all seemed to have reached its height. [...] I went on and on, till I came to where the trees were thick about a little pool, dark and silent. I sat down there. I did not think; all was dark, and cold, and still. Suddenly the sun shone out with that transparent sweetness, like the last smile of a dying lover, which it will use when it has been unkind all a cold autumn day. And, even then, passed into my thought a beam from its true sun, from its native sphere, which has never since departed from me. I remembered how, a little child, I had stopped myself one day on the stairs, and asked, how came I here? How is it that I seem to be this Margaret Fuller? What does it mean? What shall I do about it? I remembered all the times and ways in which the same thought had returned. I saw how long it must be before the soul can learn to act under these limitations of time and space, and human nature; but I saw, also, that it must do it, – that it must make all this false true, – and sow new and immortal plants in the garden of God, before it could return again. I saw there was no self; that selfishness was all folly, and the result of circumstance; that it was only because I thought self real that I suffered. [...] This truth came to me and I received it unhesitatingly. (MMF 1:140-41)

One detects here a methodical succession of steps that seems to be associated with a number of similar instances, prior to the experience of ecstasy in 1831, and prior to the time Fuller recorded it in 1840: pain and anguish lead to walking, which leads to exhaustion, which leads to tranquility. After a period of pain, she would begin to walk; walking would fatigue her body and eclipse the mind's alertness. Her own thought would then literally take her by surprise, as if it hadn't originated from her own interiority or hadn't been continuous with

other thoughts. A thought, like a sensation, would come from *outside* into her head, a head evacuated of any reference point ("I did not think" because "there was no self," and then "a beam [...] passed into my thought"). It would disorient her perspective ("How came I here? How is it that I became *this* Margaret Fuller?") and deprive her of the anchor of self-presence (the self "was all folly"). At that moment her personal point of view is erased, and Fuller realizes in retrospect that "there was no self," that the self is a circumstantial construct. Since perceptions cannot be gathered at a single interpretative point ("the limitations of space and time" have been erased), the nonsensical dimension of her mystical experience only emphasizes the evacuation of consciousness. She is unable to find words not because the experience is inexpressibly sublime, as some critics who tend to view Fuller as a Romantic would suggest, but because the thought does not belong to her and, hence, there is nothing meaningful to express. In the moment of ecstasy, meaning and temporality are abolished – and with them pain – as Fuller explicitly asserts in "Aglauron and Laurie": "It is indeed the dearest fact of our consciousness, that, in every moment of joy, pain is annihilated. There is no past, and the future is only the sunlight streaming into the far valley."²⁰



While we should undoubtedly consider ourselves fortunate to live in a time that recognizes the importance of Margaret Fuller's intellectual feats – a recognition best reflected in a growing number of critical and biographical studies about her – it seems that the radical potentials of her work are yet to be interrogated as seriously as they deserve. It is commendable that the two most recent biographies, Matteson's and Marshall's, have made the point of emphasizing Fuller's identitarian elusiveness not only as part of her lived trajectory, but also as integral to the intellectual choices she made. Their contribution is highly valuable in this regard, as it sets the standard for future scholarship on Fuller, which from now on must take into account the volatility inherent to her

thinking. That said, however, we should perhaps strive to move beyond the prevalent view, which Marshall and Matteson also hold, that the eccentricity of some of Fuller's ideas is inessential, or that her mysticism was the spiritual instrument for ethical or political intervention. When reading closely her struggles with the pitfalls and potentials of ecstatic trances, we register that Fuller perceives them as *an intervention in itself*. Her ecstasies are radical: a fundamental intervention into the very nature of being, they engender a strange ontology of a material, de-spiritualized self, a self momentarily evacuated from psychology and, ultimately, from personhood. This is not to say that Fuller's philosophy of impersonality, because it abolishes rational agency, is apolitical or bereft of ethical considerations. On the contrary: to the extent that it generates a profoundly different kind of being – a neutrality, an "Ecstatica"²¹ – her endeavor is emphatically political and ethically binding. It forces us to reconsider the political as a zone of possibility, spontaneity – risk *and* promise at the same time – rather than as a fixed field of historically pre-determined identitarian categories of class, race, gender, or the human even. In its potential to divorce the "I" from personal experience, Fuller's philosophy of impersonality raises important questions about the possibilities for individual or collective action, and complicates certain feminist perspectives through which her work has been traditionally viewed. It doesn't offer any solution, program, or project, as she explicitly states in one of her letters to Channing:

We have different ways of steering the ship. Yours is to seek conclusions, which as you often hasten to, you must afterward modify, mine to give myself up to experiences which often steep me in ideal passion, so that the desired goal is forgotten in the rich present. Yet I think I am learning how to use the present, and were my calendar published, it might lead to association too. An association, if not of efforts, yet of destinies. In such an one I live with several, feeling that each one by acting out his own casts light upon a mutual destiny, illustrates

the thought of a master mind. It is a constellation, not a phalanx to which I belong.²²

Her position is merely a suggestion, but even so it is more radical than any reformist project of her time – indeed, it is uncompromisingly revolutionary.

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Notes

¹ *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, Vol. 1, Ed. Ralph Waldo Emerson, William H. Channing, and James F. Clarke (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884), 3-4. Subsequent references are from this edition and are abbreviated parenthetically in the text as MMF, followed by the volume and page number

² As many as seventeen biographies, scholarly as well as popular, appeared since the publication of the *Memoirs* – most of them during the last twenty-five years. While the ones from the 1930s and 1940s were being reprinted (Bell, Stern), six new volumes appeared in the 1990s (Capper, 1991; Balducci, 1991; Dickenson, 1993; Chevigny, 1994 [revised and expanded 1996]; Von Mehren, 1994; Kornfeld, 1997), and another four within the period of five years (McGavran Murray, 2008; Fascik, 2012; Matteson 2012; Marshall 2013).

³ Matteson, *The Lives*, xv-xvi. Since Robert Hudspeth's publication of the collected *Letters of Margaret Fuller* in six volumes (1983-1994), Fuller's biographers have attempted to distance themselves from the Emerson-Channing-Clarke control by consulting wider archival material directly and by going beyond the selection provided in the *Memoirs*. Larry J. Reynolds traces the turn toward seriousness in Fuller scholarship to Robert Hudspeth's 1984 essay "Margaret Fuller," which registered the prevailing "reductiveness and inaccuracy" in the studies of Fuller until that time (Reynolds, "Prospects," 139).

⁴ This is the general problem of any biography, of course: How to encircle a life within a narratable frame and still give its diversity its due respect? In what remains the most authoritative and exhaustive biography of Fuller to date, Charles Capper divides her life into the

“private” and “public years” in an attempt to impose some order on the unruly narrative, but at the same time admits that “the ‘real Margaret Fuller’ is a phantom.” Capper, *An American Romantic Life*, x.

⁵ Matteson, *The Lives*, xiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸ Marshall, *A New American Life*, xvii.

⁹ Cf.: “For nine long days and nights, without intermission, all was agony, – fever and dreadful pain in my head” (MMF 1:154); “A week of more suffering than I have had for a long time – from Sunday to Sunday – headache night and day! And not only there has been no respite, but it has been fixed in one spot – between the eyebrows! – what does that promise? – till it grew real torture” (MMF 2:135). Fuller’s aches and weak health are among her contemporaries’ most frequent memories of her. Emerson, for example, notes: “She was all her lifetime the victim of disease and pain. She was in jubilant spirits in the morning, and ended the day with nervous headache, whose spasms, my wife told me, produced total prostration” (MMF 1:227).

¹⁰ Fuller, *Love Letters of Margaret Fuller*, 74-75.

¹¹ Reynolds, “Prospects,” 149.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ All Fuller scholars give extensive reports on her illness and weak health (some, like Capper, McGavran Murray and Matteson, dedicate significant portions of their books to her headaches), but most treat it as a mere hindrance to her ambitions, failing to investigate its formative impact on Fuller’s thinking. Two critical exceptions are Cynthia J. Davis’s “Margaret Fuller, Body and Soul” and Deborah Manson’s “The Trance of the Ecstatica.” Contrary to my reading, both of these essays take Fuller’s experimentation with pain as conducive to, or as a defining aspect of, her thinking about gender.

¹⁴ *Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. II: 106.

¹⁵ Steele, *The Essential*, 6.

¹⁶ Steele, *The Essential*, 7 – emphasis added.

¹⁷ Higginson, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, 97

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¹⁸ *Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. II: 76-77.

¹⁹ Marshall, *Margaret Fuller*, 95.

²⁰ Fuller, "Aglauron and Laurie," 185.

²¹ "Ecstatica" is Fuller's term for a woman in ecstatic and/or mesmeric trance, a state she sees as the enlargement of "intellectual resources," which is to say – as a mode of thinking that is different from rational reasoning. Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit," 37.

²² *Letters of Margaret Fuller*, Vol. III: 154.

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