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*Margaret Fuller and Her Circles* ed. by Brigitte Bailey,  
Katheryn P. Viens, Conrad Edick Wright (review)

Leslie Elizabeth Eckel

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***Margaret Fuller and Her Circles.*** Edited by Brigitte Bailey, Kathryn P. Viens, and Conrad Edick Wright. Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013. x + 318 pp. \$85.00 cloth/\$35.00 paper/\$19.24 e-book.

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The focus of several major biographies published in the past two decades, the center of nationwide celebrations of her bicentennial in 2010, and the subject of the solo author conference at the Massachusetts Historical Society (also in 2010) upon which this book is based, Margaret Fuller has definitively broken free from the mold of a minor Transcendentalist to become our current model of a nineteenth-century progressive intellectual. This outstanding volume of essays interprets Fuller in three key contexts, each of which stands at a knowing distance from Emerson and Thoreau's Concord: the transnational feminist movement, the utopian system of Associationism, and the vibrant urban worlds of New York, Paris, and Rome. Situated within these "circles," Fuller appears less an outlier than an insider, or, as editor Brigitte Bailey observes, "less exceptional yet more substantial and wide-ranging in her theoretical and representational writings than previously imagined" (10). Her multiple roles as "Transcendentalist, teacher, translator, feminist theorist, book reviewer, literary journal editor, surveyor of reform institutions, journalist, traveler, political activist in the 1848 European revolutions, and foreign correspondent" (2) speak to Fuller's creativity as well as to her intent to take the century in hand and give it shape, as she did in her landmark treatise *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). This new book insists that with Fuller at its core, that century shifts on its accustomed axis from nature to culture, from individualism to collective enterprise, and from nationalism to international networking of the kind we practice today.

Not since the publication of the collection *Margaret Fuller's Cultural Critique: Her Age and Legacy* (2000) have scholars been able to access such a comprehensive critical examination of Fuller's achievements by leading interpreters of her works. The volume is organized topically rather than chronologically, but each essay evinces a striking sense of Fuller's development out of a particular historical context and into her own transformative voice. Phyllis Cole, John Matteson, Dorri Beam, and Charlene Avallone locate Fuller within the first wave of feminism—a movement that she oddly seems to shun as well as to lead. Influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft and spurred onward by Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Fuller constructed her *Dial* essay "The Great Lawsuit," according to Cole, as "the most audacious confrontation with power" (13). As Emerson often did with the Romantic poets, Fuller elided these foremothers' significance as she pursued her own strategy of "utopian feminism" (19). Ulti-

mately, she “modeled an integral feminism . . . by also incorporating and building on the contributions of her predecessors,” helping to gather cries in the wilderness into a movement (31).

Still, as a number of this volume’s contributors recognize, Fuller’s radicalization was both slow and ambivalent. She may have been fascinated with “pantheistic force and influxes of power,” as Beam contends, using that spiritual vocabulary, which she shared with writers such as Harriet Martineau and Mary Clemmer, to assert that “the especial genius of woman” was “electrical in movement, intuitive in function, spiritual in tendency” (61), but as Matteson observes, she was often disappointed by how other women failed to live up to that standard. Fuller would visit with prostitutes in Sing Sing Prison to learn “more about the forces of passion that drew women away from the fulfillment of their divine destinies,” gradually reconciling “women” themselves with the ideal “Woman” she imagined in “The Great Lawsuit” (43, 38). Fuller was also slow to realize that women’s liberation had a great deal to do with the antislavery movement, as Albert J. von Frank notes. Frustrated with Martineau’s and Lydia Maria Child’s emphasis on politics over intellect, Fuller was suspicious of antislavery activism (perhaps in keeping with Emerson) but, like her Transcendentalist colleague, embraced the cause in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, where she would “make use of antislavery as ‘a cause identical’ to the enfranchisement of women” (145). Despite Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s well-known judgment of Fuller as “one of the out and out *Reds* and scorners of grades of society,” Adam-Max Tuchinsky finds that Fuller’s socialist colors were not quite as true as we might assume (228). “Fuller’s radicalism,” in Tuchinsky’s opinion, was grounded in “her politics, her anticlericalism, and her Romantic nationalism,” not in Marx and Engels’s manifesto (123). Avallone also provokes a “reconsideration of Fuller’s avant-garde status” (228), reminding us to read our nineteenth-century heroines in their context, not ours.

The strongest link among the essays in this collection, and perhaps the most valuable tool for reevaluating Fuller in relation to her Transcendentalist roots and to “a tradition of women’s education, writing, and rights advocacy” (1), is her view of what David M. Robinson calls “a self-in-relation” (89). Unlike Emerson and Thoreau, who sought individual growth in isolation, Fuller realized that the most effective way to cultivate both herself and others was through friendship, conversation, and community. As Beam argues, Fuller’s “ecology of ‘self’” in its environment was fundamentally distinct from the individual self created in figurative terms at Walden (55). Essays by Megan Marshall, Jeffrey Steele, and Robert Hudspeth build upon these observations as they chart Fuller’s fascination with classical music, her commitment to remedying “pervasive *social* injustice” (161), and her utopian spirit of “urban inno-

cence" (199). Like fellow journalist Walt Whitman, whom Hudspeth mentions only in passing, Fuller experienced an uplifting "harmony" in the city (157). Although she could be extremely skeptical of the utopian communities constructed by her contemporaries, urban life made her optimistic and left her fulfilled. First in New York and then in Europe, Fuller found what Hudspeth calls her "audience," the circle of readers that she herself created, as Whitman would do for his innovative poetry (180). According to Beam and Mary Kelley, Fuller's ideas recirculate now in the feminist work of Judith Butler, Gail Collins, and Susan Douglas, who adapt her notions of gender fluidity and continue the pursuit of equality in community. *Margaret Fuller and Her Circles* invigorates and stretches our thinking about this bold and brilliant woman as well as the century she transformed.

***Slavery in American Children's Literature, 1790–2010.***

By Paula T. Connolly. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013.

ix + 288 pp. \$42.50 paper/\$34.00 e-book.

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Paula T. Connolly's *Slavery in American Children's Literature, 1790–2010* addresses the institution whose toxic legacy still haunts American culture today. Her book is a timely and comprehensive contribution to the study of slavery and the conventions of racial and historical memory as they are constructed for the youngest and arguably the most impressionable of readers. Connolly shows how antebellum and Reconstruction-era prototypes of the representation of slavery in American children's literature are either extended or revised in twentieth-century and contemporary culture. Perhaps not surprisingly, Connolly demonstrates the strong afterlife of nineteenth-century representational conventions, which were not disrupted until the civil rights movement. The scope of the book is historically broad yet generically narrow, which is both a strength and, at times, a weakness. Overall, however, the book is solidly researched, well illustrated, and thoughtful. It makes a powerful contribution to the study of American children's literature that will be important for scholars as well as teachers.

The book is organized into chapters that build nicely upon each other. The first two chapters—on abolitionist and proslavery responses to the slavery debates—set the tone for the rest of the volume. Connolly divides antebellum abolitionist children's literature into three categories: "radical" (15), including Lydia Maria Child's story "Mary French and Susan Easton" and Noah Webster's *The Little Reader's Assistant*; "moderate" (34), which includes a