In many ways Margaret Fuller was an eccentric among her peers, a puzzle who mystified her contemporaries and who continues to elude her critics. Fuller herself questioned her identity in an 1831 diary entry that recalls a childhood moment of perplexity: “How is it that I seem to be this Margaret Fuller? What does it mean? What shall I do about it?” (Von Mehren 6). Henry James framed her as an enigma when he reportedly inquired, “Would she, with her appetite for ideas and her genius for conversation, have struck us but as a formidable bore, one of the worst kind, a culture-seeker without a sense of proportion, or, on the contrary, have affected us as a really attaching, a possibly picturesque New England Corinne?” (Perry Miller xxvii). More recent critics such as Ann Douglas emphasize her appearance, calling her “Emerson’s difficult and homely friend” (313). Similarly, Joseph Deiss stresses Fuller’s “striking” appearance, noting that “she was nearsighted, and had a mannerism of half closing the lids to see more sharply” (14), while Joel Pfister argues that “Fuller’s caustic wit and plain physical appearance made her stunning in a different way,” contrasting her impressive demeanor with the “‘ordinary’ feminine manner” of Beatrice in Hawthorne’s “Rappacini’s Daughter” (69). And of Fuller’s conversations, Perry Miller writes, “Margaret Fuller presided over these bacchanal rites in homemade dresses that her adorers thought to be of Oriental magnificence, and at the climax of each session, when she had reduced the others to awed silence, she would close her eyes in an inspired trance and utter unfathomable words, which they thought emanated from some occult or Delphic wisdom” (xi). Regarding her biography, contemporary readers still wonder, did she and Giovanni Ossoli ever officially marry? Was her refusal to be rescued from the shipwreck off the
New York coast a suicidal gesture? And, despite Fuller’s landmark role in American periodical writing, questions persist regarding her place in our literary canon, as evidenced by the title of the introduction to Joan Von Mehren’s recent Fuller biography, “Margaret Fuller: Should She Be Famous?”

Although such questions and colorful biographical anecdotes are provocative, they threaten to elide Fuller’s historical context and political contributions by representing her primarily as a quirky “personality.” Bringing the discussion more firmly back to Fuller’s writing is crucial to any understanding of how periodical literature, gender, and nationalism intersect in nineteenth-century America. Fuller’s journalism connects meaningfully to the political and social climate in the world around her, and dismissals of her as “peculiar” betray the social censure that has frequently attended women who transgressed the nineteenth century’s carefully delineated, gendered spheres. The first American woman to work as a foreign news correspondent, Margaret Fuller wrote thirty-seven dispatches between 1846 and 1850 for publication on the New-York Daily Tribune’s front page under the heading “Things and Thoughts in Europe.” The majority of her dispatches utilize the Italian Risorgimento, a revolutionary movement to establish a popular government in which she became actively involved, as a lens through which to assess American democracy. Read with an awareness of context, the dispatches Horace Greeley contracted Fuller to send home from Europe emerge as a revealing product of and contribution to the nineteenth century’s burgeoning nationalistic movements. Not only did newspapers such as the Tribune function as a primary means of representing imagined national community, but Fuller’s journey to Italy and eventual expatriation also occurred at a historical moment dominated by European struggles for republican government. Like the periodical press within which she worked, Fuller’s columns and even her personal life were saturated with issues of both national and international importance.

Though her concerns were clearly global, Fuller’s experiences as a woman crucially inform her political agenda. In her dispatches, America’s democratic actualization becomes coterminous with a woman’s political right to self-actualization and full citizenship. Fuller helped to promote nineteenth-century American nationalism, but her journalism also critiqued gender constraints on American women of the mid-nineteenth century. This complex and apparently paradoxical agenda is reflected in her rhetorical use of body imagery. Fuller writes of the “body” politic in terms that speak for the various bodies that contribute to the nation: individual bodies, of all classes, races, and genders, that
compose the national community. She refers to her country as a “huge, over fed, too hastily grown-up body” in need of “soul,” and later asserts, “I do not deeply distrust my country. She is not dead, but in my time she sleeppeth, and the spirit of our fathers flames no more, but lies hid beneath the ashes. It will not be so long; bodies cannot live when the soul gets too overgrown with gluttony and falsehood” (166, 230). This mapping of human sentience onto geographic space links body politic to body personal, perpetuating the sentimentality of mainstream American patriotism even as it stands outside the dominant tradition to critique the nation on behalf of its downtrodden members. The alignment of the two discourses, nation and gender, suggests a parallel optimism underlying Fuller’s conception of both. Recognizing the potential for struggle to liberate the Italian people, she underscores in her columns that awareness and political action can effect similar freedom for American women and other oppressed groups and thereby allow the United States to reclaim its glorious founding principles. Certainly the Risorgimento liberated Fuller herself, whose removal from familiar soil and immersion in politics abroad cast her in a powerful role drastically different from the spinsterish eccentricity projected onto her by those at home.

**Print Journalism**

As a journalist paid in advance for news she sent home, reportedly ten dollars per dispatch, Fuller had a distinctive relationship to her audience and her subjects. Horace Greeley’s hiring of her was a historic decision, making her “the first female member of the working press” and affirming her right to step into a patriarchal line: “Greeley had hired her to fill the spot vacated by Albert Brisbane (later filled by George Ripley) and he expected her to report on social conditions as well as lend literary prestige to the paper” (Chevigny 288, 290). A political and patriotic publisher, Greeley “hoped to crowd out the sensational rival penny papers by his commitment to morality, social progress, and the arts” (ibid., 288). Acquiring Fuller’s commentary on both political and cultural issues was clearly a significant part of this project. Other nineteenth-century women travelers to Italy, like Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, told of their experiences in private journals and letters that became public documents years after their return home. In contrast, Fuller wrote and was read en media res, her commentary’s value determined by how quickly she could dispatch it. She wrote words for immediate public consumption, without the protestations about the worth of
the “private musings” that “friends were forcing her to publish” often found in conventional travel writing. As a reporter, Fuller spoke with a broader cultural sanction derived in part from her association with the Tribune and its well-known editor.⁴

Fuller’s dispatches demonstrate her awareness of the newspaper’s function as the “heart” of the country. As Margaret Lukens notes, the Tribune’s “nickname was ‘The Great Moral Organ’” (187), suggesting its vital role in the American nation. Fittingly, Fuller wrote of the London newspaper, “As for the Times [sic] . . . the blood would tingle many a time to the fingers’ ends of the body politic before that solemn organ which claims to represent the heart, would dare to beat in unison” (91). The irregular beat she describes indicates her concern that journalistic dysfunction might threaten a nation’s integrity. The periodical press, a continuous and pervasive infusion into the community, could either sustain or infect the national body. An address to Horace Greeley penned in Edinburgh indicates how powerfully Fuller believed in journalism’s obligation to nourish the moral life of its readership: “[T]he publisher cannot, if a mere tradesman, be a man of honor. . . . [H]e who, for his sordid aims, circulates poisonous trash amid a great and growing people, and makes it almost impossible for those whom heaven has appointed as its instructors to do their office, are the worst of traitors” (66). Aligning the publisher’s powers with those of statesmen and priests, Fuller indicates the centrality of the periodical press even as she demonstrates that the profit motive threatened to taint its higher aims and poison the civic body. Fuller used her columns as a platform from which to edify the predominantly male publishers of her country who might have allowed greed to distract them from their higher calling. She not only recognized the influential power of the periodical press, but she also wielded it with passion.

Fuller’s existence as an American abroad, living a life parallel to those of readers in the States, gave her dispatches their relevance and force. In Benedict Anderson’s theory of the building of modern nationalism outlined in Imagined Communities, the newspaper is significant because it reflects and enables modern conceptions of time and also because its consumption is communal.⁵ What Anderson calls “homogenous empty time,” the sense that readers shared the same moment with the columnist, created the conceptual framework within which Fuller’s audience apprehended her textual and ideological connection to themselves. The idea of time, in relation to the nation and the journalist, reinforces this bond and becomes a central component of Fuller’s columns; the news, a timely commodity, is enveloped in temporal allusions. She boasts of making history by completing “the shortest voyage ever made across the Atlantic—
only ten days and sixteen hours from Boston to Liverpool” (39), and each dispatch bears the mark of the transatlantic steamer schedule. One letter, “meant to go by the Great Britain” was delayed; later she was “inevitably prevented from finishing one that was begun for the steamer of 4th November” (62, 78). Her columns documented events as they occurred, a concept quite different from the traditional travel narrative or travel-inflected novel, published after the journey when events had often been resolved. The immediacy of the journalistic dispatch kept domestic readers up to date on fast-breaking developments in transportation as well as specific events occurring in Europe and all the while reminded them that they shared a moment with an entire community of nationals, even (or especially) a compatriot who resided abroad.

In addition to creating an imagined nationalism that temporally bound the foreign correspondent to the domestic reader, this sense of immediacy, of time bearing down on the frantic journalist and injustice transpiring even as the reader sat down to read the front page at breakfast, fueled Fuller’s calls for immediate political reform. In one dispatch, for example, Fuller means to translate the mission statement of a progressive Roman journal, but mailing constraints limit what she can accomplish: “I intended to have translated in full the programme, but time fails, and the law of opportunity does not favor, as my ‘opportunity’ leaves for London this afternoon” (139). In another dispatch, she closes with the frustrated declaration, “Time fails, as usual. The clock strikes, the postbag opens and leaves only time to make the sign of [a star—the symbol she used to close her columns]” (146). Perceiving how thoroughly time pervades her craft, Fuller explicitly incorporates this fact into the discourse itself, offering her awareness of time as a facet of the columns. The effect is to involve her readers in her own sense of urgency, an effect well suited to her political message—the need for immediate U.S. action to alleviate suffering, both at home and abroad.

Her tactic for catalyzing social activism is to target the individual reader. Fuller utilizes her front-page platform to make large-scale political pronouncements about her nation and its people, harsh assessments designed to promote the reader’s self-scrutiny. When she writes, for example, “The American, first introduced to some good pictures by the truly great geniuses of the religious period in Art, must, if capable at all of mental approximation to the life therein embodied, be too deeply affected, too full of thoughts, to be in haste to say anything” (112), her description invites readers to measure themselves against the standard established for “the American” who is mentally “capable.” Similar challenges pervade the dispatches, allowing Fuller to interpolate a diverse
population into a cohesive whole with the term “American” and simultaneously to criticize individual members of that population for failing to live up to her high standards. In a representative gesture, Fuller challenges her readers by making categorical assertions about American tourists in Europe. She begins with a pronouncement that again demands self-reflection from her domestic reader: “The American in Europe, if a thinking mind, can only become more American” (161). Left to determine whether one is “a thinking mind,” one then faces Fuller’s delineation of the three “species” of American travelers and the task of finding one’s place therein. The first type Fuller calls “the servile American—a being utterly shallow, thoughtless, worthless” who “comes abroad to spend his money and indulge his tastes” (162). Second, Fuller names “the conceited American,” with an excess of patriotism, who “does not see, not he, that the history of Humanity for many centuries is likely to have produced results it requires some training, some devotion, to appreciate and profit by” and is thus prone to criticize European culture (ibid.). The final choice is clearly the best, a character Fuller calls “the thinking American,” open minded enough (like Fuller herself) to “recogniz[e] the immense advantage of being born to a new world and on a virgin soil” and also “anxious to gather and carry back with him all that will bear a new climate and new culture” (163).

The *Tribune* readers, an “estimated circulation of 11,000” (Lukens 187), who faced these rhetorical challenges in their original context, as one facet of the newspaper’s front-page collage, would have been reminded of their imagined national community even as they were encouraged by Fuller to take a critical stance regarding their own obligation to that community. The resulting conflict manifests itself in the dispatches as a combination of yearnings for an ideal America and confessions of faults Fuller cannot deny. In Dispatch 18, she opens with the glory of America’s destiny, “Thou wert to be the advance-guard of Humanity, the herald of all Progress,” but soon arrives at a series of sobering admissions: “Must I not confess in my country to a boundless lust of gain? Must I not confess to the weakest vanity, which bristles and blusters at each foolish taunt of the foreign press...? Must I not confess that there is as yet no antidote cordially adopted that will defend even that great, rich country against the evils that have grown out of the commercial system in the old world?” (165). Greeley established the *Tribune* in 1841, according to Chevigny, “as a paper dedicated first to the elevation of the masses—the reading public generated by the new penny papers—and second to the success of the liberal Whigs” (288). Fuller’s critique would have contributed to this project by addressing a range of subgroups within her
audience. She combines a challenge to middle-class liberals (those with access to the “foreign press”) with attacks on America’s capitalist system that would have appealed to the working class (Greeley’s “masses”). In the same dispatch, she fuels her argument by adding commentary on current events in the States: “I listen to the same arguments against the emancipation of Italy, that are used against the emancipation of our blacks; the same arguments in favor of the spoliation of Poland as for the conquest of Mexico. I find the cause of tyranny and wrong everywhere the same—and lo! my country the darkest offender” (165). With such accusations, Fuller uses her journalistic platform both to consolidate and to arouse an informed public who could remedy the suffering body politic at home.

Equally worthy of her readers’ attention was the revolutionary movement occurring in Italy during Fuller’s residence there. As one of America’s first foreign correspondents, as a political commentator, as a liaison between American and Italian culture, as a progressive revolutionary who recognized capitalism’s moral and social implications, Fuller spoke to and about nineteenth-century cultural movements that were changing the face of the globe. She participated in a unique historic confluence that conjoined the forces of technology, capitalism, and revolutionary activity in Europe. As nationalism came to denote an internal sense of moral commitment and connection, rather than merely a reflection of random, external circumstances, her columns promoted the ideal that citizens had the right to determine their allegiance based on the values displayed by their country. Indeed, Fuller’s immersion in radical politics and her awareness of the profound changes redefining nationhood led her to reevaluate her commitment to the land of her birth: “My friends write to urge my return; they talk of our country as the land of the Future. It is so, but that spirit which made it all it is of value in my eyes, which gave all of hope with which I can sympathize for that Future, is more alive here [in Italy] at present than in America” (230). Her textual expatriation underscored for readers at home the severity of her disillusionment with the United States, the magnetism of the Italian independence movement, and the obligation of individual citizens to make choices that reflected their moral codes.

Fuller and the Risorgimento

When Fuller arrived in Italy in 1847, the various Italian city-states (not yet unified into one nation) were engaged in struggles to oust foreign
monarchies, limit the pope’s temporal power, and establish a centralized, republican government. The resulting revolutionary activities, collectively known as the Risorgimento (“renaissance” or “revival”), lasted throughout Fuller’s Italian sojourn and became the central concern of her dispatches and her life. Although ultimately unsuccessful, the Risorgimento paved the way for Italian unification a decade after Fuller’s departure, providing the previously fragmented Italian people with national heroes and a common cause. Her dispatches constitute a major textual contribution to this movement, her columns distributing the demands of the Italian revolutionaries—which included, notably, “freedom of the press” (Hearder 201)—to an international audience and keeping Americans apprised of developments in the uprising. In representing the Italian revolution for American consumption, Fuller’s dispatches cultivated nationalisms on both sides of the Atlantic. Her reconstitution of American revolutionary history simultaneously revived American patriotism and validated Italy’s republican mission.

Part of a mid-nineteenth-century phenomenon in which the nation, as an ideology, became reproducible as a model for emerging nations, Fuller’s discourse self-consciously performs the important political/historical work of representing the nation. As Anderson notes, “The close of the era of successful national liberation movements in the Americas coincided rather closely with the onset of the age of nationalism in Europe”; therefore, European movements were “able to work from visible models” (67). Fuller recognized the explosiveness of her political moment and offered the American Revolution as a model for a struggling Italian people. The nationalistic uprisings that characterized the nineteenth century seemed, to Fuller, the inevitable consequence of centuries of corrupt monarchical oppression: “Still Europe toils and struggles with her idea, and, at this moment, all things bode and declare a new outbreak of the fire, to destroy old palaces of crime!” (164). The “idea” that would rid Europe of this evil was, in fact, the idea of republican nationhood already implemented in America, an idea imported into Europe through print culture and adjusted to fit political conditions there. A woman whose homeland fell short of her humanitarian ideals, Fuller embraced the European uprisings with their demands for universal rights, and her dispatches were dedicated to a twin project of fostering the nascent Italian republic and redeeming her homeland’s democratic failings.

Repeatedly Fuller reminds her readers of America’s recent revolution and its corresponding debt to the world: “Ah! America, with all thy rich boons, thou hast a heavy account to render for the talent given; see in every way that thou be not found wanting” (160–61). To heighten the
emotional stakes, she invokes patriotic signs, symbols of the imagined nationalism that Anderson sees as originating in American revolutionary activity (81). Not eternal but historically produced, such symbols become part of nationalist rhetoric when Fuller writes home, “This cause is OURS, above all others; we ought to show that we feel it to be so. . . . Please think of this, some of my friends, who still care for the Eagle, the 4th [of] July, and the old cries of Hope and Honor” (160–61). Fuller uses strategic appeals to sentimental patriotism to enlist the aid of fellow Americans in the ultimate goal of transporting American ideals and experience to Italy. Her project may have been especially challenging, as Brigitte Bailey has pointed out, due to Americans’ fear of losing Italy as a site of aesthetic fulfillment: “Supportive of these movements for self-determination [the French and Italian revolutions of 1848], especially since they seemed to follow an American model of iconoclastic republicanism, elite Americans also wanted to preserve Europe as a source of icons and instruction in consolidating national identities through images” (60). Such protestations notwithstanding, Fuller’s patriotic dispatches constitute a text of nationhood that affirms the American community even as it offers a model for the emerging European republics. In other words, Fuller’s attempt to distill the domestic model for foreign consumption actually creates the model nation that would serve as precursor. Enabled by the attributes of the periodical press, she inscribed a version of national identity and ideology that would produce patriotism at home.

Despite Fuller’s invocations of an idealized American republicanism, she also laments American shortcomings: “Yet, oh Eagle, whose early flight showed this clear sight of the Sun, how often dost thou near the ground, how show the vulture in these latter days! Thou wert to be the advance-guard of Humanity, the herald of all Progress; how often hast thou betrayed this high commission! Fain would the tongue in clear triumphant accents draw example from thy story. . . . But we must stammer and blush when we speak of many things” (165). Such blemishes as slavery, the Mexican War, greed, and solipsism are Fuller’s evidence that America has failed to fulfill its special destiny. This combination of, on the one hand, reminders of America’s fortunate history with, on the other, examples of national failures forwards Fuller’s agenda by showing Americans their sins and offering a path to redemption. The suggestion is that America will rise anew by sustaining other countries in their struggles for freedom: “Send, dear America, a talisman to thy ambassadors, precious beyond all that boasted gold of California. . . . Hail to my country! May she live a free, a glorious, a loving life, and not perish . . . from the leprosy of selfishness” (284). Thus Fuller constructs an international connection within
which America redeems itself by offering itself, as the “blueprint” of which Anderson speaks, to an emerging Italian republic.

By valorizing American destiny, the dispatches contribute to a conceptualization of the nation, despite its historical contingency, as eternal. Anderson argues, “If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past” (11). In other words, “it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny” (ibid., 12); clearly Fuller’s columns contribute to the narrative that recasts historical contingency as fate. Reproaching her rich countrymen “who think that a mess of pottage can satisfy the wants of man,” that is, who think the poor are content, she writes, “they have no heart for the idea, for the destiny of our own great nation: how can they feel the spirit that is struggling now in this and others of Europe?” (154). In a later dispatch, she draws a parallel between current political action in Italy and a transhistorical fantasy of American values: “It was the spirit of religion [that infused a Florentine celebration of the National Guard]—such my Country; as welling fresh from some great hearts in thy early hours, won for thee all of value that thou canst call thy own, whose ground-work is the assertion, still sublime though thou hast not been true to it, that all men have equal rights, and that these are birth-rights, derived from God alone” (158–59). If democratic rights, offered as the “ground-work” of “all of value” in America, are “derived from God alone,” they not only extend into an immemorial past, but they receive sanction from a transhistorical and superhuman power. These associations transform the nation into a mythical/moral entity rather than a historical eventuality. Further, Fuller’s use of an inflated discourse likely to conjure up biblical associations—“all of value that thou canst call thy own”—would contribute to a sense of nationalistic worship in her readers.

American destiny translates into international leadership with Fuller’s assertion that “the facts of our history, ideal and social, will be grand and of new import,” an idea that leads Fuller to speculate that sculpture is the consummate artistic medium for the American. “It is perfectly natural,” she argues, “to the American to mold in clay and carve in stone,” depicting the artist’s vocation as both natural and national. As the passage continues, sculpture becomes an expression of civic pride: “He [the American sculptor] will thus record his best experiences, and these records will adorn the noble structures that must naturally arise for the public uses of our society” (267). The repetition of the word “natural” in her argument is significant. Government buildings become “noble structures” that “naturally arise,” losing their utilitarianism as they are transformed into
organic manifestations of American art and, thus, American greatness. Art, nationalism, and government are combined in Fuller's vision, all representations of the same agenda that arises "naturally" from American soil.

In a dispatch written two months later, Fuller uses a similar rhetoric to celebrate Roman political strife: "This city [Rome] that has grown, not out of the necessities of commerce nor the luxuries of wealth, but first out of heroism, then out of faith. Swelling domes, roofs softly tinted with yellow moss—what deep meaning, what deep repose, in your faintly seen outline" (285). The city "grows" out of moral ideals, and the nation's buildings symbolize more than mere "commerce." The idea of national destiny is transferred from America to Italy, with Fuller's parallel descriptions of the two republics reinforcing the "rightness" of the Italian revolution for the benefit of an American readership already convinced of its own nation's superiority and leadership role.

In her profound identification with the Italian cause, Fuller betrays a communal perspective that runs counter to Emerson's famous prescription against travel in "Self-Reliance": "Let us not rove; let us sit at home with the cause" (180). The assertion not only betrays Emerson's naiveté regarding his own nation's formation, but also negates the value of interaction with other cultures. More applicable to Fuller's experience would have been Thoreau's admonition in Walden: "Not until we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves" (217). Yet Thoreau's discovery of self through isolation and withdrawal contrasts with Fuller's self-realization through travel and interaction with other cultures. The Transcendentalism inscribed by Emerson and Thoreau, in its insistence on solitude and domestic pride (the sovereignty of the individual person as well as the individual nation), maintains a separatist logic that Fuller sought to transcend. She lost both the (familiar) world and the self projected onto her there when she traveled to Italy. Her translocation to Italy ignited in her a camaraderie with the Italian people and an emboldened sense of political agency; in addition, the epistolary nature of her dispatches invited a certain intimacy between herself and her readers. Indeed, the essential character of the newspaper column—an evolving pastiche composed of small pieces produced over time, stylistically flexible enough to encompass a range of discourses and voices—uniquely suited Fuller's vision of a literary and political collective.

Her innovative use of the periodical forum, as well as her political engagement, might be demonstrated by her manipulation of the star imprint with which she closed her dispatches. A shifting symbol that
reflects Fuller's self-conception, the star becomes increasingly entwined with the content of the dispatches, representing Fuller's growing involvement in Italian politics. In the early dispatches, the star is tacked on at the end of the columns, unconnected to the commentary itself. Yet after Fuller's arrival in Italy, a year into her trip, she begins to play with the star's signifying possibilities, implicating her signature in her column's contents. She closes Dispatch 15, written from Milan, with the statement, “The clock strikes, the postbag opens and leaves only time to make the sign of [star]” (146), thus situating her mark within the text. Five months later, writing from a Rome bombarded by new developments in the fight for independence, Fuller remarks, “Every day the cloud swells, and the next fortnight is likely to bring important material for the record of [star]” (208). The rhetoric implies Fuller's deepening personal involvement in political events, foregrounding their significance in relation to her. After a tour of the hills outside Rome with Giovanni Ossoli, Fuller's star and self are transformed: “Meanwhile the nightingales sing; every tree and plant is in flower, and the sun and moon shine as if Paradise were already reestablished on earth. I go to one of the villas to dream it is so, beneath the pale light of a [star]” (231). The romantic optimism of this dispatch is heightened by the metamorphosis of Fuller's by now familiar byline into a sentimental symbol. In addition, the journalistic convention of self-naming is appropriated and deployed to express the distinctive sensations of an American woman immersed in a foreign culture.

During the height of the revolution, Fuller incorporates Italian speech into her dispatch and essentially writes herself into the narrative of Italian destiny. Calling out her grief to the Virgin Mary over the revolution's violence, Fuller writes, “Ave Maria Santissima! when thou didst gaze on thy babe with such infinite hope, thou didst not dream that so many ages after blood would be shed and curses in his name. Madonna Addolorata! hadst thou not hoped peace and good will would spring from his bloody woes, couldst thou have borne these hours at the foot of the cross.” In the final entreaty, Fuller pens the name that applies to herself: “O Stella! woman's heart of love, send yet a ray of pure light on this troubled deep!” (274). Immediately following this exhortation, Fuller's familiar star is printed. The juxtaposition of the star symbol and the Italian word for star (stella) suggests the closeness Fuller felt to Italian traditions at that moment and even casts her as a savior figure for this troubled people. Perhaps the “star” of her journalism would shine a new light onto the revolution she was witnessing. Significantly, the star disappears entirely from Dispatch 34, which reports the defeat of the Roman republic and is the only dispatch without the symbolic sign-off. The relationship of
Fuller and her writing to the Risorgimento, represented by the star, became increasingly intense until the defeat of the movement threatened to erase her discursive self. Indeed she writes in Dispatch 35, “To write from Italy is now become a sorrowful business” and then again in Dispatch 36, “I have begun to write, yet little do I feel inclined” (312, 317).

Despite the Roman republic’s ultimate defeat and despite her protests about writing, Fuller continued to post her dispatches and maintained faith in the eventual triumph of republicanism in Europe. Her belief in the United States as a fulfillment of providence rather than a result of historical circumstance, combined with the Italian revolution she witnessed, formed the backbone of her journalism and permitted her to write enthusiastically to her compatriots, “I have also a lurking confidence in what our fathers spoke of so constantly, a providential order of things, by which brute force and selfish enterprises are sometimes set at nought by aid which seems to descend from a higher sphere” (283). Fuller could display such confidence, despite the treachery and setbacks that plagued the Italian revolutionaries, because of her astute long-range understanding of world politics. She accurately predicted that the “struggle may last fifty years, and the earth be watered with the blood and tears of more than one generation, but the result is sure. All Europe, including Great Britain, where the most bitter resistance of all will be made, is to be under Republican Government in the next century” (278).

**Woman and the Nation: Body Personal and Body Politic**

In the periodical writing Fuller contributed to the *Tribune*, she discovered a politically efficacious way to transcend gender and genre. The columns, in their subject matter and in their extensive distribution to a mixed audience, permitted her to fuse her feelings as a woman and as a writer/patriot. Although the majority of her columns deal with national affairs, she also weaves into her writing stories of individual women. Fuller’s second dispatch, for example, describes a woman she met during her travels in Scotland. Calling her “a fine specimen of the noble, intelligent Scotchwoman,” Fuller goes on to praise the woman as “an only child, a cherished wife, an adored mother, unspoiled by love in any of these relations, because that love was founded on knowledge” (52). The knowledge underlying this Scottish woman’s integrity is explicitly political: “In childhood she had warmly sympathized in the spirit that animated the American revolution, and Washington had been her hero. . . . [S]he had known in the course of her long life many eminent men, knew minutely
the history of efforts in that direction, and sympathized now in the triumph of the people over the Corn-Laws, as she had in American victories with as much arder as when a girl . . .” (52–53). Fuller is clearly smitten with this exemplary woman’s ability to combine familial devotion and revolutionary fervor, a mixture that Fuller strove for in her own lifetime and advocated in her writing as a healthier and more respectable option for nineteenth-century women than stereotypical, infantile dependence. In contrast to the sentimental novels that were so popular a form for nineteenth-century American women writers, Fuller makes use of a literary space that permits precisely this fusion—that of the political and emotional self.

Fuller further alludes to her literary values in a passage from a later dispatch written in praise of two European women writers:

I prize Joanna Baillie and Madame Roland as the best specimens which have been hitherto offered of women of a Spartan, Roman strength and singleness of mind. . . . They are not sentimental; they do not sigh and write of withered flowers of fond affection, and woman’s heart born to be misunderstood by the object or objects of her fond, inevitable choice. Love, (the passion,) when spoken of at all by them, seems a thing noble, religious, worthy to be felt. They do not write of it always, they did not think of it always; they saw other things in this great, rich, suffering world . . . nor was all their speech one continued utterance of mere personal experience. It contained things which are good, intellectually, universally. (89)

In the preceding passage and in her journalism itself, Fuller lays claim to the entire “great” world as proper subject matter for women who write. Her theory of women’s writing self-consciously positions itself in opposition to the conventions of sentimental novels, especially their exclusive focus on home, love, and the wounded woman. In her ideal, the woman writer recognizes that the personal and the political are codependent, that her private experience can encompass a range of issues, and that her literary output should reflect this diversity. An elastic genre that depended upon many individuals’ interpretation and transcription of global events, the newspaper underscored an ideology of inclusion and facilitated Fuller’s use of personal experience to promulgate a political message.

In contrast to women who “sigh and write of withered flowers of fond affection,” Fuller praises women who combine love with knowledge. The Scottish woman gains respect within the home by bringing her concern with public affairs into the domestic sphere: “Dear to memory will be the sight of her in the beautiful seclusion of her home among the mountains,
a picturesque, flower wreathed dwelling, where affection, tranquility and wisdom were the gods of the hearth.” Fuller follows this idyllic vision with an impassioned appeal: “Grant us more such women, Time! Grant to men the power to reverence, to seek for such!” (53). The rhetorical devices used in this dispatch illuminate how Fuller manipulates print journalism’s power on behalf of women’s rights. In this case, the apostrophe to “Time” establishes a lofty and traditional tone, reminiscent of classical rhetoric, yet Fuller uses the distanced voice to make demands of her own historical context. The appeal, “Grant to men the power to reverence,” accuses American men, the Tribune’s readers, of demonstrating a lack of “power” in their treatment of women. Under the guise of an appeal to the generic concept of “Time,” Fuller chastises her countrymen. The classical style would have tempered her demands with a tone of formality and diplomacy by making the accusation less direct, though no less weighty. Such hybrid discourse is characteristic of Fuller’s journalistic strategies for promoting her feminist message.

When Fuller discovered powerful European women who exceeded their culture’s low expectations of them, she incorporated their stories into her column alongside updates on current events and background on Italy’s warring political factions. Fuller describes, for example, “an object which gave [her] pleasure” in Chester, namely an old surveillance tower converted into a museum. What pleases her is that, as the museum relied upon contributions “from all who had derived benefit from Chester,” “many women had been busy in filling these magazines for the instruction and the pleasure of their fellow townsmen,” with one woman contributing “a fine collection of butterflies, and a ship” (49–50). Putting the women’s efforts in context for her Tribune readership, she asserts, “I like to see women perceive that there are other ways of doing good beside making clothes for the poor or teaching Sunday school; these are well, if well directed, but there are many other ways, some as sure and surer, and which benefit the giver no less than the receiver” (50). The importance of recognizing women’s many and various contributions to the larger culture is made explicit here, as is the potential link between the opportunities for women Fuller observes in European countries and the ideals she envisions for America.

In a later dispatch from London, Fuller initiates what seems a conventional observation about the lack of a “woman’s touch” in the London Reform Club: “To me this palace of so many ‘single gentlemen rolled into one,’ seemed stupidly comfortable in the absence of that elegant arrangement and vivacious atmosphere which only Women can inspire. In the kitchen, indeed, I met them and, on that account, it seemed the
pleasantest part of the building—though, even there, they are but the servants of servants” (96). The reflection that women are permitted only in a kitchen, where they must serve men, inspires the caustic rejoinder, “I am not sorry, however, to see men predominant in the cooking department, as I hope to see that and washing transferred to their care in the progress of things, since they are ‘the stronger sex’” (ibid.). Fuller’s flippant inflection of “stronger” attacks traditional gender divisions, suggesting both that men’s physical strength might suit them to manual household labor (rather than intellectual privilege) and also that women have historically been responsible for much of the culture’s hardest work.

Yet Fuller’s Europe also offers evidence that ancient civilizations conceived of a woman’s role differently and thus undermines the essentialism of nineteenth-century gendered spheres. Fuller advises her American readers,

A woman should love Bologna, for there has the spark of intellect in Woman been cherished with reverent care. Not in former ages only, but in this, Bologna raised a woman who was worthy to the dignitaries of its University, and in their Certosa they proudly show the monument to Clotilda Tambroni, late Greek professor there. . . . In Milan, also, I see in the Ambrosian Library the bust of a female Mathematician. These things make me feel that if the state of Woman in Italy is so depressed, yet a good will toward a better is not wholly wanting. These things, and still more the reverence to the Madonna and innumerable female Saints, who if, like St. Teresa, they had intellect as well as piety, became counselors no less than comforters to the spirits of men. (143)

Fuller offers to her contemporary readership not only a history of respect for women in Bologna, but also by implication a call for similar advancements in her own country’s future. Her emphasis on St. Teresa’s “intellect and piety” echoes her earlier description of the Scottish woman, suggesting that a woman’s spiritual and emotional strength depend upon a solid intellectual foundation.

The worship of female saints, which fascinated many nineteenth-century American women writers in Italy, informs a later dispatch in which Fuller confesses, “[St. Cecilia] and St. Agnes are my favorite saints” (241). The stories of Agnes and Cecilia foreground individuals sacrificing themselves for a higher moral principle, echoing Fuller’s repeated emphasis on each citizen’s responsibility for national ideals. In Cecilia and Agnes, Fuller selected symbols of bodily invincibility who, having pledged themselves to Christ, died defending their spiritual faith. Agnes, “a special patroness of bodily purity,” was persecuted for refusing to marry, then tortured, humil-
iated, and eventually sent by the governor to a brothel “with liberty to all to abuse her person at pleasure.” When young men rushed to take advantage of the thirteen-year-old girl, they “were seized with such awe at the sight of the saint that they durst not approach her” and Agnes remained pure (Butler’s 133–34).

As a means of demonstrating her piety, Cecilia also refused marital relations. After converting her husband and brother-in-law to Christianity, she was punished by a prefect who ordered her to be “suffocated to death in the bathroom of her own house” (ibid., 403). Despite the fact that “the furnace was fed with seven times its normal amount of fuel,” Cecilia lived unharmed for a full day. The soldier sent to decapitate her also found his task daunting; having “struck at her neck three times,” he left her for dead but she “lingered three days” (ibid.). Like Agnes, Cecilia devoted herself to a faith that gave her bodily invincibility. These women transcended physical limitations through their devotion to a higher ideal, and both determined their fates by refusing coercion. Certainly such heroic foremothers would have encouraged a woman who dedicated herself to journalism’s power and sought to transcend the weaknesses her culture ascribed to her. Further, Fuller used her column to publicly valorize women who had been unjustly abused by patriarchal power—most likely, some of Fuller’s readers would have recognized the parallels with her own situation.

Relying upon images of body and disease, Fuller’s columns often liken weaknesses within the community to sickness and suggest that national health is maintained either by cure or by prevention. The nation-as-body metaphor was not unusual in American patriotic rhetoric; yet Fuller takes the image of the diseased national body to a provocative extreme by bringing gender into the picture. It is possible to trace the movement from body politic to body personal/feminine over the course of her dispatches. In May 1847, for example, Fuller penned one of her most aggressive social commentaries in response to evidence of poverty and hunger in France: “The more I see of the terrible ills which infests [sic] the body politic of Europe, the more indignation I feel at the selfishness or stupidity of those in my own country who oppose an examination of these subjects—such as is animated by the hope of prevention” (119). Later, in Italy, Fuller uses similar terminology to remark on the influence of domestic abuse on her sharpening political/social awareness: “[T]he cries of mothers and wives beaten at night by sons and husbands for their diversion after drinking, as I have repeatedly heard them these past months, the excuse for falsehood, ‘I dare not tell my husband, he would be ready to kill me,’ have sharpened my perception as to the ills of Woman’s condition and remedies that must
be applied” (245–56). The repetition of words associated with sickness and treatment (“prevention” and “remedies”) fortifies the thematic bond between the individual woman and the state. In contrast to a literary tradition that often feminized the American land to accommodate masculine conquest fantasies, Fuller textualized a feminine body politic to reveal the injuries caused by patriarchal insensitivity to women’s needs. In marking domestic violence as a social issue and in using her status as a reporter to bring the issue to public attention, Fuller was a pioneer. By presenting injuries to women’s bodies as analogous to a sickly political body, she demonstrated the interconnections between woman and nation and between private and public and thereby stressed the state’s responsibility to treat the (woman’s) body in order to heal itself.

“The Bond of Life”

Fuller’s dispatches document an urgent call for action that, though interrupted occasionally by her frustration with America’s reluctant politicians, ultimately locates hope in radical reform. Clearly concerned with material conditions and capitalism’s implication in societal ills, Fuller was an early advocate of socialism and is credited with helping to introduce Marxist thought to the American people. Chevigny reads an 1845 Fuller Tribune column as “among the very earliest notices of Marx and Engels in America” (294). In the dispatches Fuller offers an incisive and unflinching assessment of how capitalist class structure depends upon an oppressed working class. From Glasgow Fuller writes home that “the people are more crowded together and the stamp of squalid, stolid misery and degradation more obvious and appalling” in that city than at any other stop on her European tour (79). She continues, describing “persons, especially women, dressed in dirty, wretched tatters, worse than none, and with an expression of listless, unexpecting woe on their faces, far more tragic than the inscription over the gate of Dante’s Inferno” (79).

The image of suffering taints the romance of a castle she visits nearby, where centuries ago “lords and ladies gay danced and sang above [while] prisoners pined and wild beasts starved below” (80). The juxtaposition provokes a sober reminder to her readers that while the maintenance of the ancient castle “at first blush looks like a very barbarous state of things . . . on reflection, one does not find that we have outgrown it in our present so-called state of refined civilization . . . . Still lords and ladies dance and sing above, unknowing or uncaring that the laborers who minister to their luxuries starve or are turned into wild beasts—below. Man
need not boast his condition till he can weave his costly tapestry without the side that is kept under looking like that, methinks” (80). Fuller's travels brought her into close contact with the oppression that underlies capitalism and contributed to the fervent, radical tone of her dispatches. Once again, her medium proves to be well suited to her message. In 1848, the year Marx and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto*, Fuller published a dispatch detailing for Americans the very issues the German socialists were investigating in Europe: “To you, people of America, it may perhaps be given to look on and learn in time for a preventive wisdom. You may learn the real meaning of the words FRATERNITY, EQUALITY. . . You may in time learn to reverence, learn to guard, the true aristocracy of a nation, the only really noble—the LABORING CLASSES” (211).

The periodical press permitted such a radical declaration, providing Fuller with a wide audience and encouraging (indeed, demanding) her immediate, uncensored response to events, even though her socialist rhetoric would have seemed radical to American readers who believed that the class structure rewarded merit and that the upper classes deserved their status and its attendant privileges.

Fuller herself had grown up in a community infused with elitism, her father bestowing upon her a classical education, her brothers attending Harvard, her early conversational circles comprised of wealthy and educated cosmopolitans from the Boston area; but the encounter with Europe and Italy and with poverty and revolution led her to form new and radical allegiances, accompanied by rebellious declarations. She transcended the national affiliation imposed upon her at birth, expressing throughout the dispatches a closer affinity to Italian culture than to her own. The birth of her son (to an Italian father) seems to have broadened and complicated her sense of national belonging. Fuller collapses her political and maternal connections to Italy tellingly in a letter written to Caroline Sturgis Tappan in December 1849. Describing an afternoon outing with a friend, Fuller writes, “We sat down on a stone seat in the sunny walk to see the people walk by. The Grand Duke and his children, the elegant Austrian officers who will be driven out of Italy when Angelino is a man” (Chevigny 492). The chronology, linking Fuller’s son’s maturity to the overthrow of the occupying forces, suggests causality; a mother’s heightened investment in the establishment of republican government casts Angelino as the hero of the revolution.

With new allegiances came Fuller’s endorsement of socialism, as she grew to believe that only radical reform could ease the world’s suffering: “Here lie my hopes now. I believed before I came to Europe in what is called Socialism, as the inevitable sequence to the tendencies and wants
of the era, but I did not think these vast changes in modes of govern-
m ent, education and daily life, would be effected as rapidly as I now think
they will, because they must. The world can no longer stand without
them” (320). “Hope” is an important term in this prognosis. Despite
the defeat of the Italian revolutionaries and what she saw as America’s fail-
ures, Fuller’s dispatches remain cautiously optimistic. Comparing the Ital-
ian zeal for reform with American domestic policy, she asks the barbed
question, “And my country, what does she? You have chosen a new Presi-
dent [Zachary Taylor] from a Slave State, representative of the Mexican
War” (245). She continues with a prescription for American redemption
and sends a hopeful message on behalf of her own sex: “Pray send here a
good Ambassador—one that has experience of foreign life, that he may
act with good judgment; and, if possible, a man that has knowledge and
views which extend beyond the cause of party politics in the United
States. . . . Another century, and I might ask to be made Ambassador
myself . . . but woman’s day has not come yet” (ibid.). In its suggestion
that Fuller herself possessed the requisite characteristics to serve as a
diplomat and its evocation of an approaching “woman’s day,” the dispatch
offers a feminist hope to American readers.

Fuller offers a larger-scale hope as she closes her final dispatch from
Italy, dated January 6, 1850:

Joy to those born in this day: In America is open to them the easy chance of
a noble, peaceful growth, in Europe of a combat grand in its motives, and in
its extent beyond what the world ever before so much as dreamed. Joy to
them; and joy to those their heralds, who, if their path was desert, their work
unfinished, and their heads in the power of a prostituted civilization, to
throw as toys at the feet of flushed, triumphant wickedness, yet holy-hearted
in unasking love, great and entire in their devotion, fall or fade, happy in the
thought that there come after them greater than themselves, who may at last
string the harp of the world to full accord, in glory to God in the highest, for
peace and love from man to man is become the bond of life. (323)

Although her nation often disappointed its citizens’ dreams, Fuller did not
ultimately relinquish her faith in American destiny or her reliance on the
concept of nation itself. In light of her literary accomplishments and social
activism, it is ironic that Perry Miller felt compelled to assert that Fuller
“may easily be dismissed as an eccentric, as no true voice of American civ-
ilization” (xii). Clearly her discourse, situated at a historical moment of cri-
sis abroad and problematic expansion at home, critiques America’s greed
even as it participates in constructing that nation as a manifestation of the
ideal republic. A “true voice” speaking to the contradictions inherent in her nation’s ideology, she was a radical and a patriot, working within the emerging, nineteenth-century periodical press and in response to the major nationalistic upheavals around her. Margaret Fuller’s columns and commentary blurred the line between public and private affairs as she attempted to supersede, personally and politically, the limitations of her time.