CHAPTER II

MARGARET FULLER'S EMERGING MYSTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: ON THE MARGIN AND IN THE MARGINS

According to the pervasive antebellum Christian ethos, Margaret Fuller was to be an articulate and well-educated private servant of the Republic, a "True Woman" eventually instructing her own children in Christian values. Her father's methods for cultivating her virtue and stimulating her intellect called her to self-surrender on behalf of her family and her Heavenly Father. Inadvertently, however, Timothy Fuller, Jr., also encouraged his daughter to become an independent-minded public servant—particularly, an innovative religious guide. He trained Fuller in textual analysis and provided her with a Christian Bible,[1] thus giving her tools to become a Protestant theologizer. By moving the family away from the cultural center of Cambridge and to the rural town of Groton, he set in motion Fuller's lifelong process of creatively cultivating personal religious experiences and expressions unique to each landscape that she encountered; during this period when socializing with Harvard intellectuals proved less convenient, Fuller turned to individualized study and meditation and found her new environment conducive to the mystical experiences that advanced and shaped her individualized concept of spirituality. Fuller's father's untimely death also influenced her and her culture: it moved her beyond the domestic sphere and her self-created rural "cloister" by hastening her social re-engagement and, more specifically, her experiments with "preach[ing] . . . mysticism" as a means of supporting her family.[2]

Fuller's movement from the Groton "cloister" to Providence, Boston, New York, and Rome strongly influenced how she articulated a developing mystical consciousness, but her Bible studies during her days in Groton also informed how she expressed her religious thoughts. In Groton, Fuller developed a method of complementing her more intuitive approaches to divine truth (approaches heightened

by her mystical experiences of 1831 and 1833) with analytical responses to Christianity (heightened by her father's pedagogical techniques). Fuller's marginalia in her 1826 Eyre and Strahan Bible reveal some of the play of the Bible upon Fuller and the play of Fuller upon the Bible:[3] how at times Biblical messages supported and at other times haunted her beliefs, how she expressed Biblical themes that she admired but challenged those that she deplored. Her marginalia show her concern for the issues of patriarchal oppression, universal compassion, and women's roles—in particular, her rejection of complicity in women's subjugation and feminine sentimentalism.[4] More importantly, however, they provide some of the earliest evidence of Fuller's evolving mystical consciousness, which placed her on the margins of antebellum society, and demonstrate her emerging responses to cultural issues that later motivated her social action.

In Her Hands: Dating the Marginalia

Fuller received the Eyre and Strahan Bible from her father on January 1, 1832,[5] when they were still living in Brattle House, her uncle Abraham Fuller's home on Brattle Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Timothy Fuller, Jr., probably purchased it at a lending library book sale.[6] We know that this was her second Bible because on May 21, 1824, while at Miss Prescott's school in Groton, she asked her father to "have the goodness to send me my Milton's Paradise lost, my Hedge's Logick and Bible" (*Letters* I: 139). However, Fuller appeared to have been reading the Eyre and Strahan Bible when she was first admitting in other writings her discomfort with patriarchal influences on society and religion.

Comparing the themes highlighted in Fuller's marginal notes with the themes in her 1833-1835 journals and letters allows us to estimate the dates of Fuller's first close readings of this copy of the Bible. As early as 1833, signs of textual interplay emerge within her own correspondence. For instance, in a letter written that year, Fuller compared her own encounters with "Heaven's discipline" to scriptural warnings

about the consequences of idolatry that she marked and responded to as she read (see Deuteronomy 3:24-8, 4:15, 5:8-9, 8:5, 13:3.). Her letter states, "Who shall wonder at the stiff-necked, and rebellious folly of young Israel, bowing down to a brute image, though the prophet was bringing messages from the holy mountain, while one's own youth is so obstinately idolatrous" (*Letters* I: 180), a clear reference to verses in Deuteronomy to which Fuller responds. This letter lacks details that specifically define what Fuller means by "Heaven's discipline" and "obstinately idolatrous," but the remainder of the letter and the historical context suggest that "obstinately idolatrous" related to Fuller's fondness for her former immersion in the intellectual center provided by the Harvard community and her unwillingness to appreciate or use "Margaret's Grove," the wooded area on the farm that her father sanctioned as Fuller's private intellectual center (Capper *Margaret Fuller* 123). "Heaven's discipline" might be construed as the Fuller family move to Groton, a move that Fuller construed as going away from intellectual companionship and toward pastoral tragedy, tragedy such as her obligatory labor at housework and her responsibility for educating her siblings as well as caring for her brother Arthur after the accident that half-blinded him (Capper *Margaret Fuller* 121).

While throughout her life Fuller vacillated between whole-hearted acceptance of the tasks before her and dissatisfaction with her "weary work" (I.e., see *Memoirs* II: 224-225, 239, 245-248, 250-252; also see Berg and Perry 124; *Letters* I: 351), early references to the Israelites' behavior and Job's position further suggest she was reading her Eyre and Strahan Bible and making marginal notes in it shortly after the family moved to Groton in the spring of 1833, a time when she keenly felt her father's influence upon her life. In the 1833 letter mentioning "Heaven's discipline," Fuller also echoed Job 9:25, a verse that she highlighted in her Bible: "Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good." Job in ensuing verses laments how he labors in vain, how he is weary of life, how God's expectations are unfair. Job's existential plight evoked a response from Fuller, who likewise struggled to be cheerful under what she deemed to be oppressive constraints. She wrote that her

"*seemingly* most pure and noble hopes ha[d] been blighted; the *seemingly* most promising connections broken" (emphasis added; *Letters* I: 180). Fuller recognized her own stubbornness and admitted that her perspective and feelings might be limited and unjustifiable. She also displayed her acceptance of culturally-prevalent religious doctrines by asserting that her "lesson shall be fully learned" if she will accept "Heaven's discipline," the "weary work . . . before [her]," and obey the father who tells her, "you should become a young lady of *prepossessing manners & estimable character*. At the bottom of such a character I have often assured you must be *virtue & religion*" (*Letters* I: 180; Fuller MSS and Works, Houghton Library, Harvard University, V, 13, qtd. in Capper *Margaret Fuller* 73).[7] Themes in Fuller's personal writings of 1833 echo messages she marked in her Eyre and Strahan Bible.

Perhaps more meaningful, though, Fuller very likely used this Bible while studying the historical books of the Old Testament in 1834 and 1835 (*Letters* I: 213, 226, 229; Capper *Margaret Fuller* 126). Her marginalia appear in this Bible on Old Testament pages. Dating her marginalia between 1833 and 1835, we can trace how Fuller articulates and develops her responses to Old Testament scriptures.

Foremost in significance, Fuller's marginal marks coincide with some of her first deliberate efforts toward developing cultural consciousness by analyzing her relationship to her religious heritage.[8] Before receiving this Bible, Fuller had absorbed diverse beliefs more than she had formulated and refined her own. As late as the winter of 1829-1830, she deliberately eschewed religious definitions and categories, explaining that though she believed in God and in Eternal Progression, she had no "settled opinions at present" and did not feel a "need" for any (*Letters* I: 158-159). Approximately a year later, a moment of intense religious dissatisfaction collided with her spiritual receptivity,[9] culminating in Fuller's most profound mystical experience where she "was taken up into God" and shown the "films" that comprised almost everything of earth but "seemed to drop from [her] existence" (*Memoirs* I: 141, *Letters* I: 185, 347). A year and a half after that, Fuller had another mystical experience where "the Holy Ghost descended [upon her] like a dove" (*Memoirs* I:

142).[10]

Julia Kristeva argues that such individual experiences, which some call mystical, constitute a reappropriation of power during a narcissistic crisis—a questioning of identities, positions, and rules; accordingly, while "pretending to reveal the abyss"— the experiences engender re-creations of personal and cultural identities through "the rejection and reconstruction of languages" (4, 14, 15, 16, 45). Fuller's responses accord with this model, and by the summer of 1833 she could no longer argue as she had in the winter of 1829-1830 that she was "yet ignorant of the religion of Revelation" (*Letters* I: 159). Her mystical experiences having reinforced her sense of spiritual Self Reliance or "narcissistic power" (Kristeva 16), to use Kristeva's term, Fuller yearned to have "settled opinions" on religion. She decided that she wanted to know what she believed, to trust herself, not to qualify all she said with "it *seems* so to *me*." In essence, she wanted to create "a system which [would] suffice to [her] character, and in whose applications [she] [could] have faith": "a system suited to guide [her]" (emphasis added; *Letters* I: 181-182). The summer of 1833 Fuller leaned heavily upon her unitive experience,[11] calling God her "only friend" (qtd. in Capper *Margaret Fuller* 126). Separated geographically from her friends in Cambridge, she had the opportunity to demonstrate what she had come to understand just before the family's move to Groton: that she must rely on herself and God alone if she were to become independent-minded (*Letters* I: 178). Whether wise or foolish, Fuller's position reflects what John J. McDermott describes as the American "obligation to reconstruct experience so as to aid in the resolution of those difficulties seen to hinder growth" (*Culture* 9).

Fuller's passion to impart meaning to her experiences yielded more ambiguities, not the inclusive and resolved "system" of faith that she yearned to have. By the next spring (1834), she had become disillusioned with the Old Testament God and was writing in her journal about forcing herself to believe (Capper *Margaret Fuller* 132-133); nonetheless, she was still determined to overcome her doubts. Her aspiration to move from "I think" to "I know" became even stronger by November

1834 as the skepticism of several Deists with whom she was associating magnified her discomfort with her own doubts (*Letters* I: 213).[12] Within a week of articulating her desire to resolve her heightened religious uncertainties, Fuller's first published work appeared in *The Daily Advertiser*, challenging the low opinions of Brutus, a Roman ruler during the first century B.C., that George Bancroft presented in an article for *The North American Review* the month before. In her rebuttal, Fuller argued against being "too hasty in questioning what is established, and tearing to pieces the archives of the past," contending that "there are other sorts of skepticism, and not less desolating in their tendencies, than that of religion" (qtd. in Higginson 47-48). Fuller's essay also asserts that individuals possess creative potential regardless of their environments (Higginson 47-48). And here began Fuller's blending of politics and poetics in writings that might be described as feminist religious revision.

Following her own advice to avoid denouncing religion itself and to demonstrate her creative potential in her particular historical situation, Fuller at this time decided that she would "examine thoroughly as far as [her] time and abilities permit[ed] the evidences of the Christian religion." She felt the process would help her understand her heritage, find her place in that heritage, and thereby eliminate her own religious skepticism (*Letters* I: 213; also see Capper *Margaret Fuller* 132-133 for a related journal entry). As Regina M. Schwartz argues in *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, such a process of remembering, forgetting, and re-creating one's religious heritage proves profoundly Hebraic. Fuller's method unfolded as a mixture between a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of confirmation, a mixture resulting in a hermeneutics of amelioration. While she would question traditional authority and alter traditional theological readings and significations, Fuller exhibited a desire to construct truth claims that would place her not in opposition with but in connection to others. The sincerity of her desire to improve a given situation for herself and others would repeatedly manifest itself; yet, as Fuller's religious studies and her broadcasting of her chosen truth claims show, her oppositions and connections to her culture and to individuals proved interrelated.

Margin of Error: Criticizing and Coping with Her Heritage

Sensitive to the impact of religion on history and well-trained to explore others' ideas, Fuller used logic to achieve some clarity in her religious studies. She had already been studying American history with her father and finding it helpful in understanding him, her time, and her place (*Memoirs* I: 149). But while she "rejoice[d]" to learn about and appreciate the United States alongside her father (*Memoirs* I: 149), Fuller wanted to work through her religious uncertainties alone in hopes of ensuring that "the results [would] be my own" (*Memoirs* I: 151). Even if Fuller were directing her own studies, she was not alone in her quest for religious certainty. Not only were Deists in America arguing the incompatibility of revealed religion with scientific thought, German Bible criticism had recently made its way to America and was prompting Americans to question the accuracy of the Bible (Richardson 7-12). Moreover, Fuller's concept of studying Christianity alone ironically involved both the influence of her forefathers and her biological father. Fuller supplemented her culturally-acquired knowledge of Christian principles with a study of printed resources on the topic: the Bible itself and Biblical commentaries that Frederic Henry Hedge and James Freeman Clarke recommended (Blanchard 85).

Fuller had learned from her father to absorb and to analyze the knowledge contained in books. In order to cope with such demands, Fuller transformed the study of others' ideas from a burden into a passion (*Memoirs* I: 22). She allowed her own mind to sink from the surface and become veiled over (*Memoirs* I: 18), silencing the majority of its voices (*Letters* I: 163) and referencing other minds any time she articulated one of her ideas (*Memoirs* I: 18). Looking at later instances where Fuller acts out this training—for instance, when she read profusely before writing *Summer on the Lakes*, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, and her lost history of the Italian Revolutions—we can see how her dependence upon books both inhibited and stimulated her creative expressions.[13] Her approach to her Biblical studies—thinking

for herself but adopting her father's method—reflected the lifelong tension she felt between finding and relying upon her own voice and acknowledging and appreciating the voices of her fathers. Fuller grappled with her religious skepticism, personal insecurities, and authorial anxieties by negotiating between her own revelatory experiences and the religious discourse of others. On the one hand, her studies of printed works ensured that she was intellectually well-informed and psychologically well-balanced. In effect, she fused the worldly and the transcendent, the rational and the supra-rational, the analytical and the emotional. These combinations allowed Fuller to use intertextuality both creatively and subversively. On the other hand, in the tradition of her paternal training (*Memoirs* I: 14-15), she acquired knowledge from books so rapidly that she induced mental exhaustion and physical discomfort. In addition, this process fed her authorial insecurities by sustaining her need to have her articulations mediated and authenticated by other voices. Years later Fuller felt so strongly about the need for mental rest as well as mental rigor that she encouraged others to immerse themselves in whichever of the two tendencies they seemed least inclined toward at that moment.[14] Fuller's valuing of mental rest periods emerges against the seeming absence of such moments in her father's pedagogical methods, methods that now appear excessive in terms of challenging a capable mind.

Though empowering his daughter with analytical skills and a broad education, Timothy Fuller, Jr. in many ways undermined his daughter's authority with his own exacting standards.[15] For example, he did not encourage her to develop her own definition of virtue but rather to appropriate his version, which reflected values of the dominant culture.[16] Inevitably, Margaret Fuller would be influenced by cultural authorities, but her unwillingness to consent unquestionably to her father's demonstrations of influence served as a training ground for Fuller's later confrontations with cultural powers. Timothy Fuller, Jr.'s inscription on the front endpage of his daughter's Eyre and Strahan Bible suggests the pervasiveness of his presence. In the front of the book he had written: "Sarah Margarett Fuller. / Cambridge, 1. Jan. 1832. / Presented to her by / her Father – ". We can be grateful for

such precision and formality on Timothy Fuller, Jr.'s part, for it helps to validate whose marginalia adorns the pages of this Bible. But the inscription reminds us of another father-daughter tension. Not only was Margaret Fuller being told what to study for intellectual and moral edification but also how to identify herself. She had previously given herself some of the power associated with the naming process. By 1830 she was signing her letters with "M." or with "Margaret" and was known among her friends as "Margaret."[17] But her father continued to call her by his own mother's first name,[18] disregarding his daughter's long-voiced preferences to be referred to as "Margaret." Their debate on this topic had begun in 1820, and the correspondence between father and daughter shows that Timothy Fuller repeatedly refused to comply with his daughter's efforts to go by her middle name, her mother's name.[19]

Much has been written on Fuller's other names for herself, such as Leila, Marianna, Miranda, Minerva, Muse, and the Virgin Mary. But even "Margaret" is one of Fuller's donned identities, one of her ways of establishing her own voice apart from her heritage. Her desire to be known as "Margaret" parallels Ralph Waldo Emerson's decision that he would be called by his middle name; in both cases, a sense of personal power was being expressed within the boundaries of cultural prescriptions. That Fuller would choose her middle name, her mother's name, certainly was consequential. However, the fact that Fuller spelled her chosen name with one "t" rather than the two of her mother's name and of her birth name was equally significant. Fuller was asserting her kinship with, yet her independence apart from, her mother; and, in both of those ways, she distanced herself from her father. At this time when Fuller began her Bible studies, just prior to her father's death, she was dealing with her vacillating opinions of him, which would take her years to resolve.

Fuller's ambiguous feelings about her biological father appear to influence her responses to Christian theology. A looming factor in Fuller's religious discomfort was the Biblical presentation of God the Father. One month after the publication of her *Daily Advertiser* article, she found herself following her own advice about cautiously "questioning what is established"; she attacked a fundamental premise in Christianity

by revealing that she lacked "confidence in God as a Father" (*Letters* I: 223-224).[20] Her own mystical experiences, which she conceived of as unification with God, were moments free of consternation: "I was dwelling in the ineffable, the unutterable. But the sun of earth set, and it grew dark around; the moment came for me to go. I had never been accustomed to walk alone at night, for my father was very strict on that subject, but now I had not one fear" (*Memoirs* I: 141-142). Fuller's recognition that she was undaunted by and in fact upheld in her solitary walk through darkness fostered her independent conceptions of God. In the way of the mystical discourse described as *via negativa*, Fuller defined God as "ineffable" and "unutterable," a definition far more abstract than the paternal personification ascribed to the Judeo-Christian God of the Old Testament. She remembered this day as "one chastest, heavenliest day of communion with the soul of things" (*Letters* I: 347). Significantly, Fuller's sense of communion followed her sense of isolation, as if the receptivity to the one state related to the availability of the other state: that is, when Fuller felt free, she no longer needed to limit herself with oppositional stances but could open herself to approving ones.

Fuller's marginalia reveal both positive and negative responses to the idea of "God the Father." Some of Fuller's Biblical marks draw attention to virtuous attitudes her biological father expected of her, attitudes Fuller would choose to support throughout her life, such as sharing her material resources with others (Deuteronomy 15:2-3, 15:9-10, 24:21), becoming aware of inclinations toward personal prejudices and minimizing these by focusing on the common humanity in others rather than their difference (Deuteronomy 23:7), and giving those deemed "sinners"—those who deviate from acceptable social norms—opportunities for reform (Deuteronomy 4:41-43). In these notations Fuller does not attack or question such attributions to the Judeo-Christian God; rather, accompanying comments show her agreement and support: "! wise" (Deuteronomy 15:2), "beautiful" (Deuteronomy 24:21), and "I am glad there is some tenderness for the children of poor Esau" (Deuteronomy 23:7). However, some tendencies of the described Judeo-Christian God do prove more

troubling to Fuller. Examples of this emerge in Fuller's marginalia highlighting scriptures stating that God takes from people as well as gives to them (Deuteronomy 8:3, 28:58), God tests people but not beyond their capacities for endurance (Deuteronomy 13:3), God disciplines people as their actions merit (Deuteronomy 8:5), and God expects people to side with him in punishing others who refuse "to keep all his commandments" (Deuteronomy 13:5-18, 16:19-20, 21:18-23). Other writings by Fuller acknowledge her reaction to such renderings of God. For instance, in the aforementioned letter written shortly after her father moves the family to Groton, Fuller wrote of "Heaven's discipline" (*Letters* I: 180), echoing the Biblical verse Deuteronomy 8:5 (to the side of which she had written "Just so—"): "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, *so* the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." However, when on February 1, 1835, she admitted her lack of faith in God as a father, she seems to be comparing her own father with the God of the Bible and the God of the Bible with her subjective encounter with an unutterable God; she vacillates between conflating the figures and separating them: they are each viewed at different times as unjust authorities but also as loving parents. Neither of these conceptualizations of God, God as a disciplinarian or God as a father, reflect the God that she had experienced during her moments of mystical rapture. She found in the Old Testament a God of gore and groundless actions, a God who seemed to advocate and to participate in extensive homicides, a God who promoted jealousy and revenge and who accused unjustly and punished the innocent. According to her marginalia, Fuller considered such a God "onerus", "odius", and "shocking" (Deuteronomy 5:8-9; Deuteronomy 7:20).

The vestiges of Fuller's conversation with her Bible reveal that she reacted strongly when she deemed the actions and mandates of the Old Testament God "violent" and "savage" (Deuteronomy 13; Deuteronomy 21:13).[21] She would even question the plausibility, the consistency in the message of Deuteronomy 5:3-4, which states, "The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *even* us, who *are* all of us here alive this day. The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount

out of the midst of the fire." Underlining "*even* us" and "you face to face," Fuller marked suggestions of the validity of personal revelation at the same time that she questions the historical accuracy of the account, as in this questioning phrase she wrote in her Bible: "I thought that generation died ere Israel could enter Canaan." Fuller's interpretations at this time suggest that she found that though the Old Testament validated individual revelatory moments in the past, there was little to suggest the Bible validated her revelations and her definitions of God when they differed from the ancient record. She noted instead passages suggesting that what she knew of God was what her father knew and what her forefathers had known of God (Deuteronomy 8:3), passages suggesting that religious knowledge was communal and traditional. Despite all of Fuller's desires and efforts to eliminate her religious skepticism, it remained a part of her thought.

In articulating what she had come to understand, Fuller found herself in that ironic situation of many mystics deemed heretics:[22] her expansion in spiritual awareness actually increased her doubts about accepted religious/cultural beliefs and practices. Extant linguistic creations, whether popular or theological, offered reductive definitions of the deity when compared to the experiential knowledge acquired during the mystical encounter. Whereas before she was more comfortable absorbing and adopting the Stoicism and Romanticism that she found in books and learned from her parents, her mystical experiences—subjective and empowering—made her aware of her personal choices, which in turn encouraged her to confront some of her previously suppressed opinions.[23] Fuller recognized that her position opposed the cultural viewpoint represented by her biological father, who instructed her not "to walk alone at night," a stance which both supported and limited her. Wanting to assert her independence, Fuller could no longer confer power upon the status quo with her silence;[24] she had to try to "settle" at least some of her positions on religion. And as others have shown,[25] the Law of the Father was a big topic to try to settle.

The value that Fuller placed on such a process emerges in her later pedagogical practices: the ways she worked with and against her culture to encourage students at the Greene Street School, readers of the *Dial*, attendees of her West Street Conversations, and readers of the *New-York Daily Tribune* to analyze and contemplate their historical situations. Or, as Scott Gac assesses it in "The Eternal Symphony Afloat: The Transcendentalists' Quest for a National Culture," Fuller, like other Transcendentalists, looked to a national culture as a national cure and, accordingly, participated in creating that influential national culture. Skepticism and reservation about the current cultural productions and traditions intimated honor in Fuller's mind. She eventually articulated her stance in this way:

> We should have a sense of mental, as well as moral honor, which, while it makes us feel the baseness of uttering hasty and ignorant censure, will also forbid the hasty and extravagant praise. . . . A man of honor wishes to utter no word by which he cannot abide. The offices of poet, of hero-worship, are sacred, and he who has a heart to appreciate the excellent, should call nothing excellent which falls short of being so. ("Letters From a Landscape Painter" 1)

Two months later, an article appearing in the *New-York Daily Tribune* further developed her ideas about the roles of the artist, the critic, or any creator of the culture:

> Art is mental procreation, and the mind of a people can no more grow without Art than the body can without generation. It embalms the past, it beautifies the present, it facilitates and widens the future. The Artist, therefore, whose ministry is so high, deserves to be, and is, cherished and honored as the refiner, vivifier, benefactor of his country and race. ("Translations from the German" 1)[26]

Fuller clearly supported connecting analysis and creativity with morality: a person was a "benefactor" to society, holding a "sacred" office, a high "ministry," if she could refine and vivify the past, somehow making it active in her life and the lives of

those around her by judiciously discarding and adopting, censuring and praising cultural creations. Fuller's own actions throughout her life illustrate that she considered herself capable of embracing such a role. Her early negotiations with the religious aspects of her culture, the negotiations the Biblical marginalia further underscore, serve as a prototype for her lifelong orientation toward her time and her place. Her censure and praise followed her contemplation; her creativity found meaning in what Emerson in 1826 had called "the sepulchers of the fathers" (*Nature* 7).

The Bible and Literary Criticism: Learning the Language of Cultural Creation

Fuller's Biblical marginalia offer an interesting look into Fuller's critical reading method, a technique inculcated by her father for advanced mental acuity and appropriated by Fuller for culturally-acceptable spiritual creativity.[27] In *Timely Reading: Between Exegesis and Interpretation*, Susan Noakes distinguishes between "interpretation," reading something and applying it to one's self as a reader, and "exegesis," reading something and situating it in its cultural and temporal context (11-13); moreover, tracing readership from the thirteenth through the nineteenth century, Noakes argues that most readers perform a mixture of the two practices. Fuller often practiced at least one of these reading methods and more often a two-fold textual engagement when encountering religious discourse whether it was Egyptian, Greek, Hindu, Native American, Quaker—or Hebraic. As the Muse, Fuller performed interpretation. She participated in the Biblical story, owning it as her history and the myths that she lived by or acted against as a nineteenth-century American woman. As Minerva, Fuller performed exegesis. She read the Bible as a literary critic would, maintaining a greater emotional distance between herself and the text.

Among the marginal notes that show Fuller reading the Bible as an historical literary document are those earmarking the "facts" that the story presents. Throughout Genesis, for example, Fuller puts the ages of the characters into numerals, sometimes

adding years together to ascertain the character's age at death. Such is the case with her note "Adam 930" beside Genesis 5: 3-4: "And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat *a son* in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth; And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters." Fuller added 130 and 800 and registered the total number of years attributed to the character Adam: 930. As she registered the given details, she transcribed them in a way that would enable her to more efficiently ascertain the information should she refer back to it in the future.

A similar regard for details manifests itself where she highlights major plot developments, such as the transfer of power from Moses to Joshua (Deuteronomy 3:24-28, Leviticus 8:23-24, Leviticus 16:21-22) and the capture of Lot, who is subsequently rescued by Abram (Genesis 14:12). Beside Deuteronomy 4:41-43, the account of Moses indicating three cities that could serve as an asylum or refuge for the self-exiled Israelite who murdered another human being without premeditation, Fuller wrote, "What a singular provision undoubtedly occasioned by a tender selectivity towards his kind as the stern lawgiver thought of the homicide he had committed in earlier days." This reference, recalling the part of the Old Testament plot (where Moses murders an Egyptian abusing one of the Hebrews and, then fearing his own safety, exiles himself) presented in Exodus 2:11-15, along with other such marginal responses not only demonstrate Fuller's reading comprehension skills but also confirm that Fuller read the Biblical narrative meticulously.

Beyond demonstrating the extent of care Fuller applied when reading those things she chose to study, much of her marginal commentary reflects the role of critic that she would later define in her "A Short Essay on Critics." A main point in Fuller's discussion of literary criticism is the need to remember that literature gives a reader ideas to contemplate, not necessarily tells a reader how to live ("A Short Essay on Critics" 7; *Letters* II: 126). When Fuller deemed some of the Old Testament's food regulations "strange" or its military recruitment techniques "queer" (Deuteronomy 14: 8; 20: 6-8), she was differentiating between the times and societies, articulating how a

prevalent idea from one historical moment or one culture could be an oddity in another historical moment or another culture. Similarly, when she wrote "what a narrow notion!" beside a verse justifying the eating of meat only if the blood is drained from it (Deuteronomy 12:23), she indicated that this idea from Moses was not one she could perpetuate. However, Fuller did not, as some would, immediately dismiss the significance of the entire text as a result of finding multiple ideas in it that she could not adopt. Immediately after labeling this aforementioned idea "narrow," in fact, Fuller wrote: "How great this man in some things, how small in others." Such a comment suggests that Fuller was reading her Bible open-mindedly, a practice that in years ahead she would enact and advocate in multiple ways.

In addition to noting associations between her society and the Mosaic society, Fuller also noted partial correlations between them. For example, regarding some verses that advocate stoning the stubborn, rebellious, drunk, glutton son (Deuteronomy 21: 18-23), Fuller wrote: "what would our sons do — this [nineteenth-century American Christianity] is Judaism not too severe." While recognizing that her own culture was very much in the Judaic tradition, Fuller also noted that the nineteenth-century American version of Judaism was less "severe." Such a comment illustrates her recognition that each generation appropriates and discards beliefs from the preceding ones, a negotiation process that parallels what Fuller wanted each individual to do and what she wanted literary criticism to help individuals do.

The marginalia show Fuller performing another task that she later assigns to the critic as well: the job of apprehending and investigating the text to the best of his or her ability and, accordingly, conducting conscientious research as the need arises ("A Short Essay on Critics" 1-5, 8; *Letters* II: 126). One example of Fuller's commitment to becoming thoroughly acquainted with a text manifests itself via her tagging of unfamiliar words such as *pygarg*, *ossifrage*, and *shittim* (Deuteronomy 14:5-6; Leviticus 11:13, Deuteronomy 14:12; Deuteronomy 10:3). If she did not comprehend the meaning of a word, she noted what she needed to learn. Additional examples of her conscientious research efforts exhibit themselves where at the end of

Nehemiah she notes the historical time frame of the story and where at the beginning of Job she records the setting of the account. These comments mark two instances where Fuller investigated the temporal and geographical contexts of narratives.

On both the local (definitions) and the global (contexts) levels, then, Fuller made inquiries in order to increase her familiarity with a given literary document, in order to better understand it. She also would attempt to explore the impact of a given document on her own times, questioning the implications of correspondences and differences. For instance, beside Deuteronomy 33:17, the Biblical passage predicting that Joseph would push all people to the ends of the earth, Fuller asked, "has this anyway been fulfilled." With the Puritan ideology still pervading New England, it is very likely that Fuller could have been contemplating the connections between the modern American myth and the Old Testament prophecy, a myth she in many ways appropriated in her future discourse.[28] Fuller in fact throughout her life enacted and encouraged others to enact the decree she highlighted in Deuteronomy 28:37: "And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee." Fuller's notations indicate that such passages gained an extra degree of her attention. And the syntax of her comment beside Deuteronomy 33:17 indicates that Fuller was posing a question that would require investigation and contemplation if she wanted to apprehend the text more fully.

Another important element of Fuller's approach to literature emerges in her Biblical marginalia: her tendency to judge a work by its own laws, a guideline that she would eventually articulate in "A Short Essay on Critics." She specifically identified apparent textual contradictions. If read literally, Deuteronomy 5:3-4, for example, confutes the previously made points that Moses was the only one to see God face to face and that Moses would be unable to enter the Promised Land to which he had led the Israelites: "The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *even* us, who *are* all of us here alive this day. The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire." Fuller underlined "*even* us" and "you face to face" and noted at the bottom of the page: "I thought that generation died ere Israel /

could enter Canaan." If she had been more heavily influenced by the Puritan beliefs that were so pervasive in New England, Fuller might not have paused upon reading such a passage; in essence, she might have read it figuratively as an example of Sainthood, where the covenant is renewed each time someone is personally endowed with God's grace. But at this moment, like many others, Fuller read the passage literally and recorded the incongruity in the story line.

She once again noticed narrative ironies when she read Deuteronomy 24:16: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." In the right margin she wrote, "yet the children are to be punished for several generations," probably referring back to having read in Deuteronomy 5:9 that "the Lord thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation.*" This earlier passage had so disturbed Fuller that she had deemed its idea "onerus" and "odius." When nineteen chapters later Fuller encountered this scripture, whether her tone be interpreted as bitter or pragmatic, she questions the inconsistency of the Biblical justice system.

Interestingly, however, she also marked Leviticus 16:21-22, a passage demonstrating the Judeo-Christian ritual of transferring personal transgressions onto some sacrificial mediator, and Deuteronomy 21:15-17, a passage suggesting that disfavor cannot be transferred to children through mothers as it could be through fathers. Such verses, which Fuller labeled as "good," provide a hopeful contrast to a focus on the limitations of one's socio-historical moment; and, in this way, they reflect Fuller's lifelong tendencies to transform oppressive factors in her life and to associate such amelioration with her mother and typological maternal figures such as the Madonna and Ceres ("Autobiographical Romance" 149-150; *Woman* 60; Berg and Perry 56; Dall 28). Fuller's sensitivity to both the "odious" and the "beautiful" Biblical passages demonstrates her early proclivity to read critically and to assess the merits and demerits of her cultural landscapes.

Marginal Power: Furrowing Curves in the Mainstream

In February of 1835 when Fuller was noting her misgivings about the Judeo-Christian God, she addressed another factor influencing her distaste for traditional Christianity: she surmised that since childhood she had preferred the Greek more than the Christian myths because she found the former more imaginatively presented (*Letters* I: 218-219; Dall 161-162). Fuller's recent close reading of the Old Testament would have reminded her of this distinction. In her marginal comments she twice writes "beautiful" beside scriptures (Deuteronomy 15:9; Deuteronomy 24:21). But, as both passages are legalistic mandates rather than aphorisms in tales, she was probably responding to the sentiments of compassion and generosity being advocated rather than to the artistry involved in delivering these messages.

Only twice in Fuller's marginalia do we find her appreciating the rhetoric as much as the ideas themselves. Among a group of verses that warn how easily images can become objects of worship, eclipsing the worship of God, Fuller highlights Deuteronomy 4:15: "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day *that* the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire." This depiction of God accorded with her own unitive encounters involving light (fire) and the ineffable (no similitude).[29] Understandably, then, Fuller remarked, "The manner in which this is expressed is sublime and pathetick";[30] however, that verse may have proved noble and touching to her because of the memory of her own mystical encounters that it stirred more so than because of the way it was integrated into the Hebrew story. The one other time she responded to a rhetorical presentation comes after an account of families destroying themselves because they failed to serve God (Deuteronomy 28:37, 49-58). Beside these highlighted verses she wrote, "striking description."

Still, as Fuller's silences (the scant marginalia praising Biblical rhetoric) and her articulations (her written records) attest, "the manner in which [ideas] [are] expressed" or described in the Old Testament rarely excited or impressed Fuller. She

argued that her religious skepticism could be linked to her long-held preference for the Greek over the Hebrew presentations of spiritual principles (*Letters* I: 219). Remembering this influences her pedagogy. She desired to minimize for her own students (*Letters* I: 219), her siblings and the neighborhood children whom she was teaching from the Groton farmhouse, the kind of spiritual sufferings she underwent for favoring the Greek to the Hebrew mythology; she wanted to ensure her students' comfort with Christianity. At this time when she was feeling uncomfortable with her religious position and burdened by tribulations that she felt others had imposed upon her, she also was thinking of ways to eliminate such pains from the lives of those she might be influencing: she was thinking of ways to improve upon her inherited models. This position suggests Fuller's independent and compassionate nature, which was heightened by her mystical experiences; and it also demonstrates how the Bible was influencing her at the time.

A few years later, Fuller decided that compassion in some ways may minimize the pain of others but that, in terms of pedagogy, students discover their own positions by confronting contradictory beliefs that she might earlier have eliminated (Capper *Margaret Fuller* 231, 234, 297; *Letters* I: 347; Simmons "Margaret" 218-219). Her evolving articulations of her mystical conscious emerge with her commitment to enhancing individual students' analytical and creative skills. Thus, when she taught at the Greene Street School, she presented ancient myths and beliefs as well as Christian beliefs, criticizing and praising different aspects of each and encouraging her students to do the same (Capper *Margaret Fuller* 233-234). For example, when telling her Greene Street School students about Lady Jane Grey, Fuller describes her as "a devout Christian accomplished scholar" who had "the life of a saint, yet the death of a malefactor for her parents' offence" (Shealy 47). Fuller strikingly juxtaposes "saint" and "malefactor," calling attention to the irony of the Judeo-Christian concept she had marked with dissatisfaction a few years earlier: Deuteronomy 5:9, which reads, "I the LORD thy God [am] a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth [generation] of them that hate me." Indeed, Fuller

continues to help different audiences observe the strengths and weaknesses of Christianity even as she continues to advance Christian beliefs and value their overall impact on her culture. On December 25, 1844, for instance, Fuller told *New-York Daily Tribune* readers that children benefited from knowing the story of Jesus and having the model of his life in their minds; but she also asserted that Americans too often overlooked the "good suggestions," the symbols provided by "the Church of Rome" ("Christmas" 1). References made to a predominantly Protestant audience regarding the relevance of Christ would prove acceptable; however, discomfort might arise in some Protestants choosing to explore the validity of Fuller's assertions regarding the relevance of Catholic images. Nonetheless, Fuller repeatedly demonstrated that she valued inducing discomforts of this kind. Modifications of her early position on pedagogy parallel her gradually developed appreciation for her father's teaching procedures and the Biblical God, which in part offered her a vocabulary and method for presenting her mystical consciousness.

The conversations Fuller held with her Bible at this time add to our understanding of Fuller's emerging recognition of the tensions existing between herself and the dominant culture as represented by her father and the Biblical God. They also illuminate our understanding of Fuller's responses to such recognitions. Upon finding that the Old Testament in many ways merely reinforced her misgivings, she recognized part of what her religious heritage needed to come alive in her mind: her imagination (*Letters* I: 218-219). Consequently, Fuller entertained the possibility of writing historical fiction whose plots would be situated in Biblical times (*Letters* I: 229). By imbuing with her own imagination the Biblical narrative that already influenced her life, Fuller connected herself more closely to her history, her heritage.[31]

Fuller began writing her Biblical-based tales in April 1835 (Steele "'A Tale" 96), demonstrating her willingness to delve deeply into whatever she embraced, to make it a permanent part of her life.[32] As Schwartz convincingly argues in *The Curse of Cain*, this process of forgetting history and reconstructing memory for personal needs occurs repeatedly within the Biblical narrative itself. In this way, Fuller

embraced not only the Zeitgeist but also her socio-historical heritage.[33] Fuller's approach to reading the Bible was not that of accepting another's revelation as her own but of using her imagination to rewrite the stories, thereby developing her intellect and spirit. A decade later in the *New-York Daily Tribune* article "Thom's Poems," Fuller described the method with which she here began experimenting: "literature may be regarded as the great mutual system of interpretation between all kinds and classes of men. It is an epistolary correspondence between brethren of one family, subject to many and wide separations, and anxious to remain in spiritual presence one of another" (1). Literary and social criticism and literary production provided Fuller with a pragmatic outlet for sharing her mystical consciousness with a community. In these ways, Fuller experimented with her technique of merging the mystical and the analytical, the personal and the cultural, in order to live a unified life.

Writing literature in particular allowed Fuller to interpret the narratives that she inherited and to apprise others of her interpretations. As much as Timothy Fuller, Jr., developed his daughter's intellectual and emotional strength, he had limited its expressions. After his death on October 1, 1835, Margaret Fuller reconciled the God of her mystical experiences with the God of Christianity. In March 1836, Fuller wrote in her journal that it would be a source of consolation to her "To copy Him [Jesus], who here below / Sought but to do his Father's will" (qtd. in Capper *Margaret Fuller* 164). Within a year Fuller would demonstrate the extent to which she had applied her reconstructive powers to Judeo-Christianity. She openly disagreed with Francis Wayland, the author of one of the textbooks used by students at the Greene Street School, on this point: any value found in the Bible would be confined to its New Testament. Fuller taught her students that the entire Biblical text proved sublime, symbolic, and intellectual (Capper *Margaret Fuller* 233-234). Similarly, at one of the regular Coliseum Club meetings Fuller and other local adults attended at this time in Providence, Rhode Island, she went so far as to announce: "I believe Christianity will eventually be diffused over the whole globe, because it is a religion which satisfies the whole nature of man, as no other does . . ." (Hoffmann 49).[34] In 1839 Fuller was

arranging her father's papers and finding it "so interesting that [she] [could] not think of any thing else" (*Letters* II: 56), for here she discovered not what she had known of her father but what she had not known: "I know him hourly better and respect him more, as I look more closely into those secrets of his life. . . . Were I but so just, so tender, so candid towards man so devout towards a higher Power" (*Letters* II: 57). With time, her reverence for both her biological and her spiritual father grew.

As Jeffrey Steele has shown, in May 1839 Fuller continued her project of refashioning Biblical history, integrating ideas from the Egyptian history that she was then studying ("'A Tale" 96-97). Steele argues that Fuller's 1839 "A Tale of Mizraim" contains "quintessential Fuller" elements: negotiating between and integrating the masculine and the feminine, reconfiguring women's roles and positions, and questioning Jehovah's spiritual authority (97)—issues her marginalia show she was confronting as she read the Old Testament years before. Even then Fuller demonstrated her sensitivity to literary depictions of women. While she noted the "savage" laws relating to women (Deuteronomy 21:12-12), she also noted the occasional "very good" clause comparatively protective of women's rights (Deuteronomy 21:14). Marking Deuteronomy 28:56-57, she signified a passage derisive of "the tender and delicate woman," in fact a passage accusing such a woman of being "evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter." Contrary to the Victorian Angel of the House model preferred in her day, Fuller found and highlighted a passage demanding female strength and suggesting that any alternative would be a menace to the society. By the time Fuller composed "A Tale of Mizraim," her father had been dead for over three years and she had studied the New Testament with Jesus' redefined God.[35] These two factors helped Fuller "settle" her religious opinions, for she literally and figuratively discerned that she could express her beliefs and find no angry father waiting when she returned home. By 1840 Fuller comfortably integrated both the mystical *via negativa* language and *via positiva* language. Not only was God "unutterable," but also affectionate. In fact, she would call God her "only Father" (*Memoirs* I: 139-140, 142), suggesting the strength

of her bond with her spiritual orientation. In this sense she claimed power over all aspects of her life except its spiritual inception from the divine ground of being.

Fuller continued to explore religious rhetoric after she had found a productive space within her heritage. As Earle J. Coleman notes in his study *Creativity and Spirituality: Bonds Between Art and Religion*, "Religions may glean truths from each other and, just as importantly, rediscover the significance of truths within their own tradition" (6). Fuller now found new ways to integrate the Greek and Hebraic myths (such as in her West Street Conversations), and she explored religious texts with which she was previously unfamiliar. By early 1841, for instance, Fuller had studied Hinduism and had concluded that she preferred the Greek myths to the Hindu because they were more ordered and less luxuriant (Higginson 114).[36] Fuller frequently responded to theological texts in terms of literary merit, almost linking aesthetic merit with spiritual fervor.[37] For example, a year and a half later Fuller read the biography of the eighteenth-century American Quaker John Woolman and asserted that while some of Woolman's beliefs were "prompted by a deeper and wiser desire for purity" than "those of Messrs. Alcott and Lane," others were equally "puerile." Fuller's analysis continues beyond Woolman's character and to the rhetoric of Quakerism: "Quaker cant is even more disagreeable than any other cant, from its baldness, its want of various illusion" (Berg and Perry 65). The simple, unembellished style of these Quaker writings, the contained psychological tension of the Biblical narratives, and the effusive imaginative displays of the Vedantic tradition appealed to Fuller less than something she positioned in between the unadorned and the ornate linguistic creations:[38] the Greek myths.

Such a preference reflects the desire for balance that Fuller strove for in all aspects of her life. But also influential was her long association of her father's mentality with the Roman/Christian tradition and of her own mind with the Greek tradition (*Memoirs* I: 20-22). Not only was the Greek tradition an admirable balance between imagination and order, it also was filled with empowering roles for females: "in Greek Mythology, not only Beauty, Health and the Soul are represented under

feminine attributes, but the Muses, the inspirers of all genius, and the chaste Moon who reflects the rays of the god of the unerring bow, of poesy and light, nay Wisdom itself, tutelar deity of the polished Athenians, are feminine" (Hoffman 50). On multiple levels, then, throughout her lifetime Fuller readily identified with the Greek rendering of the spiritual in humanity. It was the "happy" side of the sacred (Berg and Perry 83): the vital, the creative aspect of being.

Fuller could imbue her own heritage with such energy, as can be demonstrated by one of her remarks during the summer of 1844, a time when Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson were commencing their detachment process. That July Fuller in her journal associated the Greek spirit with what she loved in Emerson. It was not his "beautiful, and full and grand. But oh, how cold" writings alone that induced Fuller to call Emerson the "fair Greek" (Berg and Perry 83). Emerson's ability to "ma[k]e the atmosphere serene and golden" with his "happy" presence largely inspired the playful tag (Berg and Perry 83). Several months later Fuller continued this analogy in her first *New-York Daily Tribune* article, which appeared on December 7, 1844. Reviewing Emerson's second series of essays, Fuller publicly compared Emerson to ancient Greek poets and legislators in that he served as a "shepherd of the people," "trying to draw up [toward "the one God only, the God of Truth"] with him those less gifted by nature" ("Emerson's Essays" 1). Approximately two months later, in her February 22, 1845, *Tribune* article on the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane, Fuller again conflated the philosophies of ancient Greece, Christianity, and nineteenth-century America: she attested to witnessing examples of "the miraculous power of Love" that Christ demonstrated, praised the "self-renovating character" of the Greeks, and argued that "we are all Greeks, if we will but think so" ("St. Valentine's Day" 1).

Fuller's tendency to cull agreeable components from multiple belief systems should not suggest that she unequivocally embraced any one system of thought. As far as Greek conceptions of God were concerned, Fuller felt that Socrates and his followers were the only ones to offer any "just, pure, and sublime conceptions of a Deity" (qtd. in Capper *Margaret Fuller* 233). Of writings by this group of Greeks she

noted, “I feel as if only returning to my native mountain air while with these philosophers and cannot be quite enough of a disciple” (*Letters* II: 40). Her appreciation for the sense of vitality that she felt upon exposure to Greek myths, however, did not cause her to reject completely her—at times—less satisfactory roots. It inspired her to enact her own myth-making.

In the midst of studying different religious traditions and comparing and contrasting those religions with religion as she came to know it in America, Fuller reached a point where she felt secure returning to the abstract spiritual stance that she had articulated the winter of 1829-1830. She wrote in her 1842 journal:

> I will bear the pain of imperfection, but not of doubt. . . . Let others choose their way, I feel that mine is . . . to see, to think, a faithful sceptic, to reject nothing but accept nothing till it is affirmed in the due order of mine own nature. I belong no-where. I have pledged myself to nothing. God and the soul and nature are all my creed, subdivisions are unimportant. (Myerson 329, 336)

In her Credo composed that same year, Fuller asserted that she thought everything in the Old and the New Testaments “really happened” but that “it [was] of no consequence to [her] whether it did or not, that the ideal truth such illustrations present[ed] to [her], [was] enough” (Braun 253), and—following the lead of William Ellery Channing, the elder who “demanded of all he met . . . ‘great truths’” (Fuller *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* 66)—she argued that all religions are expressions of the same Great Spirit (qtd. in Braun 252-254).

Later writings demonstrate that Fuller lived according to her Credo, continually distilling wisdom from foreign religious traditions she encountered and her own Judeo-Christian heritage. For instance, in *Summer on the Lakes* Fuller writes that “The Indian is steady to that simple creed, which forms the basis of all this mythology; that there is a God, and a life beyond this; a right and wrong which each man can see, betwixt which each man should choose; that good brings with it its reward and vice its punishment” (196). Likewise, in *Woman in the Nineteenth*

Century she argues that the Native American Indian, the "Hindoo," and the American "meet, as children of one Father, to read together one book of instruction" (50). When in January 1845 Fuller reviewed a book on Native Americans, she called the "Indian . . . pre-eminently a religious being" whose devotion to and trust in the "Great Spirit . . . would have been pleasing and intelligibly grand to the Jewish lawgiver" ("*Oneota, or the Red Race of America*" 1). The expectations of the Native American and nineteenth-century American deity merge with the ideas of devotion and trust. Addressing the slavery issue in a different *New-York Daily Tribune* article appearing that same January, Fuller again made reconciliatory efforts that intersected different races and religious narratives:

> And ye, sable hands, forced hither against your will, kept down here now by a force hateful to nature, a will alien from God; it does sometimes seem as if the Avenging Angel wore your hue and would place in your hands the sword to punish the cruel injustice of our fathers, the selfish perversity of the sons. Yet, are there no means of atonement? Must the innocent suffer with the guilty? Teach us, oh All-Wise: the clue out of this labyrinth, and if we faithfully encounter its darkness and dread, and emerge into clear light, wilt Thou not bid us "go and sin no more?" ("New Year's Day" 1)

Fuller here moves from her previous discomfort with God making "the innocent suffer with the guilty," the sons suffer for their fathers, to a recognition of the opportunity for new beginnings promised in John 8:1-11, the New Testament parable alluded to with "go and sin no more." Fuller's passage calls for racial and spiritual at/one/ment.

Given Fuller's positions that all religions express the same spirit and that atonement is a possibility, much less given Fuller's other well-known reformatory positions and independent acts, it might seem surprising that in her early-1830s Old Testament explorations Fuller would comment on socially-imposed limitations to individuals' forms of worship—even to the point of killing those propagating aberrant beliefs—as a "wise but savage" edict (Deuteronomy 13:3-13). But there is a

philosophical conservatism underlying even her most radical religious positions: Fuller unfalteringly believed in a God, unwaveringly rejected complete skepticism on this topic (Higginson 47-48). The anti-Catholicism that Fuller embraced toward the end of her life exemplifies the same kind of conservatism, or an unwillingness to maintain an open-minded position toward a system that she felt was threatening the most basic components in the architecture of her entire belief system. Fuller's movement toward reconciling all religions paralleled her movement toward accepting and working in and through the culture to which she was confined.[39] Her rhetoric reveals common mystical impulses: to see unity and to foster a sense of community.

Fuller eventually distinguished between emotional distance and imaginative distance, and even her "exegesis" required what John Keats called "negative capability":

> It is even more rare to meet a great Critic than a great Poet. True criticism . . . supposes a range and equipose of faculties, a generosity of soul which have as yet rarely combined in any one person. The great Critic is not merely surveyor, but the interpreter of what other minds possess; he must have a standard of excellence, founded on prescience of what man is capable of; he must have, no less, a refined imagination and quick sympathies to enter into each work in its own kind, examine it by its own law, so that he may understand how certain faults are interwoven . . . ; he must have a cultivated taste, a calm, large, and deep judgment, and a heart to love everything that is good, in proportion to its goodness. ("*Conversations on Some of the Old Poets*" 1)

A few days later Fuller further developed this idea in an article on "French Novelists of the Day": "To read . . . any foreign works fairly, the reader must understand the national circumstances under which they were written. To use them worthily, he must know how to interpret them for the use of the Universe" (1). Loving the "goodness" in Judeo-Christianity and interpreting it for the benefit of herself and "the Universe"

required attempting to reconstruct the meaning of narrative in its own historical moment as well as attempting to apply the narrative to the contemporary historical moment. Fuller's marginalia in her Eyre and Strahan Bible mark the beginning of her lifelong negotiation between a receptivity to and a renunciation of her culture; they show us the critical method Fuller perhaps originally adopted inadvertently but increasingly valued, for Fuller used this method in creating mystically-imbued performances that contributed to American religious culture.

Though creative and subversive in many ways, Fuller also preserved and guarded ideas fundamental to her way of undergoing life, ideas such as the existence of God, the efficacy of democracy, and the inevitability of progress. Weaving together strands within her own religious heritage—the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Puritan America—Fuller in 1845 asserted that "the ark of human hopes has been placed for the present in our [nineteenth-century Americans'] charge. Wo be to those who betray this trust! On their heads are to be heaped the curses of unnumbered ages!" ("New Year's Day" 1). The covenant with God represented by the ark,[40] the generations of curses—these were part of the Old Testament, which often motivated morality through fear. The hope of the people, the trust of God—these were the Old and New Testaments, the Puritan theology, the inheritance of nineteenth-century New Englanders, which increasingly focused on possibilities. Fuller's unorthodoxy, her marginal positions converged with her distant and contemporary cultures.

In effect, Fuller's marginalia in the 1826 Eyre and Strahan Bible, her conversations with a literary document vital to her heritage, illuminate a developmental stage in Fuller's life: they show her attempt to understand the dominant religion of her culture from a critical and a mystical perspective. As she reads, she acknowledges her doubts, studies the sources of those doubts, and controls the abiding ambiguities through the medium of language. By balancing the analytical and the mystical, the labor and the love, as she worked with her Bible Fuller eliminated some of her fears and hesitancies; she made the unknown more her own. The vestiges of Fuller's conversation with her 1835 Eyre and Strahan Bible illustrate

her early interest in religion and her life-long commitment to engage it critically and creatively.

Notes

[1] Between the Revolutionary War and 1830, national leaders advocated educating girls, the future “mothers of future citizens” (Kaestle and Vinovskis 25). In training his daughter Margaret, Timothy Fuller embraced this idea. And other three- and many four-year-olds attended school (Kaestle and Vinovskis 55). Still, both Timothy Fuller’s training and Margaret Fuller’s abilities were exceptional.

[2] In a letter to William Henry Channing in October 1840, Fuller says she plans to “preach . . . mysticism” (*Letters* II: 173).

[3] The transmission history of this Bible immediately after it was Margaret Fuller’s to the present is as follows: Arthur Buckminster Fuller [Elizabeth Godfrey Davenport/Emma Lucilla Reeves] —> Arthur Ossoli Fuller [Ellen Minot; Arthur lawyer in Exeter, NH] —> Constance Fuller Howes [Paul Howes; husband and wife architects] —> Ruth Ellen Rowntree [Ken], who granted permission to publish the marginalia. I have not included the transcriptions and photographs of the marginalia.

[4] Fuller’s marginal responses to patriarchal oppression appear by Deuteronomy 5:8-9, 7:20, 8:3-5, 13:3; her responses to universal compassion emerge beside Deuteronomy 4:41-43, 10:19, 14:21, 15:2-3, 15:9-10, 22:4, 23:7; and she marks issues concerning women’s roles at Deuteronomy 21:13-17, 28:56-57.

[5] This information comes from the inscription on a front endpage.

[6] The Bible has a standard trade binding from the time; the full calf binding

was executed for the British and Foreign Bible Society. A "Newfoundland & British North America School Society 1823" stamp appears on the title page. The British and Foreign Bible Society was established in 1804 in order "to promote, in the largest practicable extent, the circulation of the Holy Scriptures both at home and abroad"; the Bibles were all the authorized King James version "without note or comment" (British and Foreign Bible Society 7-8). Bible distribution societies in New England combined in 1816, forming the American Bible Society based upon British models but imbued with the American ideology of leading the world to spiritual glory (Abzug 39-40). The Bible Societies in America included one at Philadelphia that distributed Bibles in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware; two in New York; and one in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and the District of Maine (British and Foreign Bible Society 14-15). See also "History of the Bible Society." The Newfoundland School Society until 1850 was the common name of the American Society for the Education of the Poor ("Sources for Tracing Clergy and Laypersons at Guildhall Library"). This society was based upon the early work of Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838), who established schools for the poor children in London. By 1814 Lancaster had lost favor with some patrons because of his poor fiscal management, his omission of Anglican instruction, and his rumored floggings of his apprentices; as a result, the Lancasterian Institution was renamed the British and Foreign School Society ("About Joseph Lancaster"). In 1823 Samuel Codner, an Englishman living in the British colony Newfoundland, met with Evangelicals in London and received their support for establishing a program of Bible education for poor people in his region (Underwood 22-23). Neither Fuller nor her father seem to have had any direct connection with the North American School Society. However, years later in her *New-York Daily Tribune* articles Fuller would promote intellectual and moral instruction for the laboring classes—one of the primary concerns of the North American School Society—demonstrating how she embraced from her cultural

heritage the belief that the human race, with the help of Godly servants, was advancing toward greater morality and intellectual capability. Moreover, while Fuller worked for the *Tribune*, she would be familiar with debates such as that displayed on February 14, 1845, in "The Two Bible Societies", wherein the American Bible Society denied the Baptist Bible Society's allegations that it desired to have a monopoly on the public distribution of copies of the scriptures (1).

[7] Daniel Walker Howe argues that manners and politeness along with voluntary religious practices became the mark of personal empowerment for nineteenth-century middle-class culture, men and women (271-274).

[8] Ever since Thomas Wentworth Higginson's 1884 biography *Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, Fuller studies often have emphasized differences between the Boston-Concord and the post-Boston-Concord Fuller, linking the geographic move with a mental move toward cultural consciousness (For example, see Bell Gale Chevigny, "Daughters Writing: Toward a Theory of Women's Biography" and "Growing Out of New England: The Emergence of Margaret Fuller's Radicalism"; Larry Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith, ed., introduction, "*These Sad But Glorious Days"*). Indisputably, Fuller's cultural consciousness expands along with her relocation; however, her philosophical and socio-political inclinations do emerge here as she begins to question the religious ideologies that permeate nineteenth-century American culture. For discussions of American religion specifically, see Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*; Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion*; John J. McDermott, *Streams of Experience*; and Harold Bloom, *The American Religion*. For discussions of Western religious beliefs and practices, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*; and Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*.

[9] Fuller had heard yet another uninspiring sermon upon attending church to obey her father; walking after church by the Charles River on her Uncle Abraham's

property, Fuller experienced a sense of holiness foreign to her church-going moments (Stern 45; "Self Definitions" 10). As Fuller explains in her 1840 journal, "I almost always suffered much in church from a feeling of disunion with the hearers and dissent from the preacher" ("Self Definitions" 10). Here also note the distinctions and parallels between "religion," a group practice or a "Cultus" (*Letters* VI: 97), and "spirituality," an individual practice. Likewise, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller qualifies religion as "the thirst for truth and good, not the love of sect and dogma" (101). Later Fuller would explain, "I am myself most happy in my lonely Sundays, and do not feel the need of any social worship, as I have not for several years, which I have passed in the same way. Sunday is to me priceless as a day of peace and solitary reflection. . . . The stillness permits me to hear a pure tone from the One in All. But often I am not alone. The many now, whose hearts, panting for truth and love, have been made known to me . . . are with me . . . in spirit" (*Letters* VI: 97-98). Emily Dickinson later echoes these sentiments.

[10] Fuller in her 1840 journal says this experience occurred in the spring in Groton. Since the Fullers moved to Groton in the spring of 1833 and in the summer of 1833 she notes two moments of rapture (*Letters* I: 185), this experience likely took place that year. Robert Hudspeth notes the date of the earlier religious experience as 1831 (*Letters* I: 186, note 2), and this is the experience that Fuller repeatedly suggests as her "chastest, heavenliest" (*Letters* I: 347). As the first experience emerged with Fuller's displeasure, so did the second: "For bitter months a treble weight had been pressing on me; the weight of deceived friendship, domestic discontent, and bootless love. I could not be much alone; a great burden of family cares pressed upon me; I was in the midst of society, and obliged to act my part there as well as I could" (*Letters* I: 347). To highlight the 1831 and 1833 experiences, however, does not discount the significance of other similar moments. Madeline B. Stern describes a nature experience Fuller has while attending the Misses Prescotts' school in Groton

during spring of 1824 or 1825; the experience accords with other spiritually-imbued, mystical passages Fuller describes in her journals, her correspondence, and her published writings such as her allegorical flower sketches (26-7, 36). Fuller's use of light and nature imagery, her sense of unification, and her longing for death also fit Kristeva's descriptions throughout *Powers of Horror* of abject experiences as a point where the life and death drives co-mingle.

[11] In theology, *unitive* means having the quality of uniting spiritually to the Deity; the *unitive life* or *unitive way* refers to the stage of spiritual advancement in which the mystic's contemplation manifests itself in everyday actions.

[12] Fuller does not specifically name the Deists with whom she was interacting.

[13] Nicole Tonkovich writes that Fuller's "use of others' words was to recombine them into a new and coherent discourse, effecting their transmutation into a kind of 'literature.' Such a practice also ensured that she would not be censored for exceeding womanly commentary because her words were self-evidently not her own; she 'merely' quoted others" (*Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catharine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller*. [Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997. 120]). Tonkovich praises Fuller's subversive nature and reconstructive use of language, but it is unlikely that Fuller would or could cloak the power of her own mind to the degree suggested here. Though Fuller might integrate others' words to a certain extent to deflect attention from the radical nature of her message or from the fact that in this case a woman was the messenger, she also re-presented earlier discourses to show the individual's creative potential.

[14] For example, Fuller will tell her students at the Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island, that they should "let nothing pass from [them] in reading or conversation, that [they] do not understand, without trying to find out" (Fergenson 83). Similarly, she will encourage attendees at her 1840 West Street Conversations to sacrifice some of their happiness in order to develop their "higher faculties" of

thought (Simmons "Margaret" 218). In contrast, Fuller will surprise Mrs. H. Ware in 1844 by advising her to be moderate in her "wilful education" (Berg and Perry 94). Similarly, in an 1848 dispatch for the *New-York Daily Tribune*, Fuller will criticize the excessive intellectual focus of German scholars (*"These Sad But Glorious Days"* 177).

[15] I use "authority" to emphasize an argument that Richard Grenier presents throughout *Capturing the Culture*: authors influence the creation of a culture and simultaneously gain authority from their consumers. Whether conscious or subconscious, this recognition of rhetorical power is relevant to Margaret Fuller on multiple levels, but certainly in terms of her public expressions of her mystical consciousness. A number of the arguments throughout this study will note the tenable and untenable authority that accompanies the authorship of those claiming to have had a mystical experience.

[16] Examples of Timothy Fuller's position abound, but a commonly known one would be his forbidding Fuller to read certain books on Sundays (*Memoirs* I: 30-37). See also the previously cited reference: Fuller MSS and Works, Houghton Library, Harvard University, V, 13 (qtd. in Capper *Margaret Fuller* 73).

[17] Granted, Arthur Fuller uses one "t" for his mother's name in the appendix following volume one of the *Memoirs*. Possible explanations for this include spellings being less standardized at that time than they are now and printing errors being just as common then as they are now. A more suggestive reading might explore whether Arthur was projecting his sister onto his mother as Margaret was in some ways a mother figure for her siblings. Since my position rests on the issue of "t"s, such spelling anomalies certainly must be taken into account. However, regardless of such an anomaly, the dialogues between Fuller and her father remain. Knowing how exacting Timothy Fuller, Jr., was and how sensitive Margaret Fuller was and, in addition, having evidence of Fuller's repeated requests for a change from her father

regarding her name and evidence of his repeated refusal to notice or to acquiesce to her requests, it is reasonable to call attention to underlying tensions within these dynamics. The issue was so important to Fuller that she may have interpreted her father's responses as a refusal on his part to recognize and respect her autonomy and creativity.

[18] Freudian criticism would emphasize the Oedipal tensions here. Without discounting such interpretations, this study primarily points out the name debate to illustrate the multiple levels upon which Fuller was concurrently negotiating with her heritage and struggling for autonomy in a rather prescriptive environment and with a largely pre-scripted role.

[19] Margaret Fuller discusses this topic in letters beginning January 16, 1820. Through 1825 she signs her letters "Sarah Margaret Fuller." See *Letters* I : 94-95, 101-102. For excerpts from Timothy's letters, see Capper *Margaret Fuller* 23-49.

[20] Emily Dickinson reaches the same conclusions a few years later. For Fuller, this will change. A year and a half later—August 1836—Fuller writes her sister Ellen, "You must, my sister, pray to our Heavenly Father to strengthen you to rise above the opinion of this world as far as vanity is concerned and only regard it from motives of kindness and modesty. . . . From this source I get the little strength I have and the same will be given you if you seek it" (*Letters* I: 258). She likewise will write William H. Channing that when people—herself included—are "without any positive form of religion, any unattractive symbols, or mysterious rites, we are in the less danger of stopping at surfaces, of accepting a mediator instead of the Father, a sacrament instead of the Holy Ghost" (*Letters* VI: 97). She will repeatedly iterate her willingness to rely on God as a father and suggest that others do the same (For examples, see *Letters* I: 348; II: 176, 192, 237; III: 55; IV: 52, 77, 82, 90, 174, 180; VI: 97, 150; also see Habich 285; see Fuller's Feburary 6, 1846, *New-York Daily Tribune* article "The Rich Man—An Ideal Sketch"; and, see Fuller's February 19, 1848, *New-*

York Daily Tribune article in *"These Sad But Glorious Days"* 184.).

[21] In *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, Carolyn Dinshaw shows how "Jerome, author of the notoriously antifeminist *Adversus Jovinianum*," glorifies and spiritualizes the sexual abuse of the captive woman in Deuteronomy 21:10-13, the passage that Fuller finds so "savage." Jerome argues for conversion through violence: the shaving, scrubbing, and raping of the captive foreign woman (Dinshaw 22-23). Whereas many in the Christian tradition attempt to convert non-believers through intimidation and coercion, Fuller attempts to provide others with the knowledge and skills to move toward a deeper conversion experience, if they so choose. The approach represented by Jerome forces conformity; the approach represented by Fuller inspires charity.

[22] Michael Lieb explains, "Because of the theological implications that such an idea entails, the adoption of this outlook runs the risk of subjecting one to charges of being guilty of something like interpretive heresy. Such is particularly true considering that the basis of the visionary delineated here is that category of otherness called 'God.' The source of interpretation, after all, is the *visio Dei*, or at least the text in which that vision is portrayed. If one arrogates to oneself an authority tantamount to that medium through whom the vision is originally transmitted, such an act bestows upon the hermeneut a status as authoritative as the one who enunciated the *visio Dei* in the first place. Dealing in sacred matters and appropriating them to his own use, the interpreter becomes heretic, one whose understanding of the visionary causes the event to assume a form potentially at odds with those who devised laws determining the propriety or impropriety of coming to terms with its original conception"(8-9).

[23] In August 1832, Fuller says she thought she was independent because she could conceal her emotions (*Letters* I: 178).

[24] Fuller's hesitancy is not unlike that of other female mystics—where there is temporal space between a shift in spiritual consciousness and the creation of a communicable belief system based upon the consciousness-altering event. Julian of

Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen, for example, each wait forty years before writing about their visions. See Julian of Norwich, *Showings* and Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*.

[25] See, for example, Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of the Patriarchy*; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*; and Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*.

[26] This article appeared without Fuller's signature star. Its position in the upper left side of the front page, its topic of literature and especially German literature, and its message all suggest that it is one of a number of unmarked articles Fuller composed. Catharine C. Mitchell asserts that some of Fuller's articles lacked her star (39). And Judith Bean, who is working with Joel Myerson on a collection of Fuller's pre-European *Tribune* articles, wrote me on August 13, 1998, that she has found evidence to prove Fuller authored an unsigned review of the novel *Dolores* that appeared in the *Tribune* on April 25, 1846. As of yet Bean has not been able to prove Fuller wrote this article, but she agrees that unlike with other articles that she was misled by in terms of style and political point of view to eventually find that they were composed by Horace Greeley, such is not this case in with this article or a number of others. Should the article have been composed by Greeley or some other journalist, it nonetheless accords with and complements Fuller's position.

[27] Fuller's "A Short Essay on Critics," which first appeared on the front page of the 22 August 1845 *New-York Daily Tribune*, argues that the critic is influenced by his or her nation, church, and family. And, indeed, we certainly see the influence of her father's training once again as the analytical Fuller emerges.

[28] For instance, on January 1, 1845, Fuller wrote in her "New Year's Day" article for the *New-York Daily Tribune* that "we cannot lightly be discouraged as to the destiny of our Country. The whole history of its discovery and early progress indicates too clearly the purposes of Heaven with, regard to it. . . . in carrying out the

Divine Scheme, . . . we have as yet only spelt out the few first lines" (1).

[29] Fuller in poetry and correspondence composed around 1840 compares herself to the Virgin Mary (See Jeffrey Steele, "Freeing the 'Prisoned Queen'"; *Letters* II: 167-169, 175.); while in Italy in the late 1840s, she visits Catholic chapels (*"These Sad But Glorious Days"* 141, 170), admits a preference to Vespers over sermons (*"These Sad But Glorious Days"* 185), takes a Catholic lover, and initially hopes that Pope Pius IX will help the Italians unite and compares young Italian men to Jesus' disciples (*"These Sad But Glorious Days"* 98-99). However, overall she shares the prevailing American mistrust of "priestcraft" and monastic seclusion and asserts that art and religion are "dead" in Rome (*"These Sad But Glorious Days"* 156, 179-180, 187, 205; *Letters* V: 49, 72, 73, 93, 100, 102, 146, 152, 154, 158; *Letters* VI: 97; see also Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome*.).

[30] Fuller's spelling for *pathetic*, which she defined as "moving."

[31] Throughout *Creativity and Spirituality: Bonds Between Art and Religion,* Earle J. Coleman shows art's ability to give voice to an individual's religious or spiritual perspective and mystics' efforts to harmonize disparate entities through their art forms. Fuller's tales serve as an excellent example of her early attempts to voice her mystical consciousness.

[32] This action corresponds with sentiments such as those Fuller had heard expressed at the 1829 Harvard commencement ceremonies when George Phillips delivered his essay "Incorporating Historical Truth with Fiction" and with the general Transcendentalist/Romantic notion of writing one's own Bible (Stern 39), which came to be a typically American ideology of not wanting to depend on the past but wanting to take the Bible and build it again (Hatch Recurring Populace Impulse).

[33] Relevant here is Sacvan Bercovitch's notion that a dominant force in America is the "ritual of consensus."

[34] Fuller read this at Coliseum meetings in Providence, Rhode Island, on April

11, 1838; her essay was one of those on the current discussion topic: the progress of society.

[35] In March 1836 Fuller commences her New Testament studies and vows to not only think about religion but to serve God (Capper *Margaret Fuller* 164).

[36] When she was seventeen, Fuller had read *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness* (1820) by Rammodhun Roy, a Hindu who had converted to Christianity (*Letters* I: 155-156). That was probably one of her first exposures to Hinduism as an alternative belief system to Christianity. According to Caroline Wells Healey Dall, Fuller opened her spring 1841 West Street Conversations on mythology with the idea that the Greeks "borrowed their Gods from the Hindus and Egyptians, but they idealized their personifications to a far greater extent" (25); Fuller also refers to the Persian trinity fables in this Conversation series (Dall 155). In terms of Fuller's exposure to alternative religions, evidence suggests that Fuller did not study Confucianism until November 1844 (*Letters* III: 240, 248).

[37] After his twenty-five year career of studying the relationship between religion and art, Coleman concludes that cultures tend to believe that "enfeebled art" reflects "debilitated religion" (xix).

[38] See Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar."

[39] In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller paraphrases Goethe's idea that "A man can grow in any place, if he will" (74). And in a letter to James Freeman Clarke in 1833, she writes that she is reading Goethe and "he would show [her] how to rule circumstances instead of being ruled by them" (*Letters* VI: 212).

[40] For Biblical references to the ark, see Genesis, chapters 6-9; Exodus, chapters 2-10, 25-40; Numbers, chapters 3-14; Deuteronomy, chapters 10, 31; Joshua, chapters 3-4, 6-8; Judges 20:27, 1 Samuel, chapters 3-6, 14; 2 Samuel, chapters 6-7, 11, 15; 1 Kings, chapter 8.