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MARGARET FULLER AND EDUCATION: BETWEEN HISTORY AND AESTHETICS

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ABSTRACT
This essay examines the significance of historical knowledge in the context of Margaret Fuller's educational proposals, especially in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Starting from the idea that the idea of knowing history, especially during the Romantic generation in the US but also in Europe, is based on a relentless process of idealization of its main figures, I want to demonstrate that in Fuller's case this method is radicalized. So much so that Fuller literally reinvents certain historical processes and subjects (especially in the case of the Spanish *Exaltados*, as I analyze towards the end of the essay) in order to turn them into "useful" elements for her educational project and make them meaningful for her vision of female emancipation.
RESUMEN
Este trabajo explora la relevancia del conocimiento histórico dentro del contexto de la obra de Margaret Fuller y de sus propuestas educativas, en especial en *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Partiendo de la base de que el conocimiento histórico, al menos en la generación romántica de Estados Unidos, aunque también en Europa, viene mediatizado por una constante idealización de sus figuras, queremos demostrar que en el caso de Fuller este proceso se lleva al extremo. Hasta el punto es así que la autora llega a reinventar literalmente determinados elementos y sujetos históricos (sobre todo en el caso de los Exaltados españoles, como se explica al final del ensayo) con el propósito de ponerlos al servicio de sus

ideales educativos y así hacerlos "útiles" para su proyecto de emancipación femenina.

I

In her famous Boston conversations, a series of educational meetings held in the late 1830s, Margaret Fuller is reported by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody to have declared that Poesy is "the ground of [. . .] the true art of life; it being not merely truth, not merely good, but the beauty which integrates both" (Emerson et al. 1:342). This is a typically Romantic claim, to be sure, similar to Thoreau's when he said in *Walden* that "to affect the quality of the day [. . .] is the highest of arts" (90), an idea that can also be found in thinkers and poets as diverse as Wordsworth, Schiller, Goethe and Emerson, among many others. To "affect the quality of the day," in the sense of transforming human private and public life, was in fact one of the underlying tenets of Romantic philosophy and politics, even the more so at a time when—both in Europe and the United States—social and political conflicts were abundant and pressing. The possibility of regarding one's personal life as a beautiful object that can be shaped, refined and continually renovated remains one of the aesthetic and ethical principles of Romanticism. In this sense, Romantic art tends to dramatize and reveal modes of thinking and feeling beyond the private world, modes intended to transcend the artist's own personal impulses and take on a communitarian, if not universal, dimension. Art, and poetry in particular, serves as a mediator between these two spheres, private and public, and it does so mainly by recreating imaginatively situations that demand a certain degree of responsiveness from the audience.

The romantic idea of the aesthetic is not a merely generic or disciplinary one. For many romantics, the aesthetic is more than just an "experience." Many eighteenth century philosophers and art theorists had defined the aesthetic in terms of its special (but mechanical) nature and, more importantly, in terms of its separation from other, more "ordinary" experiences. The imagination was the only human faculty that could perceive and appreciate an aesthetic experience. However, the romantics expanded the meaning and range of this concept far beyond that of an enjoyable occurrence. Whether in poetry, literary theory or philosophical writing, there is a

strong interest in Romantic culture to elevate the very idea of the aesthetic to the rank of a general mode of perception, not only an experience among others. Consequently, the imagination becomes a human power rather than a faculty subordinated to reason. This transformation gives rise to what I call the "aesthetic vision," by which I mean the idea that it is only through imagined scenarios and actions that human beings can envision their idealized selves (see Engell). These ideal selves symbolize the harmony of the human faculties (reason, imagination, judgment, etc.) and are the basis of any just society. This is, of course, a Neoplatonic belief. Emerson, Fuller, Schiller and others argued that this is the "natural" state of humanity, the moment when it is still uncorrupted by prejudice and superstition, and it is best represented by Greek culture. The aesthetic vision is the only human power capable of envisioning and revealing such harmony for us. In that sense, it is a symbol-making process.

The best example of this vision can be found in the work of Friedrich Schiller, a poet and thinker whose writings American such as Emerson and Fuller knew well and helped to disseminate. In his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* Schiller argues that only through self-culture and education can human beings attempt to achieve freedom and, as a consequence, social justice. Freedom and reason, he claims, are the foundation of a balanced and egalitarian individual and social life. In particular, reason has the power of "transforming the work of blind compulsion into a work of free choice, and of elevating physical necessity into moral necessity" (Schiller 10). In more abstract terms, once this work has been accomplished an ideal self should be revealed that exists in every human being and is the basis of a harmonious existence. A person's task is therefore to remain, "through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal" (Schiller 17). This ideal self can come into view in different ways, but Schiller argues that it is through art that we can best contemplate and scrutinize it, since artists can more easily get rid of the material necessities of existence and work on abstract models of personhood. Artworks, like science, "rejoice in absolute immunity from human arbitrariness" and thereby must aspire to "produce the Ideal out of the union of what is possible with what is necessary" (Schiller 55, 57). Or, as he said in his poem "The Artists" (which Fuller used as an epigram to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*), humanities progresses "through Beauty, to the land where Knowledge lies" (Schiller, *Poems*

286). This ideal of wisdom through art (or aesthetic vision, as I call it) becomes a moral model that transcends time and place, since it unites what is necessary to do, on the one hand, with what we can actually do, on the other hand, thereby confronting what is vital to achieve with what we can actually attain. In other words, it is a way of knowing and articulating the range of human possibilities starting from its necessities. The ideal shows the path of change and reform by presenting images of what human beings can become.

The idealization of the self is not, therefore, an end in itself, a beautiful construction to be contemplated passively, but rather a means to achieve social harmony and moral growth. Richard Eldridge has usefully described this romantic use of the imagination in the following terms: "It is creative-responsive imagination that both finds habitations for mindedness within natural reality and envisions further ideal habitations in the face of present disappointments" (Eldridge 3). Natural reality was not the only preoccupation for the romantic generations, of course. This same description can be applied to other concerns of that time. Even if we replace nature with social and political reality, Eldridge's description works as a portrait of the spirit of reform so characteristic of the Romantic nineteenth century. And more importantly, it also serves to reveal the most practical application of the romantic aesthetic vision: instead of such topics as the landscape or the integration of human life in nature, the imagination is made responsive by such issues as racial inequality or class struggles.

Schiller's theory was especially appealing for American artists and philosophers, since the sociopolitical situation was perhaps even more challenging than it was in Europe. Margaret Fuller was among those who followed Schiller closely, especially in applying his ideas about the value of education for the participation of women in the reality of the country. Fuller was not alone in this particular, gender-oriented reception of Schiller. In a tone also reminiscent of the German writer, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody claimed in the introduction to her edited collection *Aesthetic Papers* that "the 'aesthetic element' . . . [is] a component and indivisible part in all human creations which are not mere works of necessity; in other words, which are based on idea, as distinguished from appetite" (Peabody 1). Using a literary metaphor to comment on the different natures of man and woman, Madame de Staël argued that "women endeavour to set themselves out like a romance; men like a history" (3:235).

Underlying this attempt at self-cultivation through art are two main ideas. On the one hand, as I have pointed out, that the cultivation of a beautiful self is not only a private effort at perfectionism but also a means of achieving the same effect at a public level; on the other hand, that beauty necessarily leads to freedom and moral virtue. This redemptive purpose was shared by most romantics, including Fuller, even though it was not without its contradictions and limitations. The contrast between the ideal and the real was many times taken to be an obstacle rather than a stimulus for improvement—an obstacle that was sometimes accepted by women themselves as a natural cause for their public invisibility. In fact, the constraints of reality were, especially for women in nineteenth-century American culture, imposed by a set of beliefs which often included a male-dominated ideology, a religious inflexibility disguised as "holiness," and sometimes women's own complicity with their accepted role as central pillars of the domestic world. One way to find a way out of that contradiction, one that Margaret Fuller assumed as her personal and public project, was to instruct women and make them aware of their potential as members of the community, beyond the walls in which they lived. Usually restricted to housekeeping, Fuller attempted to enlarge women's education so that it would embrace intellectual disciplines such as art, history, mythology, or philosophy. Art, and what I have called the "aesthetic vision," was particularly important for Fuller, since it provided women with an idea of their practical potential for social progress. The ultimate objective of this aesthetic education was both personal and social; or in Tiffany Wayne's words, "to free the very idea of 'Woman' from public discourse and popular culture by encouraging women to pursue diverse individualized *selves*, including pursuit of what each determined as her true vocation in life" (Wayne 81).

It is important here to distinguish between the "theoretical" ideas of history of Emerson and Fuller. (I place the word between inverted commas because neither of them displayed any systematic thinking about the nature, function and ultimate objective of history.) Emerson former devoted a whole essay to the subject in his first series of *Essays*, in which he thought of history as a mediator between the one mind "common to all men" and he need to explain its progress "from individual experience" (Emerson, "History," 237). Historical discourse (although Emerson never uses that term) serves the purpose of explaining in specific examples the vast processes

that give rise to individual lives. "There is a relation between the hours of our life and the centuries of time," he says ("History" 237). The difference between the right and the wrong understanding of history lies in the "principle of association" that "neglects surface differences" ("History" 241-42). This entails that the didactic value of historical characters lies in our ability to identify with them and to construct our lives and our subjectivity by making use of the "sublime family likeness" ("History" 243) that allows us to emulate their examples. This is not far from Emerson's conception and use of biography, especially in later works such as *Representative Men* (1850), which is intended to offer models, whether ideal or fallible, of both personhood and humanity.

Fuller's idea of the use of history was based on the Emersonian idea of "the simplicity of cause" that entails a straightforward identification between the historical subject and the reading public. Although she has no "theory" of history, her vision approximates Emerson's in that it seeks the potential parallel between the reader and the historical figure. However, there is a main difference that has to do with Fuller's method of treating the use history. While Emerson sticks to the real facts of the historical figures so that the reader can know and interpret (and adapt) them to his/her particular life, Fuller first strips those figures off their actual historical meaning and replaces that with her own vision of them (see the example of the Spanish *Exaltados* at the end of this essay). In other words, Fuller offers as historically true what is only her interpretation of a particular figure or moment in history, thereby orienting the reader's interpretation away from their real historical value.

II

As Emerson had done in his earlier work, in her writings Margaret Fuller employed the same aesthetic vision that was supposed to integrate the beautiful and the moral. However, several differences in conception and method between them began to emerge in the late 1830s, so that by the early 1840s, when Fuller was already an established writer and a respected voice in New England culture, their ways of approaching social conflict had grown almost foreign to each other. As several critics have argued over the last decades, for most of his career Emerson remained within the realm of the

theoretical and the abstract, even though his philosophy had become more practical and naturalistic, a transformation that makes him more realistic (and less aestheticist) when it comes to questions of power and agency; Fuller, on the other hand, had realized that social change was achievable mainly, if not only, through active intervention. (As she could witness later in Europe, intervention sometimes meant revolution). A highly metaphorical but very explicit sentence from Emerson's early lecture "Man the Reformer" conveys this difference: "It is better to work on institutions by the sun than by the wind" (158-59). Instruction was healthier and more practical than violent revolution or abrupt change. Instead of the Platonic and illuminative ways of Emerson, Fuller chose education as a means to have a direct interaction with those who were being marginalized by the social system. She made use of the Emersonian view of art as essentially an individual achievement that finds its due recognition in a common humanity that the shares with the public in an innate (many times unconscious) way. However, she also intended to awaken that common humanity through practical examples.

It is not surprising that Fuller had a strong and extensive knowledge of art, philosophy and literature. Her limited public life, at least until the late 1830s, had kept her at home where her father's library—as well as her friendship with other writers and intellectuals of the time—provided her with a window to the world that was generally unavailable to most women. For Fuller, art was a way of contemplating the world, both present and past, and a means of envisioning the future. Early in her career she had urged her fellow citizens (both men and women) to "become creators." Otherwise, there would be "no need of an Inferno" (Fuller, *Essential* 12). To be sure, "creators" meant "self-creators." The influence of Emerson and Channing had convinced her that self-culture was the only way of achieving autonomy and to have access to public life. This is why Fuller founded her didactic project not only on providing women with an acquaintance with the arts, and from there into social and political issues, but also on conveying that project in the very terminology that aesthetic theory supplied. After claiming that "[Poesy is] the ground of [. . .] the true art of life" and that the natural progress of human beings lies in advancing "from objects to law, from the circumference of being [. . .] to the culture" (Emerson et al. 1:341), she goes on to say that

> this advance was enacted poesy. We could not, in our individual lives, amid the disturbing influences of other wills, which had as much right to their own action as we to ours, enact poetry entirely; the discordant, the inferior, the prose, would intrude, but we should always keep in mind that poetry of life was not something aside,—a path that might or might not be trod,—it was the only path of the true soul; and prose you may call the deviation. We might not always be poetic in life, but we might and should be poetic in our thought and intention. (Emerson et al. 1:341)

This passage expands on Fuller's classification of the human arts in a letter to Sarah Helen Whitman dated that same year, where she divided "the universe into Poesy, Philosophy, Prose," and then "Poesy (following Coleridge's classification) into Poetry, Music, Painting, Sculpture, architecture and the histrionic art" (Fuller, *Letters* 2:118-19). Poesy, what we may call the aesthetic element, is what makes life complete, integrating as it does the rational and the intellectual—the Prose and the Philosophy—under the appearance of a beautiful image. In fact, we can say that Fuller's educational project was to explain the Poesy of the world through the Prose of myth and philosophy, which were the basis of her didactic method. However, a major problem remained at this time. Even though she continued in the Emersonian spirit of the aesthetic vision, she could not envision its effects on public life. Fuller believed that the aesthetic vision is what—in spite of the discordance and tension among different wills and personalities—reunites and finds a common purpose for them. In other words, it is the achievement of unity amidst variety. However, such an idea was still an entelechy, with no major public consequences. Eloquence was for her the way in which this experience could be communicated, which is why she chose straightforward communication rather than theoretical thinking. Eloquence was, in her own words, "the power of forcing the vital currents of thousands of human hearts into one current" (Emerson et al. 1:125).

The famous 1844 letter where Fuller confesses to Emerson "You are intellect, I am life" (Fuller, *Letters* 3:209) makes this separation all the more evident. If women remained in the domain of thought and intention, as Emerson's thinking did in Fuller's view, when was the appropriate moment of action? Was there even such a moment? These questions became increasingly important as Fuller was devising her educational project, since social and gender

differences were becoming vital to her mission. It was at that time—in the late 1830s and early 1840s—when a clearer awareness of male-female differences in society was emerging in her thought and writing. Her 1841 story "Leila" is an early record of the tension between female creative potential and patriarchal domination. Rather than a short story, "Leila" is a description of the encounters between the writer, Fuller herself, and a fictional character of that name that represents an idealized model of femininity and independence from the constraints of social life, a woman who is "too deep a being to be known in smile or tear" (Fuller, *Essential* 55). This is the first of Fuller's major works to expose her gender awareness and articulate it, even if sometimes ambiguously, by means of aesthetic and mythical images—in other words, her first attempt to combine theory and practice in a conscious way. Leila appears as the incarnation of a madonna, a Christ-like figure "with wild hair scattered to the wind, bare and often bleeding feet," among men who scorn and despise her, men who label her mad "because they felt she made them so" (Fuller, *Essential* 54). Madness is here used as the barrier precluding comprehension and integration, a symbol of an inequality that actually exists. However, for all its gender awareness, the story lingers in the realm of the mythical rather than in the real world. Even Fuller's own attitude towards Leila appears as more metaphysical than practical: "When I cannot look upon her living form, I avail myself of the art magic. [. . .] I am a conjurer, for Leila is the vasty deep" (Fuller, *Essential* 54). The "vast deep," the "conjurer" and others are all evocative terms, but of scarce sociopolitical value. The myth of Leila in inspiring but has limitations as a *practical* example. In the story Fuller seems to remain within the Emersonian world of intellectual ideas and mythical references. No wonder why she rewrites the famous "transparent eyeball" passage from Emerson's *Nature* in order to describe Leila: "She *knows* all, and *is* nothing" (Fuller, *Essential* 54).

This does not mean that the use of myth was ineffective for Fuller's educational ideals. Quite the contrary, as Robert D. Richardson has argued, "she made the old myths immediate, useful, and educative because she always drew them out to illustrate traits of mind or spirit—in short, of character" (Richardson 172; see also Murray 140-41). The educational value of myths and art was never in question for Fuller. She used to resort to images and examples from the classical world and from mythology in order to illustrate how it was "symbolical of a deeper intellectual and aesthetic life that

we were wont to esteem it, when looking at it from a narrow religious point of view" (Emerson et al. 1:342; see also Lawrence). However, despite Fuller's profound religious beliefs, the modern world appeared to her as fragmented and human beings as disconnected from each other. True religion became for her the new mythology, even though it was far from the perfection of the Greeks. Early in her life she had confessed that she believed "in a God, a Beauty and Perfection to which I am to strive all my life for assimilation" (Fuller, *Letters* 1:159). Leila is that god, but she remains distant, almost inaccessible. "Only the Poet [. . .] can bear it [the impression of eternity she expresses] without falling into a kind of madness" (Fuller, *Essential* 54).

Neither Fuller's admiration towards mythology nor her own romantic-idealist representation of it can express social and gender conflicts between men and women in a clear way, at least not at this stage in her literary career. As an educational story, "Leila" was only intended to raise—through myth—a gender awareness that might lead to social change, but that intention was only partially achieved. Jeffrey Steele has recently claimed that through its "highly symbolic, 'mystical' style" the character of Leila "cannot be encompassed in any rational system that would reduce it to a commodified idea [. . .] Thus, connection with Leila is tantamount to being borne beyond definition" (Steele 90). This "being borne beyond definition" is what, in my view, precludes an important part of its cultural and social work, despite its unquestionable inspirational value. Even though Fuller extended the importance of myth to the public realm, as when she described Greek mythology as "a complete expression of the cultivation of a nation" (Emerson et al. 1:329-30), the story of Leila has a limited inspirational value because of its remoteness.

The ambiguous value of Leila is further confirmed by Fuller's own comments during her Boston conversations. Despite the prospects for social change provided (theoretically) by aesthetic representations, Fuller still doubted that such a liberating work could be carried out effectively in her time. No matter how righteous and poetic the ideas and intentions, in her Boston conversations she admitted that "we should seek to live as harmoniously with the great laws as our social and other duties permitted, and solace ourselves with poetry and the fine arts" (Emerson et al. 1:341), therefore granting more prominence to social law rather to personal intuition. As she would argue later, for women the experience of art had to be more than just a "solace." However, the figure of "Leila"—both as an

image and as a poem—seemed to be too restricted to provide a practical example of what liberation can mean.

Fuller's next published work, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*, showed the way to a more pragmatic vision of the social work of writing. Variously described as a travelogue, a semi-political narrative and a description of picturesque America, the book already exhibits some of the traits that will become central in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Even though the aim of the book seems to be mainly descriptive, it contains Fuller's first straightforward remarks against the social situation of women and natives in the nineteenth century. Interspersed with images of the mid-Western landscape are reflections on the ways of living of its inhabitants. While still admiring "the Being who was the architect of this and of all" and perceiving how "mutability and unchangeableness were united" (Fuller, *Essential* 77), her tone became more uncompromising as she witnessed the life conditions of others and realized how American society pushed some of its people to the limits of physical and social existence. However, Fuller still conceived of her work as analogous to that of the poet or the painter, who must seek the loveliness of virtue and whose descriptions work by "adding the beauty, and leaving out the dirt" (Fuller, *Essential* 86).

III

Woman in the Nineteenth Century is the culmination of Fuller's gendered aesthetization of art and politics and certainly her most accomplished didactic work, a tendency that would later consolidate in her articles and dispatches from New York and Europe. Here Fuller found a balanced correspondence between aesthetic images and their educational utility. Even though, as several critics have pointed out since its publication in 1845, the book may be irregular and sometimes disorganized in both its structure and style, its focus on the necessity and prospects of women's education is more clear and systematic than ever before. When shortly after Fuller's death John S. Hart called her work "more remarkable for strength and vigor of thought [. . .] than for the graces of style and action" (238), he was repeating a dangerous and harmful cliché: that because she was often more spontaneous than organized in her writings, the effectiveness of these is severely limited. However, as it happens with Emerson, there would be no "strength and vigor of thought" without

those images that proliferate, however randomly, throughout her works. Fuller's method is mainly associative. Her interest in the use of the aesthetic vision is always bound up with actual social and political objectives. As John Gatta maintains, Fuller moves from "images of the passionate seeker [. . .] toward icons of the enspirited woman celebrating her self-reliant yet associative identity" (34-35). The movement from image to icon is the result of the aesthetic vision. This movement, which is from the general to the individual, confirms that Fuller remained a Transcendentalist thinker throughout her career, even though her particular idealism underwent a change towards practical action when she moved to New York and after. David Robinson has rightly argued that Fuller's move to New York was "less a parting shot at the New England phase of her intellectual life than a culmination of much of her thought and activity as a transcendentalist" (84). This continuity has to do, among other things, with Fuller's recurrent use of myth and art as educational instruments.

As she had done earlier, Fuller employed in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* not only traditional images of Greek culture and mythology, but also the terminology of art theory. She repeats again the idea that only the artist—as opposed to the philosopher and the legislator—can create beauty and view women nobly, since only the former shares with women the "feminine principle" (Fuller, *Woman* 21, 101). And she also separates the spheres of male and female in terms of the preponderance of certain faculties or elements: man possesses energy, power and intellect; women possess harmony, beauty and love (Fuller, *Woman* 99). In this sense, the book reelaborates some of the capital principles of Fuller's thinking and vision, even though the general tone of admonition has made several critics describe it as a sermon rather than a political manifesto (Urbanski 134-35; Cole 238). But what is most important about the book is the way in which Fuller uses gender roles, how she transfigures characters into mythical figures and the tensions created between the real and the imagined woman.

The conventional vision of male and female spheres as separate in terms of their faculties implies, in the first place, the existence of feminine and masculine principles. This idea is a central one for Fuller already in her earlier works, which attempt to reveal the "ideal selves" of man and woman as a means of finding, even though theoretically, the ways in which they can complement and balance each other. Each one of the female figures in *Woman in the*

Nineteenth Century is taken to represent one particular trait of this female ideal self, that is, one of the characteristics or faculties on which women's identity is based. What is interesting is how Fuller attaches abstract qualities to women and practical ones to men. Power and intellect are to be counterbalanced by love and beauty in order to "subjugate bruteness" (Fuller, *Woman* 70). An equal distribution of materiality and spirituality in the private realm will ultimately bring justice in the public sphere. Emerson attempted to formulate this balance through philosophical thinking; Thoreau through the natural life and civil resistance; Whitman through poetry; Fuller through aesthetics and active involvement in educational issues. She practices the aesthetic vision as much as her male contemporaries, as when she describes sexist prejudices as being anti-poetical (Fuller, *Woman* 61) and claims that self-culture is the path to social equality (Fuller, *Woman* 36).

Despite her defense of a new, more active role for women in society, at times Fuller sounds oddly comfortable with her male-dominated world, or at least she shows an uneasy conformity with the dogmatist vocabulary of the age. "The man furnishes the house; the woman regulates it," she argues in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Fuller, *Woman* 42). In one of her *New-York Tribune* essays of the mid-1840s she speaks of educated women as the "tutelary genius of a home" who provides men with a "sweeter and nobler companionship" (Fuller, *Critic* 235). Even in her defense of Greek culture, which in her own words represented "unison in variety, congeniality in difference" (Fuller, *Woman* 32; see also González-Rivas Fernández, 2008), she refuses to believe that in the ancient Greek world women were as subjected to men as they were in nineteenth-century America. "Every victory," she proclaims, "wore a female form" (Fuller, *Woman* 31). Fuller again idealizes women and neglects historical reality, a reality she had come to know through her extensive readings of Greek culture and literature. Even though it wore a female form, in the classical world victory was usually a male achievement. Perhaps because Fuller knew that world mainly through myths she attempted to reform her own world in the same way. This does not mean that Fuller's project of female education and emancipation is rendered useless or that is remains conservative. For her the value of myths and aesthetic images was beyond doubt, serving as they did to show the way to the improvement of women's education. However, idealizations such as that of Greek culture betray a tension between the ideal and the

actual that, from a certain point of view, seems to lessen its efficacy (in order to see true womanhood, or at least its potential characteristics, we must somehow abandon reality). However, the fact that most of the examples of female identity were beyond the real world did not worry Fuller, for it was their beauty and perfection that should move to emulation and perfectionism. Even when she misreads Greek culture the purpose of the example is to inspire, not to analyze the historical truth.

This process of idealization therefore implies emptying historical figures of their actual meaning. Let me illustrate it in more detail with an example from nineteenth-century Spanish politics. Towards the end of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* Margaret Fuller recalls having read "in a foreign paper" news about the Spanish *Exaltados* (Fuller, *Woman* 91), the political party who ruled Spain between 1820 and 1823—first in alliance with the liberals, later on their own. Their most important objectives were: a thorough reform of both the 1812 Spanish Constitution and the tax system, the clarification and legislation of the relations between church and state, and a whole set of administrative changes concerning the division of the country into provinces and the development of the local administration. In all these attempts they succeeded only in part, especially due to the constant tensions with their allies, the liberals. When after the elections of March 1822 they were able to rule without alliances, great hopes of a true and stable socially-oriented government began to materialize. Nevertheless, their venture was a short-lived one. Their efforts were abruptly interrupted by the intervention of the so-called Santa Alianza (Sacred Alliance), a group of European countries determined to defend and enforce Christianism and political absolutism. The revolutionary nature of the *Exaltados'* political agenda earned them the fame of being iconoclasts, even violent ones. That was the image that most powers, Spanish and European, publicized in the next decades in an attempt to prevent socialism and liberalism from gaining power. Throughout Europe they were considered to be an anomaly to the "natural order" provided by the aristocratic Ancient Regime. To those with a more progressive, even revolutionary, mind they represented the hope of a different future.

Exactly how Fuller came to know about the *Exaltados* is a mystery. She mentions their name more than two decades after their disappearance from Spanish and European politics. The name of the paper where she first read about them is very difficult to locate.

However, it would not be misleading to think that she had as much information about the *Exaltados* through the American press as through that "foreign paper." Several American newspapers made explicit reference to the *Exaltados* throughout the late 1830s and the 1840s, especially in those in Baltimore, New York and Philadelphia. The use of the term, however, was many times confusing if not altogether wrong. In the October 20, 1838, issue of the *New-Yorker* the *Exaltados* are reported to try to impose "force and a dictator," while the *New World* described them as being "resolved upon the complete destruction of the Queen." These are exaggerations not only of the political project of the *Exaltados*, but also of their very potential to actually transform the Spanish society of the early 1820s, for the most part illiterate, powerless and—especially when it comes to the middle classes—content with the Ancient Regime and the Constitution. However, while it would not be misleading to think that Fuller learnt about the *Exaltados* through the New York press and a few books on Spain (especially around 1844 as she was concluding the writing of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*) her view of them is in fact closer to their original image than to the version provided by the press of that time.

In this sense, what is significant about the role of the *Exaltados* in Fuller's work is her highly particular use of the term. Fuller uses it primarily to suggest a progressive, liberal-minded sociopolitical movement that, although notorious in Europe but hardly known in the U.S., was already history. However, their actual historical importance—whether for Spain, Europe or the world—disappears the very moment are mentioned in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller did not seem to be interested in either the particular circumstances of their struggle against the Ancient Regime or in their ideological and bureaucratic reforms. That is understandable given the differences between Spain's and America's necessities of the time. The political and economic stability of Spain was much more precarious than that of the U.S. Whatever historical value the *Exaltados* may have had in Spain and Europe Fuller does not consider. As she had done earlier with mythical and fictional figures, she aestheticizes (and idealizes) them in order to introduce her own vision of future politics, not only in the United States but in the whole future world. In fact, not only does she de-historicize the *Exaltados*: she actually provides them with a gender identity at odds with their actual claims two decades before. I say this because, in the light of their main speeches and texts, the *Exaltados* never took

women's liberation as one of their central political tasks. However, Fuller chooses this particular figure—the *Exaltado*—and transforms it into a vision, a vision of a new class made up of emancipated women and sympathetic men. "Uncontaminated," the young *Exaltado* and *Exaltada* are "harbingers and leaders of a new era," and the "nucleus of such a class" (Fuller, *Woman* 91). Sharing the same education and interests, they are "without narrowness or ignorance," even though Fuller acknowledges that the members of such a class "are not easily formed under the present influences of society" (Fuller, *Woman* 91). Again, in order to envision the future the reader must look back on the past (and aestheticize) its object in order to see its meaning for the present. Fuller sees in this young Exaltada a mirror image of herself when she was giving the Boston conversations, that is, as an "example and instruction to the rest" (Fuller, *Woman* 92). Regardless of its historical significance in the realm of politics, she uses the example of the *Exaltados* to build her own particular (beautiful) image of the educated and active woman, born "free and equal" like men are (Fuller, *Woman* 97). Both are "capable of large mental development" (Fuller, *Woman* 91). The difference, as she had formulated earlier in the book, is one of spirituality: men have sold their happiness and honor "for a money market and political power" (Fuller, *Woman* 98), whereas women remain in the realm of sympathy and affection in order to "ward off the corruptions of vanity and idleness" (Fuller, *Woman* 98). This comparison reinforces the division she had formulated earlier between men as practical beings and women as spiritual ones.

Fuller's use of the *Exaltados* differs from her aesthetic view of women generally in the earlier work, whose images image had a limited social function. The role of the angelic women in society, during and after their struggle for liberation, is still a very conservative one. The madonna and the mother—not only of men, but also of the poor and the disenfranchised (Fuller, *Woman* 87)—are characters whose influence is limited by their very status *as images*. This does not happen with the *Exaltada*, who combines a real political meaning, even if aestheticized, with a promise for the future. Thus, the *Exaltada* is more real and realistic than any of the preceding images. Instead of looking back to a mythical past or remaining in the realm of the abstract, she looks beyond the present and into the future.

In conclusion, Fuller deprives the *Exaltados* of their historical significance only as a first step in order to reconstruct their image for

a new, different reality. In so doing, she moves away from the intellectual, philosophically-oriented model of Emerson and towards a more social and communitarian one. Her intention is to offer her readers models of behavior for a better society, but in order to be assimilated by that new society they have to be brought radically into the present, which implies emptying first of their original historical meaning and providing them with a new function. It is not a forgetting of history, but rather the displacement of the past in favor of the future. Emerson's use of history works towards an improvement for the individual; Fuller's works for the advance of the community.

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