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## Haunting Transcendentalist Landscapes: EcoGothic Politics in Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes*

### ABSTRACT

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In this essay, the reminiscences of Margaret Fuller, feminist activist and member of the American Transcendentalist movement, from her journey to the Great Lakes region, entitled *Summer on the Lakes* (1844), are considered in the light of EcoGothic considerations. The essay shows how Fuller's journey disillusioned her about progress and led to abandoning the serene vision of nature and landscapes reflected in the works of Transcendentalists. The destruction of nature and landscape verging on an ecological catastrophe is presented by Fuller in the perspective of the Gothic, as a price for the technological development driven by the capitalist economy. The Gothic character of *Summer on the Lakes* derives from the mental condition of the writer and a pessimistic vision arising from the debunking of the myth of America as a virgin land. Fuller's work constitutes an EcoGothic tribute to the indigenous inhabitants of America—but also a Gothic live burial of the Native Americans who do still live in the regions she visits—as well as to Mariana and Frederica, unusual and gothicized women excluded from society. By bringing together Fuller's observations about nature, indigenous peoples and marginalized women, the essay shows how Fuller's text prophetically announces the beginning of the end of the American environment.

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“The ‘eco’ in Ecogothic isn’t just about ‘going green.’ It’s about the voices, the dreams and desires, the moral quandaries, the insights and incommensurable differences that are present in our interactions with nature. It is a literary space in which the human cannot take its role as the mover-and-shaker of the universe for granted.”

Hilary Scharper, author of the EcoGothic novel *Perdita*<sup>1</sup>

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Transcendentalist thinker Margaret Fuller hoped to find solace from personal grief in the natural landscapes she would encounter on her 1843 journey to the Great Lakes. The lingering feeling of the loss of her father, the growing frustration with Emerson manifest in her correspondence with him, and her sense of alienation as a woman in American society all contributed to a growing feeling of depression. As biographer Meg McGavran Murray points out, even though Fuller had recently written her feminist manifesto, “The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men, Woman versus Women” (published in *The Dial*, July 1843), she still had misgivings about herself as a woman of intellectual substance and felt haunted by her male mentors, “No matter how ardently Fuller had argued the equality of men and woman, she still harbored doubts about her worthiness in the eyes not only of Emerson but also of her dead father, who still always seemed to be watching” (198). The image of the haunting father appears in the “Miranda” section of Fuller’s “The Great Lawsuit” essay: “To this ideal image of her father, to him whose ‘image’ lived in her, Fuller paid homage in words that reveal her continuing bondage to a haunting, godlike man, her reluctance to see her dead father as flawed” (Murray 199). Her journey to the Great Lakes might be seen as an attempt to exorcize the influence of her dead father as well as remove herself from the ongoing frustrating communications with the paternalistic and hyper-rational Emerson.<sup>2</sup> The trip to the Midwest afforded Fuller the opportunity to renew herself in an entirely different landscape: “Fuller’s dawning knowledge of her power, of a magnetic energy she felt forced to

<sup>1</sup> From <http://perditanovel.com/the-eco-gothic-2/> and <https://cayocosta72.wordpress.com/2015/01/12/perdita-by-hilary-scharper>. Hilary Scharper continues, “The use of ‘who’ rather than ‘it’ to describe Nature captures the Ecogothic’s tendency to depict nature as a living, acting, creating, unfolding ‘other.’” Interestingly, Hilary Scharper, the Canadian author of an EcoGothic novel *Perdita*, is also scientifically minded, as an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto.

<sup>2</sup> Emerson could never understand or appreciate her mystical or occult side: “her gems, her stones, her flowers, as well as . . . the animal magnetism that seemed to flow from her whenever she wrote” (Murray 202). Fuller, with her sense of difference, hoped that “elsewhere in America she might find a place where she could be, as she put it, ‘truly human’” (Murray 202). Emerson would clearly never come to understand Fuller, as he saw the movement of history in masculine terms, as men as movers, and thus he asserts in a journal entry (28 May 1839): “There is no history: There is only Biography” (Porte 219).

repress in the Northeast, generated an anxiety she hoped to overcome by leaving New England and finding a place where society's laws were more tolerant of passionate women like herself" (Murray 202).

Although Fuller's grief was at first internalized, and her sadness cast upon the object of her gaze, whether waterfalls, lakes, or forest, she ultimately quit her subjective feelings of despair for a more coherent vision of her place within the All, emblematic of the Romantic quest for wholeness. In so doing, though, Fuller is ultimately haunted by a national consciousness and feeling of guilt more frightening than the sense of an isolated individual engulfed in grief. The panorama of shame that opens up allows her to move from individual mourning to a chilling encounter with national hauntings. A Gothic landscape of capitalist waste as well as the decimation of Native Americans moves her ultimately to question her place in nature, as a visitor/intruder, as an author, and as a mourner.

Timothy Morton in *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) has described a type of nihilistic vision of nature, in which the observer is actually rendered helpless in articulating his relationship with nature: "We discover how nature always slips out of reach in the very act of grasping it" (19). Morton argues that nature exists but cannot be perceived in any objective manner by the observer. In fact, he shows how different political agendas have caused the spectator of nature to see the landscape in vastly different ways:

Since the Romantic period, nature has been used to support the capitalist theory of value and to undermine it; to point out what is intrinsically human, and to exclude the human; to inspire kindness and compassion, and to justify competition and cruelty. (19)

This phantasmagoric image of nature, as Morton presents it (although he does not concern himself with the Gothic), becomes the underpinning for the EcoGothic landscape, as I see it, in Fuller and in Thoreau.<sup>3</sup>

Fuller, as a Transcendentalist, should theoretically derive spiritual sustenance or personal enlightenment from her relationship with Nature,

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<sup>3</sup> Morton does discuss Thoreau's subjective view of nature in passing, through the course of his book, but not in the context I present here. He does not bring up Margaret Fuller's appropriation of the landscape at all. Carmen Birkle does compare Fuller's and Thoreau's travel narratives but makes them seem more similar in a positive way than I do here. Both Annette Kolodny and Jeffrey Steele suggest that Fuller was searching, on a personal level, for a consoling "mother's garden" in her travel to the Midwest. See Lawrence Buell for Thoreau's growing sense of environmentalism. See also William Cronon, who questions Thoreau's optimism in his maxim, "In Wildness is the preservation of the World" (102).

but her musings about culture finally move them away from an authentic relationship with nature (a relationship that Morton would suggest cannot exist after all). She continually resorts to other paradigms to make sense of what she experiences through her senses. Not only does she appropriate the landscape but also the indigenous peoples (whom she equates with the landscape) to make meaning, but Fuller has, at times, a colonizing view of Nature or expansionist view of America: she tries to Europeanize Native Americans or she predicts their demise, and the chasm between the real and the imagined creates a Gothic abyss. In her travel account, *Summer on the Lakes* (published 1844), based on her travels to the Midwest (the then Western frontier) in the summer of 1843, Fuller cannot reconcile the seemingly pastoral vacation with her eventual sense of the wasteland the Great Lakes region actually presents. As Lance Newman points out, “Her trip occurred during the depths of the severe economic crisis of 1837 to 1844, a period of widespread questioning of the historical progressiveness of capitalism.” I believe that the EcoGothic quality of the book relates to this historical dilemma as well as to Fuller’s own haunted background: that intersecting sense of pessimism is projected onto the natural landscape. It is noteworthy that even though Fuller’s traveling companions include a brother/sister team, James Freeman Clarke (replaced later in the excursion by William, the more mystical brother [Murray 202]) and his sister Sarah, Fuller seems very much alone.

In her recent biography of Margaret Fuller, Megan Marshall evokes a rather Gothic scene in the first chapter describing the young Margaret. On the occasion of her little sister Julia Adelaide’s death, the three-year-old Margaret witnessed a terrifying *tableau mort*: as Marshall describes it, Margaret suffered “an abrupt loss” as “the baby’s nurse, tears streaming, pulled Sarah Margaret into the nursery to view her sister’s tiny corpse” (7). Fuller further comments in her *Memoirs*: “I remember the house all still and dark,—the people in their black clothes and dreary faces” (7). Later, according to Marshall, Fuller would recall this dark moment and write, “My first experience of life was one of death” (7). The loss of her sister would strike a chord in her as she later also laments her own childhood. In one of the early semi-biographical studies of Fuller, a Harvard Ph.D. dissertation (1910), entitled *Margaret Fuller and Goethe*, Frederick Augustus Braun pinpoints another dark memory in Fuller’s life, namely her father’s overbearing pedagogical practices: Braun claims “from early childhood,” Timothy Fuller brought up his daughter “in the straight-jacket Puritan manner,” forcing her to stay up late to do her recitations. Margaret herself describes herself, in the vein of a Gothic prisoner, as “fettered” (25). And she records the deadening effect of the constant focus on her brain and the neglect of her physical and imaginative

life. As she laments in her *Memoirs*, sounding like a tortured soul of the Puritan stock, there

was a premature development of the brain, that made me a “youthful prodigy” by day, and by night a victim of spectral illusions, nightmare, and somnambulism, which at the same time prevented the harmonious development of my bodily powers and checked my growth, while later they induced continual headache, weakness and nervous affections, of all kinds. (qtd. in Braun 25)

Later in life, she would mourn for her lost childhood: “Poor child . . . I look back on these glooms and terrors, wherein I was enveloped, and perceived that I had no natural childhood” (qtd. in Braun 25).

Lacking this natural childhood, one that would have entailed less structured learning in the shape of play and exercise, and educated by her father with a Calvinist rigor rather than with the more contemporary Romantic sensibility or pedagogy, it is no wonder that the supernatural realm, with its use of enchantment, its focus on the subconscious imagination, and its psychological signposts, would take such a hold on her. With her visit to the natural landscape in the Midwest, she could weave her personal imaginary into the backdrop with her use of Native American mythology and fabrication of female characters in the shape of mystical and psychic females, like the semi-autobiographical Mariana and the Germanic Seeress of Prevorst. With these figures, she would navigate the forbidden territory, that landscape she could uncover in dreams, and also confront the creative part of her denied by her rational and authoritarian father and the likes of the paternalistic and overbearing Transcendentalist Emerson.

With her childhood trauma later developing into nervousness and moments of physical disability—necessitating visits to the mesmerist, Fuller is accused by one of her earliest biographers,<sup>4</sup> the extremely rational Transcendentalist Emerson, of mysticism or superstition:

When she turned her head on one side, she alleged she had second sight, like St. Francis. These traits or predispositions made her a willing listener to all the uncertain science of mesmerism and its goblin brood, which have been rife in recent years. (Fuller's *Memoirs* qtd. in Myerson 148)

<sup>4</sup> Emerson, along with James Freeman Clarke and William Henry Channing, edited and published in 1852 *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, and as they were selective in their choice of what (of Fuller's journals) to include and what to reword, I view the text as a type of revisionist biography.

Moreover, pain was a vehicle through which she could access her imagination. One of the notes by Emerson attributes her powerful creative streak to her pain:

She was all her life time the victim of disease and pain. She read and wrote in bed, and believed that she could understand anything better when she was ill. Pain acted like a girdle, to give tension to her powers. (qtd. in Myerson 148)

In her *Memoirs*, Fuller expresses pain as the source of feeling: “I wish to know and feel my pain, to investigate its nature and its source; I will not have my thoughts diverted, or my feelings soothed” (qtd. in Braun 87).<sup>5</sup>

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Many scholars of American Gothic, taking their cue from Toni Morrison, have commented on the wild imposing landscape and an expansive frontier that European-Americans confronted and then imbued with all their fears in the manner of a child lost in the wilderness, without the support of a mother country.<sup>6</sup> Often, the fear of the unknown is projected upon the indigenous peoples. Fuller has many Gothic moments in her visit to Niagara Falls and to the Great Lakes, but in some ways, her journey, though ostensibly outward, is really a journey inward so she is often blinded to the reality of nature by her ego. In fact, one could start with the paragraph below (from just pages into her travel account, *Summer on the Lakes*) in which Fuller blends together the sublime and sinister aspects of nature in gazing at the thunderous Niagara Falls:

But all great expression, which, on a superficial survey, seems so easy as well as so simple, furnishes, after a while, to the faithful observer its own standard by which to appreciate it. Daily these proportions widened and towered more and more upon my sight, and I got, at last, a proper

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<sup>5</sup> According to Braun, Fuller’s sensibility seemed more Germanic than American, as he aptly focuses on the Fuller–Goethe connection (with Fuller’s intense admiration of and devotion to Goethe’s works) to meditate on Fuller’s own troubled life. Weary of the shortcomings of intellectual life, she aligns herself with Germanic thinking expressed in Goethe’s *Faust*—the ever striving tortured Germanic soul craving the All of experience, intellectually, spiritually, and physically. More Germanic than New England Puritan, Fuller is like Goethe’s Faust, according to Braun, in wanting to get to the source of feeling, even if that entailed pain.

<sup>6</sup> Toni Morrison describes the early Americans’ fear “of being outcast . . . their fear of boundarylessness, of Nature unbridled and crouched for attack, their fear of the so-called civilization; their fear of loneliness, of aggression both external and internal” (37). The sense of haunting or “Gothic” is projected onto the black population, in Morrison’s terms, but I would also add indigenous peoples to the fear factor.

foreground for these sublime distances. Before coming away, I think I really saw the full wonder of the scene. After awhile it so drew me into itself as to *inspire an undefined dread, such as I never knew before, such as may be felt when death is about to usher us into a new existence*. The perpetual trampling of the waters seized my senses. I felt that no other sound, however near, could be heard, and would start and look behind me for a foe. I realized the identity of that mood of nature in which these waters were poured down with such absorbing force, with that in which the Indian was shaped on the same soil. For continually upon my mind came, unsought and unwelcome, images, such as *never haunted it before, of naked savages stealing behind me with uplifted tomahawks*; again and again this illusion recurred, and even after I had thought it over, and tried to shake it off, I could not help starting and looking behind me. (72, emphasis added)<sup>7</sup>

These are all Gothic moments of fear and pleasure at the thought of losing oneself in a Freudian manner, i.e. confronting eros and thanatos. Fuller connects fear of nature with fear of Native Americans throughout: indeed, the last part of her book is all about “wild” and “savage” Indians, related to wild Gothic nature—and fear of annihilation through the encounter with the unknown. And she sets out to poeticize by domesticating them and Europeanizing them, yearning at some point for another Gothic writer’s presence to capture the local color:

I wanted Sir Walter Scott to have been there. If such romantic sketches were suggested to him, by the sight of a few gipsies [sic], not a group near one of these fires but would have furnished him material for a separate canvass. (Fuller 176)

There is a type of colonialist, imperialist swagger though, as she positions herself as the privileged white observer and finally concludes: “I feel that I have learnt [sic] a great deal from the Indians, from observing them even in this broken and degraded condition” (223). Even so, she associates them with the Gothic sublime of “the other” but also with their eradication: “I felt acquainted with the soul of this race; I read its nobler thought in their defaced figures” (223). But at this early juncture of the book, the sense of standing in front of the majestic waterfalls and confronting one’s own demise (at least mentally) haunts the book throughout. Niagara Falls make her feel helpless, as if her death is imminent, and she associates the wildness of the waterfall with the wildness of the Indians, whom she

<sup>7</sup> All further references are to Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes*, unless otherwise indicated.

imagines as “naked savages” “stealing behind” her with phallic “uplifted tomahawks” (72). Thus, along with the fear of the wild waterfall and the wild Indian is not just the fear of death—but the thrill of an annihilating sexuality or orgasmic helplessness, associated in Fuller’s mind with nature and the native American. But the heart of darkness will be her own—mediated through the natural landscape.

Chapter one, the “Niagara Falls” chapter, is illuminating in that it shows both the pedestrian and sublime qualities of nature. Fuller observes a tourist spitting into the Falls as a means by which to “appropriate it to his own use” (72), and she laments the fact that mankind is heading towards a utilitarian age in which men will “put the bodies of their dead parents in the fields to fertilize them” (72). But she asserts her hope that such occurrences will not be seen “on the historic page to be truly the age or truly the America” (73). Immediately thereafter Fuller turns to the majestic falls to take in the potentially annihilating whirlpool and to meditate upon “the hidden vortex”—and her musings again lead to an image of death: “It is fearful, too, to know, as you look, that whatever has been swallowed by the cataract, is like to rise suddenly to light here, whether it be up-rooted tree, or body of man or bird” (73). Macabre thoughts about death follow her as she meditates upon the historical violence surrounding the War of 1812 fought in the vicinity of Niagara Falls and then concludes that human misery cannot be stilled by the beauty of the Falls: “It seems strange that men could fight in such a place; but no temple can still the personal griefs and strifes in the breasts of its visitors” (74). Even more unexpectedly, Fuller than meditates upon an image of a captive eagle she sees in the immediate neighborhood: she remarks that it is strange that “an eagle should be chained for a plaything” (74). With this image she reminisces about another captive eagle she had seen in her youth:

an eagle chained at the balcony of a museum. The people used to poke at it with sticks, and my childish heart would swell with indignation as I saw their insults, and the mien with which they were borne by the monarch-bird. (74)

The image of an injured eagle, tellingly the symbol of the U.S., would be used by Fuller in her 1845 essay for the *Tribune*, in which she announces in a melancholy fashion that too many young men are rushing as a “multitude,” following a banner, upon which “the royal Eagle is blazoned, along with the word Expediency” (“Fourth of July” 151). She ends her reverie of the eagle at Niagara Falls with a hopeful thought—that the Niagara eagle, despite his broken wing, would be consoled “by the voice of the cataract” and his connection to a more vital nature. But she does not end the



chapter here. Returning to the hotel, she feels somewhat dejected and bored; the spectacle of Niagara Falls was anticlimactic: “I felt a strange indifference about seeing the aspiration of my life’s hopes. I lounged about the rooms, read the stage bills upon the walls, looked over the register . . .” (*Summer on the Lakes* 75). She does end up, during the moonlit evening, visiting the cascading Falls, and then she feels the predictably sublime attitude towards nature, but one that also suggests violent death: “I surveyed how here mutability and unchangeableness were united. I surveyed the conspiring waters rushing against the rocky ledge to overthrow it at one mad plunge” (76). She moves from this perspective to the predictable Romantic adoration of God (“the Being who was the architect of this”) to a strange pronouncement of European/American exceptionalism, in terms of the Falls’ natural beauty: “Tis true Italy and Swedeland boast of some such things, but we may well say that they be sorry patterns when compared with this of which we do now speak” (77). The image of the enchained eagle will soon turn into the image of oppressed Indians and madwomen as the book proceeds. In many ways, Fuller can identify with the “displaced Indian,” as she similarly “felt a stranger in her native land [New England], captive to a culture that prevented her from singing freely and also imprisoned her soul” (Murray 204).

At the start of the second chapter, Fuller, coming up the River Clair, sees Native Americans “for the first time” and compares their “wild” stride favorably to the “rude” gait of the white settlers (79). In typical Transcendentalist mode, she attacks what will be the undoing of any type of spiritual life. She observes the greedy people on the boat with her—“almost all New Englanders, seeking their fortunes” (79). The focus of Fuller’s EcoGothic critique in this nature narrative will be the attack of the material realm upon the natural landscape: for Fuller, the “clash of material interests” that is “so noisy” (80). Though she starts describing the new settlers in exceptionalist discourse (“They had brought with them their habits of calculation, their cautious manners, their love of polemics” [79]), she ends with a type of funereal regret:

It grieved me to hear these immigrants who were to be the fathers of a new race, all, from the old man down to the little girl, talking not of what they should do, but of what they should get in the new scene. It was to them a prospect, not of the unfolding nobler energies, but of more ease, and *larger accumulation*. (79–80, emphasis added)

Although Fuller regrets the emphasis on the material realm (and the acquisitive American spirit), she will move forward ominously to a rhetorical

prediction of the decimation of Indian villages: “the power of fate is with the white man, and the Indian feels it” (139).

The book’s pattern continues with similar meditations on nature as Fuller moves between the sublimities and banalities of Nature, between joyful reflections of the newness of European America and a death dirge regarding the disappearing Native American. In terms of the aesthetics of nature and the portrait of a pleasing landscape, Fuller privileges the Native American, but she equates the end of pristine nature with the decimation of Indians, accepting as a bygone fact the end of both. That to me is the Gothic horror of her travel account—Fuller is basically burying the Indians alive. She does see the incursion of Europeans into the landscape as jarringly crass and material: sometimes the “little brown houses” of the settlers in Illinois looked “attractive” from afar, but “when you came near, the slovenliness of the dwelling and the rude way in which objects around it were treated, when so little care would have presented a charming whole, were very repulsive” (96). She sees the new settlers as showing “no thought beyond satisfying the grossest material wants” and proclaims Native Americans as the arbiters of good taste in their appreciation of nature. Fuller proclaims that the Indians are the rightful owners of nature:

Seeing the traces of the Indians, who chose the most beautiful sites for their dwellings, and whose habits do not break on that aspect of nature under which they were born, we feel as if they were the rightful lords of a beauty they forbore to deform. (96)

In a strange inversion, using a European paradigm, Fuller accuses the European/American settlers of being more barbaric, “more Gothic,” than civilized “Roman,” and predicts the end of nature: “their mode of cultivation will, in the course of twenty, perhaps ten, years obliterate the natural expression of the country” (96). There is a death dirge throughout memorializing the still living Indian, and the following exclamation captures her attitude as she persistently sees the Indians as remnants of the past, as “traces”: “How happy the Indians must have been here! It is not long since they were driven away, and the ground, above and below, is full of their traces” (100).

Although she gothicizes European settlers in the area, she ironically classicizes and thereby humanizes Native Americans. Visiting the site of “an ancient Indian village,” she makes a point of telling the reader that the Indians were not dirty or brutal, nor were the children “sad and dull,” but their life in nature ennobled them. She does not use the “noble savage” comparison, though; instead, she locates in them the basis of

western civilization, in classical Greek culture: “The whole scene suggested to me a Greek splendor, a Greek sweetness, and I can believe that an Indian brave, accustomed to ramble in such paths, might be mistaken for Apollo” (100). Elsewhere, she makes a point of describing an impressive-looking Indian chief in an encampment near Milwaukie, as “the finest Indian figure [she] saw, more than six feet in height, erect, and of a sullen but grand gait and gesture,” someone she deems a “fine sight, not a French-Roman, but a real Roman.” In her exuberance to carry western civilization to the indigenous peoples, she overcompensates by alluding to classical ancient myths and heroes, thereby eradicating any true history. But she is always aware of what is destroying Native Americans and their land: an industrialized economy! She insists that missionaries should stop preaching to the Indian but rather “preach to the trader who ruins him” (214)—thus aligning mercantile interests and Christianity with the end of the Indian civilization.

She intersperses the funereal tales of Indians with two seemingly out of place mystical stories about women with a special sixth sense, women at home in nature, women who are gothicized and misunderstood—women who ultimately represent Fuller’s fears as well as her sense of singularity. If wild nature threatens to rob Fuller of her identity in her initial chapter on the cascading Niagara Falls, and if encounters with Indians have her confront American-European visions of genocide, then these tales of unusual and gothicized women give her a terrifying sense of home in the wilderness. Just as the Native Americans are losing their homeland, the Gothic wandering figures in Fuller’s writing are the dispossessed women. The first of these Gothic heroines, Mariana, is the stock Spanish-Creole woman of Gothic, and the second, the psychic Seeress of Prevorst, comes straight off the pages of a German mystical treatise by Dr. Justinus Kerner. Mariana is another part of her frightened self, her own nature, that Fuller explores and that is her uncharted emotional life, the side of her obstructed by her taskmaster father and also rejected by her cool rational friend Emerson. Fuller includes the stories of these unusual women in a strange matter-of-fact way, as she moves from picturesque sightseeing to an internalized experience in the hotel, a kind of neutral territory, as Hawthorne would have it, between reality and imagination. The ghost of Mariana first appears in a mundane way. Sitting at a hotel table in Chicago, Fuller chances upon a Mrs. Z, the aunt of her childhood friend she had known at boarding school, who informs her of Mariana’s death: Fuller bluntly announces her death in the narrative, moving in tone quickly from life to death (as she does with the Indians): “Mariana, so full of life, was dead” (118). Similarly, pages later, in retelling the story of the Seeress of Prevorst, an account of

a ghost-seeing woman written by the attending doctor Justinus Kerner, Fuller will nonchalantly admit that she retreats to the hotel room with this book to stave off traveler's fatigue: "Returning to Milwaukie much fatigued, I entertained myself for a day or two with reading. The book I had brought with me was in strange contrast with the life around me" (145).<sup>8</sup> She goes on to discuss the juxtaposition of the natural with the supernatural she had experienced as a tourist: "Very strange was this vision of an exalted and sensitive existence, which seemed to invade the next sphere, in contrast with the spontaneous, instinctive life, so healthy and so near the ground I had been surveying" (145). Both Mariana and the Seeress represent to Fuller a sense of the primordial meaning, separated from the commercial ventures that terrify her in the ostensibly pure wilderness landscape, and so, these strange women gifted with second sight are allied with the mystical Indians that Fuller sees being exterminated. And so too Mariana and Frederica, the Seeress, are endangered by those men who would try to subdue or hush them—and their loss is felt tremendously.

To return to Timothy Morton's thesis about each individual's subjective view of nature, one wonders whether Fuller actually had any real connection to nature, unspoiled by her Gothic and exceptionalist imagination. Instead, the image of nature is corrupted by Fuller's sense of romance, as she moves from a European to New England point of view and finally to a Native American interpretation. First she maintains quite simply, "All woods suggest pictures" (140). And then she recounts the types, as she moves from European to New England to Western woods: "The European forest, with its long glades and green sunny dells, naturally suggested the figures of armed knight on his proud steed, or maiden, decked in gold and pearl, pricking along them on a snow white palfrey" (140). She moves from European Gothic romance to Puritan images of the conquest of New England nature: she recalls

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<sup>8</sup> This tendency to live through books over experience is shown by her taking time out from her Great Lakes travels to get library books. As Laura L. Mielke points out, while Fuller was in Chicago for two weeks, she made two library visits to get acquainted with the land and inhabitants (100). As Fuller reports in *Summer on the Lakes*, these included works by Indian historians George Catlin and Henry Row Schoolcraft as well as more Gothic writings by Washington Irving. See also essays by Annette Kolodny and Nicole Tonkovich for Fuller's sources on Native Americans. See also Christina Zwarg for Fuller's varying degrees of sympathy for real or imagined Indians. Interestingly, Fuller had written to Emerson about Kerner's book on the mystic Friederike Hauffe (a "really good book" that had landed on her desk [Murray 197]), shortly before her departure to the Midwest; she takes this book along with her on the journey.

the New England woods, wherever the sunlight falls down a longer than usual cart-track, wherever a cleared spot has lain still enough for the trees to look friendly, with their exposed sides cultivated by the light, and the grass to look velvet warm, and be embroidered with flowers. (141)

In contradistinction to a mythologized pristine New England nature, she maintains that the “western woods suggest a different kind of ballad. The Indian legends have, often, an air of the wildest solitude, as has the one Mr. Lowell put into verse, in the last volume” (140–41). Interestingly, she abandons Lowell with his political agenda or sympathy, insisting that she “did not see *those* wild woods” (141, emphasis added). Instead, her aestheticizing vision prompts her to include a poem, “a little romance of love and sorrow,” that she writes about a maiden bereft of her knight. Later Fuller turns the tragedy of the Indian into a romance: she speculates about the far-off look in the Indian’s gaze and asserts that “half the romance” of his gaze is “that it makes you think of dark and distant places in the forest” (210).

Fuller’s view of disembodied nature allows her to move from the natural to the unnatural and finally to the supernatural. The disjunction between the real and the imagined that plagues these female protagonists is also true of Fuller’s sense of dislocatedness in her travels to the Midwestern wilderness. Fuller’s account of Mariana in *Summer on the Lakes* might be perceived as a variation of Miranda in “A Great Lawsuit” and *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, but in *Summer on the Lakes*, the young girl Mariana suffers precisely because she has no guidance from a strong protective father figure (the opposite of Fuller’s life), and thus has no boundaries. At the same time, Mariana’s Anglo aunt, who acts as guardian, foists a boarding school education upon her. But there is something Fuller envies about Mariana—who is so natural and can fully express her emotions. Mariana is shunned by her peers at the girls’ boarding school precisely because she is in touch with her emotions, with a dramatic flair. Not surprisingly, this is not an Anglo girl but the stock figure of (both American and European) Gothic, with her depiction as the exotic other, characterized not simply as Spanish Creole, but associated with Eastern mystics. In a protracted scene, we hear about Mariana not fitting in at school. Her mystical powers ally her with dervishes, mystics, and Gothic sleep-walkers! And also to some extent the Indians whom Fuller is witnessing firsthand, not simply through books, for the first time. Fuller is mesmerized by Mariana’s story and is struck most by her dramatic appeal, as an “improvatrice.” The Gothically exotic Mariana is first placed within an Eastern boarding school

and her story makes its way to the frontier, incongruously in Fuller's Chicago hotel:

She had by nature the same habit and power of excitement that is described in the spinning dervishes of the East. Like them, she would spin until all around her were giddy, while her own brain, instead of being disturbed, was excited to great action. Pausing, she would declaim verse of others or her own; act many parts, with strange catch-words and burdens that seemed to act with mystical power on her own fancy, sometimes stimulating her to convulse the hearer with laughter, sometimes to melt him to tears. When her power began to languish, she would spin again till fired to recommence her singular drama . . . with fantasies unknown to life, unknown to heaven or earth. (*Summer on the Lakes* 119)

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The excitement of the dance often kept Mariana up, and we hear “[s]he was also a sleep-walker” (119), a comment which makes the reader think that Fuller is being autobiographical in her description of Mariana.<sup>9</sup> Fuller exposes the true evil in Mariana's case—the contemporary educational system: “the fever of this ardent and too early stimulated nature was constantly increased by the restraints and narrow routine of the boarding school” (125). After the students gang up on her and ridicule her, with the tacit approval of the teachers, Mariana actually goes mad—and her love turns to hatred. She is only cured of her hatred when a despairing woman pleads for help. She returns to her native land, only to marry a man who cannot decipher her—who cannot penetrate her depth. Vacillating between moments of despair and heightened excitement, she finally succumbs to a breakdown of sorts; her husband nurses her back to health for just a short time, and when she relapses, he tires of her and she dies. We hear repeatedly that Mariana had tried to make a “home” with her husband, but that he had only been drawn to her spontaneous and picturesque ways. Fuller dresses her in the garb of melodramatic Gothic: first she says her encounter with Mariana had caused her to think of the heroine of “The Bandit's Bride,” a favorite piece of hers in childhood. With Mariana's death, Fuller announces “she has never seen a Bandit's Bride” (*Summer on the Lakes* 123) again. But Fuller also connects her with other unhappy women, who were not heard—Cassandra, for example.

Directly connected to the mad Mariana and her unhappy death is the story about the Prophetess of Prevorst (from Justinus Kerner's *Die Seherin von Prevorst*), another sleepwalker like Mariana, in the next chapter

<sup>9</sup> See especially Charles Capper (80–82), who suggests that the story of Mariana is autobiographical.

(five) dealing with Wisconsin. If the Spanish Creole looms over the pages ostensibly about Illinois, the German madwoman who was ostracized and deemed mad for her fortune-telling and prophecies (another recurrent Cassandra type for Fuller) appears in Wisconsin. Now it seems odd that the prophetess Frederica Hauffe should appear in this travelogue chapter about Wisconsin (although it was home to an influx of German immigrants). Fuller explains it in this way, as old World Gothic enters the New World journey, that this was reading material she had taken along for the journey, but she notes the incongruity: “Very strange was this vision of an exalted and sensitive existence, which seemed to invade the next sphere, in contrast with the spontaneous, instinctive life, so healthy and so near the ground I had been surveying” (145). But as we have seen, the Midwest frontier was a landscape already on the decline, losing its spontaneous life.

Fuller’s account of Justinus Kerner’s *The Seeress of Prevorst* brings her back to the quandary posed by Niagara Falls in the opening pages, in which her spirit is overwhelmed by the physical manifestation of nature. The Seeress allows Fuller to make her own Gothic voyage inwards, to feel the pain and wisdom wrought by the Seeress’s clairvoyant and sleepwalking states. Justinus Kerner, the author of *The Seeress of Prevorst* and the actual medical doctor attending this simple but gifted daughter of a forester (significantly a child of nature), begins to see beyond the purely physical realm representing his profession.<sup>10</sup> And so Kerner, as doctor and as poet, bridges the gap for Fuller between the Transcendentalist divide of body and soul, as the man of science begins to believe in the spiritual realm of this almost saint-like woman (whom Fuller compares to St. Theresa). Fuller does not deem the Seeress’s trances or somnambulant life as markers of disease, but rather as a sign of a higher Transcendentalist thinking: “Better to say she was immersed in the inward state” (158). Fuller’s praise and fascination with the clairvoyant Frederica Hauffe continue for another twenty-two pages or so, a really long excursion (and interruption) in Fuller’s ostensible discussion of Native Americans. (Indeed, at one point in the next chapter, she aligns

<sup>10</sup> Even though Kerner was a medical doctor, he was very much interested in hypnosis as a healing modality and in the power of the supernatural realm (hence his fascination with his ghost-seeing patient Frederika). He associated with various mystics and religious types, such as Jung-Stilling, whom Fuller also brings up in the text and to whom I refer later in the main text. Besides writing medical treatises, he also wrote poetry. His poem “The Saw Mill” was translated by the American poet William C. Bryant; the translation appeared in *Graham’s Monthly Magazine* (Feb. 1848). It is a poem that captures the same sort of sorrow Fuller feels at witnessing the end of nature for the benefit of capitalist profits. Kerner’s macabre poem describes his disturbance at witnessing a saw mill “cleaving through” a majestic fir tree; the tree warns him that soon the wood produced by the mill would be used to make his own coffin.

Frederica with “Guess, the inventor of the Cherokee alphabet,” whose face also had the same “oriental cast” [209].) She actually describes the clairvoyant Frederica’s visions as the basis for creative inspiration: “I say poetic creation, for to my mind, the ghosts she saw were projections of herself into objective reality” (163). In fact, Fuller is much like Frederica in her ability to project her ghostly figures onto the canvas of her travelogue. Like Dr. Kerner, Fuller accepts Frederica’s ability to communicate with the dead as true fact and applauds her gift of listening to the silence within: “Her invention of language seems a natural motion of the mind when left to itself” (164). Seeing her as a poet/mystic, Fuller puts her on the same pedestal as she does Goethe’s female character Macaria (from *Wilhelm Meister’s Wanderjahre*), a protagonist Fuller extolled in various of her writings about female genius: here she praises Macaria, who “knew the sun and life circles, also the lives of spirit and soul, as did the forester’s daughter of Prevorst” (164). And in the vein of Romantics, Fuller appropriates the disabled body as conducive to a higher spiritual life: Macaria was “compensated for bodily infirmity by a more concentrated and acute state of mind, and consequent accesses of wisdom” (164). In a similar manner, the disabled clairvoyant Frederica can access mystical truth. Kerner’s description of her alternates between being a witch, a priestess, and a saint. Fuller ultimately tries to reconcile “poetic facts with their scientific exposition” and in her account of Frederica<sup>11</sup> (and following the tradition of Gothic writers), she ultimately tries to normalize the abnormal and rationalize the fantastic. Though the Seeress of Prevorst dies an untimely death at the age of twenty-nine, she had “traversed a larger portion of the field of thought than all her race before” (171). Fuller concludes the section on the prophetess of Prevorst with a general statement about the preponderance of German ghosts, by naturalizing the supernatural, especially by saying that “[t]here is a family character about all the German ghosts” (168). She connects the Friederike phenomenon with a long history of ghosts (*Theorie der Geisterkunde*, 1808) written by the German professor Johann Heinrich Jung (Jung-Stilling), who exchanged his Professorship in economics for a life investigating ghostly apparitions. Margaret Fuller is quite amenable to visitations by German ghosts, evoking a type of domestic ghost who haunted Frederica: “She stands before us, this piety, in a full, high-necked robe, a simple hausfrauish cap, a clear, straightforward blue eye” (168). Fuller shares with Hawthorne the predilection for merging the fantastic with the everyday occurrence. And she denies the excessive fright associated with the ghostly world, preferring instead a homely

<sup>11</sup> Fuller writes both “Frederica” and “Frederika,” once each, but the name is spelled as “Friederike” in the German from which she quotes.



mysticism: “There are no terrible, gloomy ghosts with Spanish mantle or Italian dagger. We feel quite at home with them, and sure of their good faith” (168). She ultimately leaves her excursion into the Germanic world of ghosts and repositions herself in the Midwestern wilderness, ostensibly the purpose of her tract, but bridging the connection between the natural and the supernatural becomes ever more difficult as the world around her (in the material realm) begins to feel more void of meaning.

Fuller tries to obviate the difference between New and Old World Gothic as she locates the idea of the supernatural or mystical in transcendentalist notions of nature. She writes about the similarities in the mythologies of indigenous peoples, European Americans, and Europeans and dispenses with the idea that the Western landscape presents anything we could consider new. In some ways, she cannot imagine an American mythology because of her Eurocentrism; she cannot go beyond the European America of New England she sets out to abandon:

Do not blame me that I have written so much about Germany and Hades, while you were looking for news of the West. Here, on the pier, I see disembarking the Germans, the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Swiss. Who knows how much of old legendary lore, of modern wonder, they have already planted amid the Wisconsin forests? Soon, soon their tales of the origin of things, and the Providence which rules them, will be so mingled with those of the Indian, that the very oak trees will not know them apart,—will not know whether itself be a Runic, a Druid, or a Winnebago oak. (171)<sup>12</sup>

It is true that by focusing on a Gothic mythologizing, she unites peoples—and she ostensibly abandons any specific bloodline by intermingling people’s stories. But this assimilation has its price—with the death of Nature and of the Native American. In a ghoulish moment, Fuller looks forward to a museum of Indian remains being preserved in a national museum: “there will be a national institute, containing all the remains of the Indians—all that has been preserved by official intercourse at Washington, Caitlin’s collection, and a picture gallery as complete as can be made, with a collection of skulls from all parts of the country” (212). As Renée Bergland says of the Native American decimation in another context: “The Indians who are transformed into ghosts cannot be buried or evaded, and the

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<sup>12</sup> This discourse of melding the nationalities together to be the quintessential American without a past, anticipates Theodore Roosevelt’s eerie discussion of the hyphenless American (without a European antecedent) and assimilationist politics. See chapter two, “True Americanism,” in Roosevelt’s book: *American Ideals* (1897).

specter of their forced disappearance haunts the American nation and the American imagination” (5).

And in the end, one might wonder: what has happened to that Margaret Fuller persona as traveler who was initially contemplating the cascades of Niagara Falls in a most mindful but ominously meditative way—as she witnesses her own potential demise in the falls (almost predicting her own death by water)? Fuller ends the book at the end of chapter seven with three seemingly disparate but similar images—of destruction, conquest, defeat, and finally a deadening detachment. She refers to the Mackinaw Indians in their “broken and degraded” condition (223) but then assumes identification with them: “I feel acquainted with the soul of this race; I read its nobler thought in their defaced figures” (223). Moreover, she juxtaposes the “greatness” of the vanquished Indians, with the “majesty of nature in this American continent” (223), although the reader has already witnessed the end of such pristine nature in the narrative. Then she spends her last day in Detroit, where she cannot fathom how the failed General Hull could have even thought of winning the Battle against the British in the War of 1812. From vanquished Indians to vanquished American general, she moves to first the mechanical failures of her day to a view of historical mementoes that would replace the true spirituality of the Indians whom she has encountered. She witnesses what was supposed to be the launching of the boat, *The Wisconsin*, as a sign of American progress, which ends up to be a complete flop, as the vessel “could not be made to stir.” On the boat ride from Detroit back to Buffalo, she encounters a phrenologist who tries to hoodwink the tourists and a young lovesick man reading “Butler’s Analogy,” an attempt at spiritual understanding, which he quickly abandons for carnality when he meets pretty newcomers on the journey. The final view is quite hollow, and one feels as if the bones of Native Americans that she wanted to export to a museum are a sign of this collapsed civilization that the white European has created.

Another episode equally Gothic and horrifying would await the journalist Fuller shortly afterwards—on the streets of New York, a type of underworld where, as a journalist working for Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, she encounters the grizzly scenes at the Insane Asylum and the Penitentiary. In her vision of urban Gothic, Fuller explains how poor women would often suffer for their crimes committed as a result of the material realm of economy, the selfsame negative impulse behind the destruction of Native Americans. As Fuller describes it, poor women, envying the clothing, jewels, and lifestyles of the rich would often succumb to theft to obtain worldly goods beyond their reach. And the overspiritualized Mariana or clairvoyant Frederica type recurs in a nervous version of the Gothic

woman. Fuller lapses into stock descriptions taken from Gothic convent tales, when, for example, she focuses on the nun in the Asylum for the Insane in New York: like Mariana, and the Native American Fuller encountered in the Midwestern wilderness, this figure was of “high poetical interest.” She wears a Nun’s veil, her staring eyes are “bright with a still fire,” and she ceaselessly chants the service of the Church: we hear “she was a Catholic, who became insane while preparing to be a Nun” (“Our City Charities” 101–02). But her Gothic presentations of the inmates of the almshouse and prison, and the poor on the streets of NY, a kind of sentimental but jarring depiction of urban landscapes shared by writers like Dickens, was perhaps the only way she could call the lethargic masses to action. And so Fuller moves from gothicizing her internal condition, her personal unhappiness, to finding equally distraught souls in other Gothic landscapes. Her empathy in the city is a great improvement over her oft-times dispassionate observations and complacency or sense of resignation she experienced in her journey to the Great Lakes.

It was her eye-opening tour to the Midwest that allowed Fuller to reconsider her naïve and optimistic New England and Transcendentalist beliefs about progress. The EcoGothic panic ensues from the clash between a primordial vision of the frontier—both the land and the Native American inhabitants—and a pragmatic philosophy of capitalist profits and expansionist dynamics that would eradicate any sense of the mystical that Fuller might wish to retain. Instead, Fuller is convinced that seeing nature from a spiritual point of view—one that would transcend the “real” of the Transcendentalists—would prevent the horrors of commodity culture resulting from the invasion of the Great Lakes by purely materialistic speculators, traders, tourists, and inventors. Much more a Transcendentalist romancer than a travel reporter, Fuller moves between the literacies of the forest and the myths of endangered peoples, whether they be Native American or mystical women, to negotiate a terrain that would bring dignity to all those on the fringes of power. The darkness of the EcoGothic emerges when Fuller makes her *Summer on the Lakes* a type of funereal tribute—to Mariana, Frederica, and the Native Americans, who have all provided her with colorful but somber images in her otherwise lackluster visit to the frontier. We find ourselves with ghosts of Indians, the ghost of Mariana, and the ghost of Frederica—mirroring the ghost of Fuller herself. And Fuller’s EcoGothic vision also provides us with a terrifying glimpse of an America that for Fuller can no longer exist, that has, in fact, only existed in a mythologized version of the past. Speaking of the decimation of the Indians towards the end of the book, she proclaims, in the past tense, “There *was* a greatness, unique and precious, which he who does

not feel will never duly appreciate the majesty of nature in this American continent” (223, original emphasis). And that message signals to me the beginning of the end of the American environment.

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