Replacing the Native American with the "New American" in Margaret Fuller's Summer on the Lakes, in 1843

Laura M. Reilly

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REPLACING THE NATIVE AMERICAN WITH THE “NEW AMERICAN” IN MARGARET FULLER’S SUMMER ON THE LAKES, IN 1843

By

Laura M. Reilly

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Thesis Committee:

Monika Elbert
Thesis Sponsor

Alyce Miller
Committee Member

Wendy Nielsen
Committee Member

Daniel Bronson
Department Chairperson
Abstract

In the summer of 1843, New Engander Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) set off with friends on a westward journey that would take her through the areas of the Great Lakes, Illinois and Wisconsin. Fuller kept copious notes during her trip, and during the eight months after her return home, she revised and enhanced her text and published it as a book, entitled *Summer on the Lakes, In 1843*.

Fuller’s book reflects a myriad of influences, especially from those most known for their Romantic writings. Jacques Jean Rousseau’s ideas of “The Noble Savage,” Edmund Burke’s theory of the sublime, Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s scientific studies, entitled *Farbenlehre (The Color Theory, 1810)*, and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s description of the ideal American character are some of the influences from which Fuller draws her ideas.

Through Fuller’s vast knowledge of language, literature, history, and science, she creatively and reflectively utilizes these and other Romantic influences to discuss two major subjects in her text: the treatment of Native Americans who are being forced to evacuate the Great Lakes area, and the character of the American immigrant that Fuller believes would be best-suited to replace the disappearing Indian population.

This thesis argues that Fuller had already accepted the idea of the “Vanishing American” before she set off on her journey. Although she evokes sympathy from her reader for their treatment by U.S. expansionist mandates, Fuller’s text reveals an underlying desire to have access to an unpopulated landscape upon which she could design a new, Euro-American population of inhabitants. These newly-arrived immigrants would be superior to those already living in the Eastern United States, according to
Fuller’s standards, as they would have a greater respect for the land, a better understanding of the valuable contributions and rights of women, and a willingness to live communally with others on the Western frontier.
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LAURA M. REILLY

Montclair State University

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Veronica Helmstetter (1910-1992).
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Introduction

Dont (sic) expect any thing from the book about the West. I cant (sic) bear to be thus disappointing you all the time. No lives of Goethe, no romances. – My power of work is quite external.

Margaret Fuller to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 12th November 1843

Written two months after her return from the two-month trek that would be the subject of her book, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*, this short entry in a letter to her friend, Emerson, demonstrated Margaret Fuller’s belief that the notes and memories that she captured on her westward trip to the Great Lakes areas of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan, were more analytical and less emotional than the sentimental, poetic texts of her favorite writer, Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Fuller’s trip, during most of which she was accompanied by friends Sarah Anne and James Freeman Clarke, included tours by wagon, canoe, and steamboat to what was then the Western United States: the Great Lakes and the territories of Illinois and Wisconsin. Fuller’s belief that what she had written until that point (the book would not be finished until the following spring) was “disappointing” suggests that she was continuously rethinking, and re-writing, her impressions of her trip to tailor a final product that was more closely aligned with the philosophy of the Romantic period: creative, passionate, and artfully expressive. It seems that despite Fuller having seen the various sights *externally*, or visually, she had difficulty translating her impressions to reflect her *internal*, or emotional, feelings, especially in her observations relating to the natural landscape.

A life lived in harmony with nature, one that shuns the areas of harsh urban development, is a major tenet of Transcendentalist thought. In his essay entitled
“Nature,” Transcendental leader Emerson, who had a profound influence on Fuller, writes, “the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood” (10). The time that Fuller spends altering her text after her trip is focused on finding this balance to which Emerson refers. With a great deal of time and attention to her internal feelings, Fuller uses the landscape as a metaphorical blank canvas where she can see the landscape “in the spirit of infancy,” as if for the first time. And later, she imaginatively creates, rather than objectively reports, the colorful collection of her impressions of the West. A close reading of Fuller’s text shows an extraordinary focus on the natural landscape: descriptions of landforms, rivers and streams, and foliage in various hues and shades.

Her subjective use of colors and shapes was not original, by any means. James A.W. Heffernan, author of *The Re-Creation of Landscape* (1984), explores a history of Romantic thought through a combination of verbal and visual perceptions that combine to create a cohesive whole. Landscape paintings, Heffernan states, were so pervasive by the end of the eighteenth century, that “Wordsworth and Coleridge did look at the places, of course, but the . . . influence of the picturesque [landscape art] made it difficult for any educated traveler even to see scenery without thinking of pictures, much less describe it without doing so” (15). Yet Wordsworth believed that words, more than pictures, were better in communicating ideas. In *Guide through the District of the Lakes* (1835), he writes:

I had once given to these sketches the title of Picturesque; but the Alps are insulted in applying to them that term. Whoever, in attempting to describe their
sublime features, should confine himself to the cold rules of painting would give his reader but a very imperfect idea of those emotions which they have the irresistible power of communicating to the most impassive imaginations. The fact is, that controlling influence . . . is derived from images which disdain the pencil.

(Wordsworth qtd. in Heffernan 19)

Wordsworth’s belief that words have a more powerful emotive appeal than pictures is rooted in Edmund Burke’s interpretations of aesthetic theory.

According to Burke, because words may be considered more obscure than pictures, the written description will always “have a greater power on the fancy to form the greater passions” than its visual depiction (Philosophy 260), and “poetry with all its obscurity, has a more general as well as more powerful dominion over the passions than the other art” (Burke qtd. in Hefferman 40).

Fuller, a true Romantic, was very familiar with the notion of using visual language to create a more powerful appeal to the reader. In fact, she used the metaphor of an artist’s sketch to express her enthusiasm for both Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s poetry. In a two-part essay written for the September and October, 1836, issues of American Monthly, entitled “Modern British Poets,” Wordsworth earned Fuller’s highest praise, and she contrasted his poetry to the poetry of others she deemed inferior: “Yet when the mind is roused to penetrate the secret meaning of each human effort, a higher pleasure and a greater benefit may be derived from the rude but masterly sketch, than from the elaborately finished miniature” (qtd. in Capper 179). In the same essay, she accentuated Coleridge’s ability to highlight a particular mood of mind: “Give Coleridge a
canvass (sic), and he will paint a single mood as if his colors were made of the mind's own atoms,” (qtd. in Capper 179).

Despite her devotion to the philosophy and expression of the Romantics, however, biographers tell us that Fuller did not feel the emotional changes or soothing influences from nature that are often associated with it. Paula Blanchard writes that Fuller believed herself to be incapable of the “Wordsworthian communion” with nature, and this may have been due to the grueling hours of lessons she was exposed to by her overbearing father. Elaine Showalter describes Fuller’s childhood in which her father “cramped her with learning,” (43) and had her memorizing lengthy Latin passages at the age of six. Charles Capper describes sleep disturbances and emotional irregularities that began in Fuller’s childhood and lasted throughout her lifetime: “She thought, and most biographers have agreed, that these nightmares and other emotional disturbances were fundamentally caused by her father’s precocious teaching” (31). Several years before her westward journey, Fuller wrote:

\[\ldots\text{Might but the years of childhood,}\]
\[\text{Which a precocious growth of mind stole from me,}\]
\[\text{Come to me now! Some years of mere sensation;}\]
\[\text{I cannot} \textit{feel} \text{this thing } \ldots\]
\[\text{My mind too early filled, -- the outward sense neglected,}\]
\[\text{I know each object, having seen its picture;}\]
\[\text{Feelings, from the descriptions I have read } \ldots\]

(qtd. in Blanchard 84)
Fuller’s belief that she was incapable of feeling the heightening effects of nature, and its related emotional transformation known as the sublime, supports the idea that she reflected greatly on her text for *Summer on the Lakes* before submitting it for publication. This idea can be explored through letters she wrote to friends both during and after her westward trip. Near the end of her journey, on August 17, 1843, she wrote to Emerson from Chicago, informing him that she expected “probably to be [in Massachusetts] by the middle of September” (*My Heart* 179). Yet, it would be over eight months later, on May 25, 1844, that she would write to friend Caroline Sturgis: “On Thursday I finished [*Summer on the Lakes*] just at dinner time” (*My Heart* 193). During that eight months’ period, Fuller enhanced her text to improve the development of her ideas in several ways: because she did not instinctively feel the heightening effects of nature, she increased her use of emotional language for a more powerful impression; she added fictional occurrences to heighten the effects of her reactions to what she observed; and she added references of color, light, and shadows to artistically enhance the effects of her impressions upon her readers.

For example, within the text of *Summer*, she uses the word “sublime” several times when referring to large, vast areas of the natural landscape, unspoiled by evidence of human interference, and the nature of sublime most commonly refers to strong, human emotions when faced with the vast grandeur of nature. Depending on the theorist, this may include feelings of terror, astonishment, fear coupled with enjoyment, or, as Burke writes, “productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (35). Yet, despite using this term repeatedly to describe various landscapes, Fuller could not express these feelings spontaneously. Less than three weeks before beginning her return
trip home to Massachusetts, she writes to friend William H. Channing: “Ever since I have been here, I have been unwilling to utter the hasty impressions of my mind. It has seemed they might balance and correct one another till something of wisdom resulted. But that time is not yet come” (My Heart 177). However, despite lacking the ability to record the feelings she has instinctively, she uses the term “sublime” in an effort to describe this change of emotion to her reader, with the belief that the dramatic change in feeling is somehow transferable and understood. In other words, as she feels that she is incapable of feeling the “grander passions” of the sublime, she fictionalizes her response for the purpose of heightening the effect of her observations to her reader.

Fuller’s nine-month reflection on the copious notes she took during her journey may have been most greatly influenced by her impressions of a science experiment conducted by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832). The experiment, arguably his most extensive scientific work, is entitled Farbenlehre (The Color Theory, 1810) and was written to counter-interpret Sir Isaac Newton’s (1642-1727) theory Opticks (1704). A letter that Margaret Fuller wrote to friend William Henry Channing about her reading of Goethe’s theory demonstrates its influence:

I have been reading, most of the day, the “Farbenlehre”. The facts interest me only in their mystical significance. As of the colors demanding one another in the chromatic circle, each demanding its opposite, and the eye making the opposite of that it once possessed. And of nature only giving the tints pure in the inferior natures, subduing and breaking them as she ascends. Of the cochineal making mordants to fix its dye on the vegetables where it nestles. Of the plants which,
though they grow in the dark, only make long shoots, and refuse to seek their flower.

There was a time when one such fact would have made my day brilliant with thought. But now I seek the divine rather in Love than law.

(qtd. in Haronian 36-37)

Goethe’s experiments with optical prisms were flawed from the beginning. His subjective perceptions of his eyes’ response to a prism, rather than the objective images created by the prism, formed the basis of his theory. However, despite its errors, Fuller discovers in the theory a “language of transformation” (Heffernan 140), a vocabulary comprised of colors, light, and darkness, that reveals to her an ability to use her poetics, her social consciousness, and her acute vision to better explore, and later explain, her interpretations of what she observes on the Western frontier.

Goethe developed his theory based on two concerns: the attempt, sometimes wayward or wrong, to explain the physics and physiology of color, and also, more importantly to Romantics like Fuller, to explain the aesthetics of perception, or, according to Frederick Burwick, the “objective as well as subjective appearance of color” (49). What Goethe determined, based on his many experiments over a twenty year period, was that color is a construct, and the eye can be “trained” to receive specific colors based on “a subtle shift of the light or movement of the eye;” a trained eye, according to the theory, must remain “alert to the slightest variation of color” (Burwick 17). Herb Aach, author of the foreword for the English translation of Farbenlehre, reports that Goethe’s primary motivation for Color Theory was “helping the painter” (3). In addition, Goethe mistrusted Newton’s theories on light, so much so, that he criticized the earlier scientist’s
efforts, calling them "useless," and "old fallacies" needing to "be swept away" (Goethe
Scientific 159).

What Goethe’s *Color Theory* provided to Fuller was an opportunity to use color
and light subjectively to express the internal ideas she fostered for the visual perceptions
she experienced while on her journey: she could express sympathy, denote an absence of
character, or reinforce stereotypical ideas about gender, race, and class. Goethe explains
his ideas about the viewer’s subjectivity and control:

Though it may sound a bit strange, we will now assert that the eye does not see
shape as such, since brightness, darkness, and color operate together as the sole
means for the eye to distinguish among objects or part of object. Thus we
construct the visible world out of these three elements, and in the process we also
make possible the art of painting, an art capable of producing on canvas a visible
world far more perfect than the real world. (*Scientific* 163-164)

Goethe’s subjectivity addresses colors themselves, and he believes certain colors, and
color combinations, are more naturally appealing to the eye. Those colors that appear
opposite on the "chromatic circle," are more appealing: “the colors diametrically opposed
to each other . . . are those which reciprocally evoke each other in the eye” (*Color* 83).

Goethe extends his discussion of color, and its natural appeal, to the subject of human
aesthetics and how skin and hair color form a subjective determination:

But we have here chiefly to speak of color, and observe that the color of the
human skin, in all its varieties, is never an elementary color, but presents, by
means of organic concoction, a highly complicated result. That the color of the
skin and hair has relation with the differences of character, is beyond question;
and we are led to conjecture that the circumstance of one or other organic system predominating, produces the varieties we see. A similar hypothesis may be applied to nations, in which case it might perhaps be observed, that certain colors correspond with certain confirmations, which has always been observed of the Negro physiognomy... We venture, however, after what has been adduced, to assert that the white man, that is, he whose surface varies from white to reddish, yellowish, brownish, in short, whose surface appears most neutral in hue and least inclines to any particular or positive color, is the most beautiful. (156)

Goethe’s ideas based on skin and hair color, and the positive or negative interpretations of an individual’s perceptions of them, would hardly be taken seriously today. However, his ideas about complementing colors that appear opposite on the spectrum, and a viewer’s ability to draw inferences in character based on colors, drew Fuller’s interests because she had a lifelong interest in science, whose postulates, according to Haronian, “continued to be among the most important foundations of her thought” (36). Fuller, according to Horonian, knew “that the link between language and knowledge is forged in the process of perception, and perception in turn is mediated by received notions of meaning and representations of knowledge” (37). Fuller’s lifelong interest in language also cannot be overemphasized. Scholar James Perrin Warren writes about her interest in using language to affect change. He writes: “Fuller’s aims and methods suggest the fundamental importance of language to her vision of cultural reform” (97). According to Warren, a close look at records kept by attendees of Fuller’s “Conversations” demonstrates that “language is a central concern in Fuller’s philosophy of education” (97). Thus, Goethe’s theory gave her an opportunity to mediate her observations through
documented research, and thereby combine her interests in science and language to form a more scientifically based perception of what she observed in her travels.

There are arguably two major concerns that are evident in Fuller’s text that she will observe, and later refine, using Goethe’s theory of perception and color: the plight of the Native American population which has rapidly been vanishing from the area, and the type of society that its replacement population would implement. Fuller needed to accept the concept of the “Vanishing American,” the forced removal of the Indians, in order to design the character of the “New American,” the emigrant population that would replace it. To develop these two ideas and best describe them to her reading public, it would be Fuller’s intention to subjectively describe her observations, and she states this metaphorically early in her text:

But now the poet must be at the whole expense of the poetry in describing one of these positions; the worker is a true Midas to the gold he makes. The poet must describe, as the painter sketches Irish peasant girls and Danish fishwives, adding the beauty, and leaving out the dirt. (my italics 85)

Apparently, Fuller believed that she had the knowledge, perception, and vision of a sensitive and enlightened poet, and this gave her the authority, as well as the responsibility, to enhance her observations of her travels with enhanced, subjective descriptions.

The nineteenth century saw continuous debate regarding the history and genesis of the Native American population. Their presence on what expansionist Euro-Americans considered their own soil fueled the controversy: Who are these people, and from where did they come? Are they related to us? Or are they a separate form of human
development altogether? In History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century (2004), Steven Conn asserts that in the mid-19th-century, the question of who the Indians were, and where they were from, remained quite open for debate (15). The central argument addressed the relationship of the Indians to the Euro-Americans, and there were two major sides to the debate. Monogenesists believed that the indigenous population evolved from the same parentage as all other men; many of these theorists aligned themselves closely to the Book of Genesis and often took a more sympathetic view of the Indians. On the other hand, polygenesists believed the indigenous population had origins different from, and wholly inferior to, the origin of Europeans; in their racial schema, there was a hierarchy of races that could easily be proven through scientific data and continuing empirical research. Polygenesists included among their members Harvard University naturalist Louis Agassiz, and naturalist Samuel Morton, a Philadelphia physician known for his study of human remains, whose research would become the basis for a popular mid-nineteenth science book, Types of Mankind (1854). The text, authored by J.C. Nott and G.R. Glidden, characterizes essential differences among the races and claimed "no non-Caucasian race could progress towards civilization without a mixture of white blood" (Stafford 238). Both DeBow's Review, a southern magazine, and Southern Quarterly Review, ran frequent articles favoring polygenesis, which also offered "a thinly veiled defense of slavery" (Conn 17).

While Margaret Fuller did not accept the polygenesis theory, and believed the Native Americans and white settlers were descended from a common ancestor, she rejected the idea of miscegenation between the two populations. This exhibits her hesitation in wholly accepting the Indians as fellow human beings. She writes in Summer,
“Amalgamation would afford the only true and profound means of civilization. But
nature seems, like all else, to declare, that this race is fated to perish. Those of mixed
blood fade early, and are not generally a fine race” (189-190). Additionally, the fact that
the Native Americans’ origins were being debated, and thus their very humanity still in
question, contributed to the notion that there was much of the Indian lifestyle that was
unknown, and ultimately suspect. The differences in their language and their appearance,
as well as their lack of written history, combined to keep Fuller’s perspective
sympathetic, but her comments in *Summer on the Lake* reflect an ambiguity toward them
as she witnessed her fellow Euro-Americans colonize the former Indian soil. The Native
Americans’ lack of written language was particularly troubling to Fuller, as she believed
the time had passed for their stories to make an impact on white America. She writes in
*Summer*:

> Had the mythological or hunting stories of the Indians been written down exactly
as they were received from the lips of the narrators, they could not have been
surpassed in interest, both for the wild charm . . . and the light they throw on a
peculiar modification of life and mind. (88)

Fuller’s interest in the vanishing languages and their tales were affected by what Fiona J.
Stafford refers to as a “deep-seated concern with the unity of man and the origin of
human institutions” (241) that existed in the young American consciousness when faced
with the plight of the Indians. At best, an acceptance of the population’s disappearance
urged many in political and literary arenas to demand the recording of the Native
American stories as a “result of an obscure desire to commandeer [them] as an honorary
ancestor” (Stafford 241).
A second theory that deals with the subject of 19th-century literature and its perception of Native Americans is Renée L. Bergland’s claim that Indians’ characters were frequently enhanced with spiritual or mystical abilities that granted them an otherworldly position in a white, secular society. In her book, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (2000), Bergland argues that white Americans internalized the representation of Indians as ghostly presences that haunted the imaginations of writers, despite claims that the purpose of the text was to lend a sympathetic representation to the Indian cause. The acceptance of the “Vanishing Indians” was a foregone conclusion to most Americans, Bergland writes, as the disappearance of Native Americans was necessary to make way for the expansion of Euro-American settlements and the emerging national consciousness of glory, pride, and the advancement of industrial development and wealth. Bergland’s idea is evident in Fuller’s text, where threatening Indians appear suddenly in her imagination, or silently along a riverbank, moving stealthily along the landscape like phantoms shrouded in cloth without identity or individuality.

Fuller had already accepted the inevitability of “The Vanishing Americans” by the time she set out on her trip. Her understanding that the race was “fated to perish” was influenced greatly by friend and fellow social reformer, Lydia Maria Child, an established writer of both fiction and nonfiction dealing with the social, political, and domestic struggles of the times. Child was among over two dozen women who took part in a series of Fuller’s “Conversations:” meetings led and facilitated by Fuller, held for the purpose of altering women’s self-images, and ultimately improving their status in the home and in society. Child and Fuller would meet at the ages of 24 and 16, respectively,
and maintain a friendship, a zeal for learning, and an interest in social reform until
Fuller’s death at the age of forty. Fuller wrote to a former teacher shortly after meeting
Child: “She is a natural person,—a most rare thing in this age of cant and pretention (sic).
Her conversation is charming...she has a very pleasant and spirited way of thinking”
(Clifford 60). Bergland writes that both Child and James Fenimore Cooper, whose stories
Fuller discusses in Summer, influenced Fuller’s perception of Indians, and both writers
“accept[ed] Indian disappearance as an inevitability” (Bergland 64). While in Milwaukee
on her journey, Fuller writes a letter to friend James F. Clarke in which she, too, predicts
the end of an era:

I am desirous to remain till the payment of the tribes at Mackinaw[,] this takes
place early in Sept (sic); there are then four or five thousand Indians assembled
and I should have an opportunity to see this remnant of a great past, such as may
never occur again. (My Heart 173)

Fuller concedes that she is witness to the ending of an era, predicting that a gathering of
several thousand Indians will, in a very short time, no longer be a common event.

Naturally, Fuller’s acceptance of the inevitability of the disappearance of the
Indians greatly affected her perception of them. Additionally, it made her determined to
design the character of the white American society that would replace them. As her
journey took place during a severe financial crisis that had crippled much of the
Northeast, and capitalism, particularly its utilitarian motivations, would, as Fuller
believed, destroy the natural “picture of abundance and peace” (Summer 115) that the
area presented, Fuller was clearly against the unlimited expansion of industry and
commerce. In 1837, several years before embarking on her journey, she had been forced
to leave Boston to find employment in Providence after her employer, Bronson Alcott, teetered on bankruptcy at the school he had established. Once in Providence, Fuller had, according to biographer Blanchard, found the city oppressive and unsatisfying, as the growing commercial center forced her to walk through blocks of paved street before she could find any expanse of green fields or trees. The city, she would lament to Alcott in a letter, "is the hostile element of money-getting, with but little counterpoise" (qtd. in Blanchard 122). Fuller believed industrial centers soiled the beauty of the countryside, and the greed of capitalism was to blame. The undeveloped landscape provided Fuller a canvas on which she could imagine, through her own "language of translation," the New American. In describing the character of this New American, Fuller searched several centuries back through history and cited 14th-century Flemish military leader Philip Van Artevelde, who died in battle and whose life and death were the subject of an 1834 play by English dramatist Sir Henry Taylor. The new American, Fuller believed, was a patriot like Van Artevelde who would die bravely and romantically on the battlefield for his country, one "whose eye reads the heavens while his feet step firmly on the ground" (Summer 132).

This thesis will explore Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* in an effort to demonstrate Fuller’s use of visual and artistic language to describe the Native American population she encountered on her westward journey. Fuller’s pre-existing acceptance of the idea of the “Vanishing American,” which is necessary to make way for a better, improved, new American of European ancestry who would create a society better than what she experienced while living in New England, will also be examined. This thesis will add to Fuller scholarship a better understanding of the writer’s use of
carefully crafted fictitious events, as well as the use of artfully imaginative elements, such as color, light, and shadow, to highlight her ideas and more creatively express her impressions of genuine observations.
A close reading of Fuller’s accounts of the Native Americans she meets on her journey demonstrates that her perception evolves as her trip progresses. In July, when she begins her trip, she is entranced by the Indians’ perceived wildness and close relationship with nature. Fuller clearly incorporates Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s idea of the “noble savage” in her re-telling of her initial observations, which highlights what she perceives to be the best elements of the Native American character. Rousseau believed that man experienced genuine freedom only in his earliest developmental stage, when he lived independently with few needs. To survive, early man relied on nature to provide all vital sustenance necessary to live, and this dependency was natural and pure. Rousseau believed man’s decline began when social networks, beginning with the family and ultimately developing into communities and various social groups, generated vices such as greed, vanity, and hostility.

Fuller’s accounts of the Native Americans, based upon her earliest exposures to them, always included nature, rather than relationships, as a primary influence of their character. This suggests that, to her, their population never advanced beyond what Rousseau referred to as the earliest stage. In his theory, nature provided Early Man with everything he needed; companionship was unnecessary: “I see him satisfying his hunger under an oak, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed under the same tree which provided his meal; and, behold, his needs are furnished” (81) Rousseau writes in A Discourse on Inequality (1755). This solitary condition seems to have made an impression upon Fuller, as the Indians she encounters early in her journey are most often described as independent, solitary beings, rather than as workmates, siblings, or couples,
even when they are in groups. Fuller’s first mention of Native Americans in the text reflects this idea, and is included in her description of Niagara Falls:

Daily these proportions widened and towered more and more upon my sight, and I got, at last, a proper foreground for these sublime distances. 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)

This imaginary encounter with a group of what seems to be identical Indians, all simultaneously presenting a threat of violence and physical control, reflects a myriad of influences. First and foremost is Fuller’s contention that the Native American is “shaped on the same soil.” Figuratively speaking, she contends that nature was the primary influence in the Native American’s development. To Fuller, it was not humans, wholly-developed and complex, who were responsible for the rise and establishment of a Native American population that flourished for thousands of years. Rather, it was Nature, God’s greatest artist, who molds and shapes them, and, as such, remains a component in the
Native American identity. This reflects Rousseau’s idea of the noble savage, but extends the idea to suggest that the Indians are not only from the soil, but the soil is a part of them: they are created by Nature from soil. Additionally, the threatening Indians assume an identical stance: they comprise a collective being, rather than a group of individuals, and this reflects a lack of individuality and full humanity.

A theory that can be explored through Fuller’s perception of this event is Bergland’s argument that representing the Indians as ghosts internalizes them as spectral figures within the imagination of Euro-Americans. Ghosts can be called upon or appear suddenly, yet they always ultimately vanish, and Fuller’s account of the sudden appearance of tomahawk-bearing Indians haunting her visit to the Falls clearly reflects this idea. While Fuller’s sympathetic eye towards the Indians is apparent throughout the text, her initial perception of them on her journey is one of fear, intimidation, and a ghostliness that uncontrollably lingers; Fuller’s claim that the vision of threatening images continues to recur despite her attempts to “shake it off” suggests her sense of vulnerability and an underlying belief that the Indians represent a danger so great that only the fierce power of nature – in this case the roaring Falls of Niagara – is capable of defending her against the threat.

A comparison of the contents of letters Fuller writes to her friends in Massachusetts during her trip shows a remarkable difference from what appears in her text published the following year. Nowhere is this more evident than in her account of her view of Niagara Falls. In a letter to Emerson six days after her visit to Niagara Falls, Fuller writes, “I stand rather forlorn on these bustling piers. I put a good face on it, but, though I believe I shall yet draw some music from the stream of sound, I cannot vibrate
with it yet" (My Heart 171). It is apparent that, despite her attempts to feel the emotional changes associated with the sublime, Fuller is unsuccessful. Later in the letter, she specifies that Niagara’s “gleams of light, have left on my mind rather the impression of a vast and solemn vision than of a reality. I got quite tired at last of seeing so much water in all ways and forms” (My Heart 171). The solemnity of Fuller’s impression suggests that she finds the Falls inspirational, but the fact that she has quickly “tired” of the scene denotes that she was not particularly impressed with its offerings. Yet, Fuller’s recollection of the event in her text is anything but solemn and tired. Did Fuller, in fact, experience the overpowering dread that she claims in her text? Or, did she fail to feel the emotional change of the sublimity of the Falls, and create a fictitious sense of horror in an effort to express a sense of the sublime? Later in Summer, when she continues to describe her emotional response to the Falls, she writes:

I walked down to the bridge . . . and when I stood upon this frail support, and saw a quarter of a mile of tumbling, rushing rapids, and heard their everlasting roar, my emotions overpowered me, a choaking (sic) sensation rose to my throat, a thrill rushed through my veins, ‘my blood ran rippling to my finger’s ends.’ This was the climax of the effect which the falls produced upon me . . . (76)

Fuller’s account in her text of her impression at the Falls is startling when compared to the two brief mentions of her experience in her letter to Emerson. Based upon what is known about Fuller’s inability to feel the emotional impact of the sublime, and her attempts to augment her observations with more creative language, it is very probable that the entry in Summer was created at a later time to enhance her ideas about the sublime and highlight an emotional change to her readers, despite her inability to sense
this change herself. Further support, suggesting that she added the reference to her emotional response later, is contained in an article entitled, “The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime” (1998). In this text, scholar Linda Austin discusses quite intricately the culmination of the mental and physical forces of the sublime that are best illustrated by the European Romantics who would have extensive influence upon Fuller. Austin writes:

For Dennis, Blair, Burke, Kant, and all of their commentators, as well as for eighteenth-century seekers of the picturesque, the occasion of the sublime is death, in the guise of some supernatural or supersensible power that stimulates instincts of self-preservation. It appears as a premonition of the subject's own death, a vision of natural destruction, a loss. The Romantic sublime, beginning with Burke’s 1759 account . . . concentrates on the imagination or the emotions during the encounter with death. Death epitomizes Kant’s idea of the sublime, that “absolutely great” thing that stretches the imagination of the survivor to its limits. (286)

Therefore, the life-threatening vision that Fuller uses to describe her response to Niagara Falls reflects her roots in European Romanticism, and Fuller clearly enhances her response to reflect how she believes an enlightened and sensitive observer would have experienced it. Fuller, unfortunately, does not have the sensitivity to feel the powerful effects of nature, so she creates a response in which her death appears imminent in an effort to accentuate the supposed mental and physical changes she believes she could not experience at Niagara Falls.
Fuller’s description of her first *actual* sighting of Native Americans again includes their relationship with the soil, thus continuing her perception of them as a part of the landscape, created by nature and therefore a part of it:

Coming up the river St. Clair, we saw Indians for the first time. They were camped out on the bank. It was twilight, and their blanketed forms, in listless groups or stealing along the bank, with a lounge and stride so different in its wildness from the rudeness of the white settler, gave me the first feeling that I really approached the West.

The people on the boat were almost all New Englanders, seeking their fortunes. (79)

Fuller perceives the Native Americans as ghostly, disembodied beings that have no interaction with each other. She sees them grouped and identical, with a wildness that is contrasted to the “civilized” Euro-American population. What is most interesting is that the Native Americans are described with no actions beyond “stealing,” a word usually used to refer to movement without being seen: an apparition that is both present and not present. Yet Fuller clearly notices them, and still refrains from giving them any real activity. It is as if even in their movement, they remain inactive and invisible: an unseen portion of the landscape that Fuller characterizes as “the West”. Immediately following Fuller’s description of the Indians, she begins a lengthy description of a group of newly arriving white settlers “seeking their fortunes.” In contrast to her failure to give action or activity to the Indians, the Euro-Americans are granted activity immediately, despite being seated or standing as passengers in a boat and presumably not very active.
These two earliest accounts of Indians reflect Fuller’s preconceived notions about the “vanishing” population, which will only become reinforced as she meets fellow Euro-Americans who see the West as “virgin soil” waiting to be conquered. Based on Fuller’s first two descriptions of the Native Americans she sees, or envisions in her own mind, they are a ghostly, uncontrollable threat to the white population’s safety, and they stand between the Euro-Americans and their desire to utilize the landscape to create a newer, better, America.
The Native Americans and the Gothic

Inasmuch as Fuller could not accept the idea of miscegenation between the white European immigrants and the Native Americans, and she accepted the notion of “The Vanishing Americans,” Fuller’s text demonstrates an “Othering” of the Indian population that can be explored through a close reading of several of her references to both the Indians as well as those who most influenced her perception of them: white American authors and artists. This component of Fuller’s perception helps create the ambivalence she expresses toward the Native Americans. Despite her sympathy and respect for them, there is a consistent underlying Othering that is contrasted against white Americans who also demonstrate rude and savage actions. Fuller’s criticism of the white expansionists is harsh and forthright: “[The white Americans’] progress is Gothic, not Roman, and their mode of cultivation will, in the course of twenty, perhaps ten, years, obliterate the natural expression of the country” (96). To Fuller, Nature is the greatest architect of the land, and while the Native Americans have consistently refused to alter its natural design, white immigrants do not have the respect and appreciation for their undisturbed surroundings. The reference she makes to a “Gothic” form of expansion is particularly ironic, as much of Fuller’s description of the Indian population reflects what has come to be elements included in the genre of American Gothic literature. Renee Bergland describes Leslie Fiedler’s means of separating European and American Gothic, which helps to recognize Fuller’s Gothic references toward the Indians as strictly American:

As Fiedler would have it, the great departure of [Charles Brockden] Brown’s American Gothic from the European is that while European Gothic novels worked
to show the destruction of traditional power structures, the American version worked to show the formation of new power structures in the wilderness. (53)

In fact, Fuller’s traveling was ripe for a Gothic influence. Allan Lloyd-Smith observes that the frontier presented a host of concerns for the immigrants, especially those who settled to the areas formerly inhabited by Indians:

[The settlers] existed on the verge of a vast wilderness, a land of threat as much as material promise, where many lived in isolation or in small settlements with memories and sometimes real fears of Indian warfare. (109)

The “fears of Indian warfare” that Fuller cites are, in a sense, a necessary element in her attempts to Americanize her text. Teresa A. Goddu describes how the original European gothic conventions were originally rejected “as inconsequential to and incompatible with the American project of literary nationalism,” (54) until the Indian became “the native material for a past specifically coded as gothic” (55). Goddu argues that the American desire to face its fears through gothic literature was swiftly realized: “The Indian, demonized as a devil, and the wilderness, turned into a bloody landscape, not only replace but exceed their British types” (56). In Summer on the Lakes, the Indians are consistently lingering in the background, even when their presence is not consistent. Fuller describes a conversation with a white settler who has occasional encounters with returning Native Americans: “They cannot be prevented from straggling back here to their old haunts,” (140) the man tells Fuller, who proceeds to describe the difference between the two continents’ wilderness representations, which exhibit a gothic quality:

The European forest . . . naturally suggested the figures of armed knight on his proud steed, or maiden, decked in gold and pearl . . . and the [American] western
woods [which] suggest a different kind of ballad [due to] the Indian legends [that] have, often, an air of the wildest solitude. (140)

Clearly, Fuller recognizes the literary significance of the Indians’ disappearance. Like European historical romances that foster knights in shining armor, she sees the Indians in a historical sense that continue to haunt those areas that remain uninhabited. In other words, despite leaving the area, the Indian presence continues to haunt the American consciousness.

The wilderness, however, need not necessarily be the physical landforms associated with western expansion. The clashing of the two races is also Gothic, according to *American Gothic* editor Charles L. Crow, while mysterious events, shadowy beings, moments of fear, crossed barriers, forging an identity, defining a homeland, coming to terms with the past, and countless other references and interests of Fuller are also included in the genre. In fact, Crow’s description of “Gothic” reads like a review of much of Fuller’s account of her observations of the Native Americans:

Gothic literature can tell the story of those who are rejected, oppressed, or who have failed. The Gothic has provided a forum for long-standing national concerns about race, that great and continuing issue which challenges the national myth . . .

[A] number of stories about monsters objectify racial fear and hatred, and the largely forbidden topic of miscegenation is explored by several authors. (2)

By her “Othering” of the Indians, Fuller can explore the mystical and Gothic-like elements of their character that she would not deem present in that of the white American. For example, Fuller describes an other-worldly sense of tragedy felt by the Native Americans who possess an inner “demon” unlike that discerned in the Europeans.
It sets them strictly apart from their oppressors, yet is not strong enough to fend off the inevitable outcome. For a second time, Fuller concedes their inevitable loss:

The development of [the Native American’s] fate, that succeeds; of love, of heartbreak, of terrible revenge, which back upon itself recoils, may vie with anything I have ever known of stern tragedy, is altogether unlike any other form, and with all the peculiar expression we see lurking in the Indian eye. The demon is not frightful and fantastic, like those that haunt the German forest; but terribly human, as if of full manhood, reared in the shadow of the black forests. An Indian sarcasm vibrates through it, which, with Indian fortitude, defies the inevitable torture. (197)

Fuller envisions this inner demon unlike those in “the German forest” to contrast the difference between the Indian and Euro-American populations and, ultimately, the difference in their humanities. Granting the Indians an inner understanding and expression not found in Germans blatantly broadens the differences between the two groups and serves as a Gothic “Othering” of the Indians. Later in the same discussion about the Indians, Fuller relates stories she has read about them in several books, including that of Jonathan Carver, who wrote about his observations of the Native American population in *Travels through the Interior Parts of North-America, in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768* (1778). In an effort to highlight the patriotism that Fuller claims Carter believes is inherent in the Indian character, Fuller compliments Carter’s ability to remain with the Indians for almost three years, while simultaneously calling upon a particularly gruesome event:
[Jonathan Carver] deserves the more credit for the justice he is able to do them, that he had undergone the terrors of death at their hands, when present at the surrender of one of the forts, and had seem them in that mood which they express by drinking the blood and eating the hearts of their enemies, yet is able to understand the position of their minds, and allow for their notions of duty. (203)

Fuller's inclusion of this incident accentuates the gruesomeness of a custom that would undoubtedly seem particularly morbid to her reading audience and would further widen the gap between the two populations. Her admiration of Carver's ability to remain in the presence of the Indians further underscores the apparent "difference" between the white observer and the savage Native American, and suggests a white, civilized superiority over the unrefined, blood-thirsty Indians.

There are other examples of Fuller's attempts to compliment the character of the Indians, while simultaneously drawing attention to less appealing habits for which they had commonly become known. In discussing one of several books she had read regarding Native Americans, she is critical of the English author's description of them, yet criticizes the Indian lifestyle at the same time. In discussing the text of one of "Murray's Handbooks," a series of travel guides that were popular in the early 19th-century, Fuller criticizes the author for his failure to look more favorably upon the Indians, yet simultaneously suggests the writer provides an accurate analysis:

[Sir Charles Augustus] Murray's travels I read, and was charmed by their accuracy and clear broad tone . . . He has, himself, no poetic force at description, but it is easy to make images from his hints. Yet we believe the Indian cannot be looked at truly except by a poetic eye. The Pawnees [tribe], no doubt, are such as
he describes them, filthy in their habits, and treacherous in their character, but
some would have seen, and seen truly, more beauty and dignity than he does with
all his manliness and fairness of mind. (87)

Fuller’s negative criticism of the text is not her belief that it is inaccurate. Rather,
Fuller believes Murray’s text fails to do what she finds is necessary, which is to create a
subjective impression that reflects the Romantic philosophy of the Indian lifestyle: one
that is natural, primitive, uncorrupted, and positive. Fuller reasons that, though accurate,
Murray fails to “leave out the dirt,” and “add the beauty,” which she was committed to do
herself. However, by including Murray’s impressions in her own text, Fuller is actually
calling attention to, and exhibiting, the negative stereotypes, while simultaneously
attempting to distance herself from its authorship.

It is argued by Goddu, and other critics, that turning the Indians into gothic
monsters does more than provide gothic material for literary texts. It also “provided a
discourse that justified the nation’s expansion,” (56) she claims. Americans, she argues,
“were predisposed to accept Indian extermination as justified,” (57) after being taught
from childhood to see Indians as wild, blood-thirsty monsters. Fuller’s repeated
contrasting accounts of Indians and Europeans reflects this argument. Later in her text,
she characterizes the New American and calls upon the necessary features, attributes, and
distinctions that are needed; all are uniquely European in nature.

Closer to the end of Fuller’s journey, a close, communal experience with an
Indian family during a sudden rainstorm brings her into their tent and provides a closer
inspection of their social customs. Fuller notes the Indians’ polite gestures, their
willingness to share their small space, and their manner of servility as an Indian mother
“kept off the children and wet dogs from even the hem of [her] garment” (142). Despite this opportunity, however, to observe the domestic relationships among the Native Americans in close quarters, Fuller uses her emotions as a Romantic to emphasize their presumed mystical relationship with nature:

Without, their fires smouldered, and black kettles, hung over them on sticks, smoked and seethed in the rain. An old theatrical looking Indian stood with arms folded, looking up to the heavens, from which the rain dashed and the thunder reverberated . . . The Indian ponies, much excited, kept careening through the wood, around the encampment, and now and then halting suddenly would thrust in their intelligent, though amazed, phizzes, as if to ask their masters when this awful pother would cease, and then, after a moment, rush and trample off again. (142)

Here, Fuller gives both the old man and his animals an intuitive ability during a particularly strong storm. The man, staring into the heavens as if to commune with God, and the horses, turning their faces to their master’s, seemingly aware of the his ability to predict a storm’s outcome, lend a hint of other-worldliness to an otherwise tedious encounter. Without a common language, Fuller and the Indians could not converse verbally, and her depiction of the encounter centers on the differences, rather than similarities, between the two groups. By noting that the man is “theatrical” looking, he remains profoundly ambiguous: nameless, without a description based in reality that could somehow be tied to an actual living being. It also suggests that he is not real, a dramatic, Western vision whose identity remains unrecorded and whose disappearance cannot be verified.
Not surprisingly, Fuller’s account of this event in a letter to her friend, Samuel G. Ward, is somewhat different than what appears in the finished text. In her letter, written from Milwaukee, the sight of the incident, Fuller writes of the incident:

“[Their] kettles were boiling over fires in the open air, which the rain could not put out. Their horses much excited by the thunder were careening wildly around among the trees, one theatrical looking old Indian stood gazing up to the heavens, while the rain poured and the thunder crashed there could not be a finer scene.

(My Heart 175)

Here, the Indian does look toward the sky, presumably to approximate the length of the storm. However, there is no suggestion that the horses look toward the humans as if to seek information or comfort from them. Once again, it appears Fuller has enhanced her observances to highlight an idea. Here, it is presumably to create a picture of a Native American, and his animals, both of whom, living alongside harmoniously with nature, have a supernatural relationship with its elements.

Future meetings with Indians contain the “theatrical” perspective that Fuller develops as her trip continues, and eventually, she becomes aware that the colors she had been using to describe various flowers and landscapes could alternately be used for the Native Americans themselves. Initially, it appears that seeing the Native Americans in a strictly visual form, without consideration for their actions, provides ample artistic license:

Part of the same ban [of Pottawattamies] I had seen in Milwaukie, on a begging dance. The effect was wild and grotesque. They wore much paint and feather head-dress. “Indians without paint are poor coots,” said a gentleman who
had been a great deal with, and really liked, them; and I like the effect of the paint
on them; it reminds of the gay fantasies of nature. (143)

With her attention kept keenly on the pairing of the Native Americans and nature, Fuller
espouses her preference for Indians to look as she has become accustomed to seeing
them, and this helps to maintain the perception that, as theatrical presences, rather than
fully human subjects, they are not individualized. Without a clear picture of them, their
situations cannot be clearly examined, and their futures cannot be clearly predicted. Their
“wild and grotesque” appearance, in what Fuller believes is their full Indian regalia,
promotes the Gothic and unpredictable character that Fuller has consistently factored into
their human character.

Eventually, Fuller’s perception of the Native Americans evolves into a more
sensitive, humanistic awareness when, near the end of her journey, she spends some time
at a boardinghouse that is centered among various groups of Native Americans’ homes.
Observing the different familial relationships, including those between husband and wife,
or mother and child, gave Fuller a clearer understanding of their character and humanity,
as well as the realization that she and those within her traveling party, and the Indians
themselves, had fewer differences than similarities. In fact, Fuller begins to recognize
several components of the Indian lifestyle that are superior to those of the white
population, specifically in terms of the acts of affection and “domestic pleasures” (177)
that she witnesses among parents and offspring. Once Fuller begins to enrich her
understanding of their humanity, and witnesses frequent examples of their gentle
character, her text becomes more colorful and imaginative, and her description of their
community is contrasted to that of imposing French settlers:
On the other side, along the fair, curving beach, below the white houses [of the French] scattered on the declivity, clustered the Indian lodges, with their amber brown matting, so soft, and right of hue, in the late afternoon sun. The first afternoon I was there, looking down from a near height, I felt that I never wished to see a more fascinating picture. It was an hour of the deepest serenity; bright blue and gold, rich shadows. Every moment the sunlight fell more mellow . . . Here and there lounged a young girl, with a baby at her back, whose bright eyes glanced, as if born into a world of courage and of joy, instead of ignominious servitude and slow decay . . . Many bark canoes were upturned upon the beach, and, by that light, of almost the same amber as the lodges. (my italics 175)

Fuller’s description of the community of people, surrounded by their homes and boats, is vastly richer and more colorful that any that preceded it. She undergoes a tremendous change in her perception of this population, and uses a host of superlatives, along with various shades of color, light, and shadow, to “paint” a landscape that is vibrant alongside wholly-developed humans who are sensitive as well as active. When she describes the “young girl, with a baby at her back,” it is one of the earliest times in which she acknowledges the relationship between two Indians, rather than describing them in uniform poses. Her use of the natural color of amber to highlight the community’s serenity, blue and gold to characterize its mellow character, and amber again on the boats to highlight their importance to their daily lives and their use on the nearby water, clearly reflect Goethe’s Color Theory, specifically his idea that brightness, darkness, and color are the three necessary elements for the eye to distinguish among objects. Fuller’s use of all three elements to capture her feelings of the community demonstrate her desire to cast
a sympathetic light onto the Native American population using her visual perception and knowledge of art and color. To Fuller, she has seen something pleasing and genuine among the members of the community that she had not witnessed before, and she finds only a description worthy of a noted author could satisfy her visual yearning.

As Fuller watches the Indians move about outside her window, she calls upon one of the more popular poets in America: “Continually I wanted Sir Walter Scott to have been there. If such romantic sketches were suggested to him . . . a group near one of these fires but would have furnished him material for a separate canvas” (176). Despite an increased recognition of the Indians’ condition, however, Fuller’s comment suggests that their full humanity has not been recognized: they remain the products with which one might use to create art. By using color to paint a scene in which their community can be imagined, and then calling upon another writer to do the same, Fuller reiterates the idea that the Indians remain part of the landscape, rather than fully-developed and wholly human. Additionally, Fuller had argued years earlier, in the afore-mentioned American Monthly article, that the younger English Romantics, i.e., Byron and Shelley, “were vastly superior to Scott” (Capper 178). Therefore, while Fuller may be using Scott’s name to keep her references familiar to her American readership, she is simultaneously suggesting that the metaphorical material offered by the sight of the Indians, paint for use on a canvas, is sufficient enough that even a lesser poet can utilize the materials to create a picturesque scene.
Designing the Character of the “New American”

While there is ample support to suggest that Margaret Fuller accepted the idea of the “Vanishing American,” an analysis of her text suggests that she tacitly approved of the Indians’ forced removal, despite her sympathetic sentiments regarding the vulnerable population. The landscape, newly vacant and pristine despite serving for centuries as the home of millions of Native Americans, provided a blank canvas upon which Fuller could design the “New American,” the white European immigrant with a character reflecting the tenets of Transcendentalism. The time period during which Fuller wrote *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* coincided with the development of the American political system still in its infancy, and there was a desire among its citizens to foster a new national identity. Biographer Charles Capper notes that the Transcendentalists “were brought up to feel keenly the responsibility to create an American culture” (337) that could be aligned with the splendor and “Adamic bravado” of their political forefathers. Although Fuller and her generation were somewhat removed from the direct influence of the Revolutionary era and its strong nationalist principles, they nonetheless identified themselves as “cultural pioneers” (Capper 337). The creation of this new American culture could not include the Native Americans, a population perceived to be less advanced, as well as physically and emotionally unrestrained. Therefore, a “blank canvas,” void of interfering people lacking the appreciation for the sacrifices and risks taken by America’s founding fathers, provided the space needed to bring this to realization.

According to biographer Capper, an examination of Fuller’s private journals suggests that her interest in her nation’s identity and its future inhabitants began at a young age. At about the time she began learning of Ralph Waldo Emerson, she also
demonstrated a keen interest in American history and the sacrifices made by those who had a hand in designing the character of the new nation. At just twenty-three years old, she began to envision that one day she might have the opportunity to become the designer of the new, improved American character. In her journal, she lamented that she could not witness the birth of the new nation in 1776, and see for herself the spirit and the development of the character of its citizens. Yet, in the same entry, she yearned for the possibility to have the chance to pursue a similar goal, foreshadowing her westward trip during which she would design a new, refreshed American character:

American History! Seriously, my mind is regenerating as to my country, for I am beginning to appreciate the United States and its great men. The violent antipathies, -- the result of an exaggerated love for, shall I call it by so big a name as the “poetry of being?” -- and the natural distrust arising from being forced to hear the conversation of half-bred men, all whose petty feelings were roused to awkward life by the paltry game of local politics -- are yielding to reason and calmer knowledge. Had I but been educated in the knowledge of such men as Jefferson, Franklin, Rush! I have learned to know them partially . . . But, better still, I hope to feel no more that sometimes despairing, sometimes insolently contemptuous, feeling of incongeniality with my time and place. Who knows but some proper and attainable object of pursuit may present itself to the cleared eye. . . (qtd. in Capper 134)

The praise she expressed for the men who had a hand in designing the character of the first American citizens demonstrates Fuller’s interest in the character of the country’s future citizens. Her criticism for the “half-bred men” involved in “the paltry game of
local politics” shows her distrust for those who endorsed the nation’s capitalist and materialistic nature. Her desire to quell the resentment she felt for having been born just thirty-five years after the nation was born, and her prediction that a second opportunity to design her nation’s character may present itself to her, foreshadowed the desire she demonstrated on her journey to use the emptying landscape as the Eden-like birthplace of the New American.

Considering and sketching the New American character is an action that critics often describe as attempts to synthesize an otherwise fragmented identity. The action provides “utopian impulses of nationalism,” (Foote 92) that allows the designer to rewrite America as a land of promise; the landscape can be rediscovered anew. Terry Eagleton argues that it allows the imagination:

To trace within the present that secret lack of identity with itself which is the spot where a feasible future might germinate – the place where the future overshadows and hollows out the present’s spurious repleteness. To “know the future” can only mean to grasp the present under the sign of its internal contradictions, in the alienations of its desire, in its persistent inability ever quite to coincide with itself. (qtd. in Foote 92)

Designing the new citizen, then, provided Fuller with the opportunity to overcome her earlier dissatisfaction with the character of New England. By describing the newer, better, fellow citizens she hopes will settle in the Western landscape, she gave them the character traits she deemed superior to those she has come to know and loathe in New England.
The responsibility to design the next generation of Americans, those whom Emerson once described as needing to put aside "the prejudices of society" (qtd. in Capper 215), was an overwhelming responsibility, according to critics. The deed provided what Capper refers to as a "literary nervousness" (337) that can be detected in their writings. Toni Morrison describes this literary task more specifically. She cites the recognition of this nervousness in American Romanticism as "an exploration of anxiety imported from the shadows of European culture, made possible the sometimes safe and other times risky embrace of quite specific, understandably human fears," (37) many of which are also present in the Gothic tradition:

Americans' fear of being outcast, of failing, of powerlessness; their fear of boundarylessness, of Nature unbridled and crouched for attack; their fear of the absence of so-called civilization; their fear of loneliness, of aggression both external and internal. In short, the terror of human freedom – the thing they coveted most of all. (Morrison 37)

In addition to the fear of an unknown future with fewer limits and ambiguous boundaries, historian Anne F. Hyde describes the weightiness of a long history of European standards overshadowing the American identity. She describes a lingering susceptibility of the newer nation to compare itself to the old:

This tendency developed out of Americans' insecurities about their culture that had been present since the nation's beginnings. Europe provided the standards that determined what was beautiful, what was historical, and what was civilized. And, much to the discomfort of culturally conscious Americans, most of the eastern half of the nation simply did not measure up. (359)
This European influence was particularly troublesome to Fuller, as her inheritances of the European Romantic movement were deeply rooted. Yet, she and her fellow Transcendentalists hoped to create something new and original, and this meant casting off the elements of the European culture that they deemed insignificant and materialistic. In a letter, written in 1840, to friend William Channing, Fuller noted this problem of complex cultural connections: “How much those of us who have been much formed by the European mind have to unlearn and lay aside, if we would act here. I would fain do something worthily that belonged to the country where I was born . . .” (Capper 337). Fuller’s sentiments reflect her desire to design the “New American,” utilizing the elements of both American and European societies that she deemed most valuable.

Surely, Fuller was challenged by the overwhelming responsibility of maintaining her esteemed position among her fellow members of the Transcendentalist Club, those whom Capper refers to as “cultural pioneers” (337), although certainly she did not lack confidence in her ability to express her ideas. In 1839, she refused to allow James Freeman Clarke to publish some of her poems in his publication Messenger, telling him “Genius seems to me excusable in taking the public for a confidant” (qtd. in Capper 337). In another letter a year later to friend George Davis, she examined her status as a single woman, referring to herself as “a thinker,” rather than one who has had a “thorough experience of life” as a wife and mother, yet she predicted a rich future for herself in intellectual terms: “. . . but this destiny of the thinker, and (shall I dare say it?) of the poetic priestess, sibylline, dwelling in the cave, or amid the Lybian sands, lay yet enfolded in my mind” (qtd. in Capper 289). Thus, as both “genius,” and “poetic
priestess,” Fuller believed she had the wisdom and understanding to create the character of the New American.

Yet, as a female alongside her male Transcendentalist counterparts, she had both the challenge of social restrictions, as well as the literary nervousness imposed by the responsibility of determining and describing what would be best for the young nation’s future. Three years before her Westward journey, Fuller described in a letter to a friend how she found these restrictions intimidating and even stifling:

For all the tides of life that flow within me, I am dumb and ineffectual, when it comes to casting my thought into a form. No old one suits me. If I could invent one, it seems to me the pleasure of creation would make it possible for me to write. What shall I do, dear friend? I want force to be either a genius or a character. One should be either private or public. I love best to be a woman; but womanhood is at present too straitly-bounded to give me scope. At hours, I live truly as a woman; at others, I should stifle; as, on the other hand, I should palsy, when I would play the artist. (qtd. in Capper 338)

Fuller’s belief that she was impeded by social restrictions made her sense of responsibility even greater than others in her literary circle. She also questioned her effectiveness as an artistic creator while she recognizes this self-inflicting inhibition. The ambiguity that she expressed – her appreciation for her womanhood contrasting her suffering for its effect on her creativity – may have contributed to her reliance upon the ideas and predictions of long-term friend Ralph Waldo Emerson in developing a portion of the text for *Summer on the Lakes*: specifically, her description of the kind of man who should assume the role of leader in the westward-expanding nation.
Emerson’s influence upon Margaret Fuller’s views was arguably greater than any other individual Fuller knew during her lifetime. Fuller spent two years singing Emerson’s praises and noting his movements in her journal prior to meeting him in 1836 when she was twenty-six years old. Her first visit to the Emerson home lasted three weeks; Emerson found her demeanor more vivacious than he generally preferred, and he would later write of their first meeting, “... she made me laugh more than I liked” (qtd. in Capper 187). Yet, in time, the two developed a mutually-supportive friendship that would last until Fuller’s death, at the age of forty, in 1850. According to biographer Capper, Fuller’s close friend William Henry Channing was somewhat skeptical of Emerson and the influence he appeared to have upon the young Fuller. Fuller responded with an uninhibited defense of Emerson’s wisdom and spirituality:

You question me as to the nature of the benefits conferred upon me by Mr. Emerson’s preaching. I answer, that his influence has been more beneficial to me than that of any American, and that from him I first learned what is meant by an *inward life*. Many other springs have since fed the stream of living waters, but he first opened the fountain. That the ‘mind is its own place,’ was a dead phrase to me, till he cast light upon my mind. Several of his sermons stand apart in memory, like landmarks of my spiritual history. It would take a volume to tell what this one influence did for me. (my italics, qtd. in Capper 216)

Emerson’s idea of living a life with the mind focused inward, always self-reflective and spiritual, influenced Fuller tremendously. In fact, it became the basis for Fuller’s description of the “New American”: the man who would lead future immigrants and Westward-bound citizens to the landscape that would ultimately become available due to
the disappearing Native Americans. Emerson’s description of the responsibilities of this American, found within the texts of his essays and speeches, set the outline from which Fuller would later draw in her own descriptions.

A major tenet of Transcendentalism, and a primary element of Emerson’s conception of what the new American character should be, is the necessity of a direct relationship with God and nature. Emerson writes that each person needs to return to a communion with nature, knowing that the reconciliation of man and nature offers a sense of wholeness, power, and self-reliance. An absence of this relationship brings about loneliness, isolation, alienation, and corruption (Leitch 719). The passionate, imaginative writer, whom Emerson refers to as “The Poet,” is the man capable of leading the democracy through his keen awareness of Nature’s liberating power and its spiritual significance. To Emerson, the common man, at present, has no appreciation for nature’s spiritual and intellectual potency. He writes in his essay entitled “The Poet”:

There is no man who does not anticipate a supersensual utility in the sun, and stars, earth, and water. These stand and wait to render [to] him a peculiar service. . . too feeble fall the impressions of nature on us to make us artists. Every touch should be a thrill . . . The poet is the person in whom these powers are in balance, the man without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, traverses the whole scale of experience, and is representative of man, in virtue of being the largest power to receive and to impart. (448)

Emerson’s belief than any man could be a poet meant that all of America could be influenced by his idea, regardless of their previous abilities or education. One, however, needed “a deeper insight” (455) into man’s ability to bring about social change and
personal improvement through a relationship with God and nature. Education, specifically the knowledge garnered through books and formal schooling, is not a necessary ingredient in the character of Emerson’s new American. Those whom he describes as having had “acquired some knowledge of admired pictures or sculptures, and have an inclination for whatever is elegant” are, he deems “selfish and sensual,” (447) and not focused on the harmony afforded by nature. Those closest to nature, through work and in thought, are more intuitive and therefore in a more enlightened state. He writes in his essay, “The American Scholar,” about his high regard for manual labor: “I hear therefore with joy whatever is beginning to be said of the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for unlearned hands” (63). Emerson believes that working harmoniously with nature provided time for reflection and promoted self-reliance.

With Emerson’s insight and influence in mind, and using her fellow travelers and local settlers as examples, Fuller outlines several versions of her ideal American citizen who she believes should have the privilege of using the virtually untouched landscape as their home. To Fuller, the most important element in the character of the New American is the understanding that he must utilize the soil only as much as needed for his sustenance. More specifically, he must not value his materialistic needs beyond what is appropriate for the betterment of the community. In other words, though capitalist in spirit, the New American must work enough to enjoy leisure, but not at the risk of failing to take the time for self-reflection, intellectual discourse with others, and family activities. The landscape was to be considered sacred, and kept, whenever possible, as pristine as it was found. Fuller believed this was possible based on the actions of the
Indians, "whose habits do not break in on that aspect of nature under which they were born" (96).

Critic Lance Newman describes Fuller’s dissatisfaction with the economic conditions in Boston and elsewhere in New England. Her journey, in 1843, took place in the midst of the severe economic crisis of 1837–1844, during which, at times, a third of manual laborers found themselves unemployed (10). The effects on the working poor were devastating, but drew a renewed sense among the Transcendentalists that changes within New England society were imminent. Among them included, “the necessity to liberate souls from spiritually confining institutions, [and] the call to achieve an organic integration of thought and action, labor and consciousness, intellectuals and common life” (Capper 310). These poor economic conditions influenced Fuller to recognize the grim realities of unbridled capitalism and the stark differences in class within her own community. It is not surprising, then, that the exploitation of laborers is a constant interest, and she was highly critical of the materialistic nature of the new emigrants to the western landscape. She described what she believes are the poorest elements of the emigrant character:

They had brought with them their habits of calculation, their cautious manners, their love of polemics. I 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)
The description of the new arrivals can be looked at from both the perspective of their selfish, capitalist nature, as well as their willingness to, as Fuller would describe later, “obliterate the natural expression of the country” (96). The “new scene” that Fuller refers to is both the area around which she travels, but also the soil upon which the Indians, who did not alter the land, had their homes. Inasmuch as Fuller desired the landscape to remain unmarred, she is disappointed by the means in which the emigrants made their arrival: “The march of peaceful is scarce less wanton than that of warlike invasion. The old landmarks are broken down, and the land, for a season, bears none, except the rudeness of conquest and the needs of the day” (85). To her, the impending commercial scene would both destroy the pristine landscape, and continue to show “plainly that they [have] no thought beyond satisfying the grossest material wants” (96).

A second important element of the character of Fuller’s “New American” is the ability to rethink and ultimately revise his understanding of gender issues. Specifically needing revision are those traditions that place upon women days filled with mindless domestic chores, as well as the belief that copying lifestyles, i.e. European customs and fashions, are paramount to home education, intellectual discourse, and activity benefiting the family and community. To Fuller, the women who have immigrated to the western states have a poorer chance for happiness than their male counterparts. They are not physically prepared for the labor that is required to run a household, they lack time for leisure activities, and they lack intellectual stimulation. Fuller describes a series of disappointing circumstances for the women of the west. Though Fuller does not oppose the women’s performance of physical labor, she finds their backgrounds in the East have ill-prepared them for the demanding tasks in the West. She writes:
The great drawback upon the lives of these settlers, at present, is the unfitness of the women for their new lot. It has generally been the choice of the men, and the women follow, as women will, doing their best for affection’s sake, but too often in heartsickness and weariness . . . their part is the hardest, and they are least fitted for it . . . The women can rarely find any aid in domestic labor . . . careful tasks must often be performed, sick or well, by the mother and daughters, to whom a city education has imparted neither the strength nor skill now demanded. (106)

Fuller is distressed that the women have “followed” the men due to “affection’s sake,” thereby performing these demanding tasks voluntarily, risking their health to fulfill men’s mandates, rather than fulfilling their own desires.

In addition to the physical demands, the endless work leaves little time for self-reflection and leisure. Despite their grueling labor duties, women appear willing to remain overly-conscious of their feminized role in society. This, too, troubles Fuller:

With all these disadvantages for work, their resources for pleasure are fewer . . . Their culture has too generally been that given to women to make them “the ornaments of society” . . . Seeing much of this joylessness . . . we could not but look with deep interest on the little girls, and hope they would grow up with the strength of body, dexterity, simple tastes, and resources that would fit them to enjoy and refine the western farmer’s life. (106-107)

Fuller shows optimism for future generations of women who may be better prepared for the western lifestyle due to their experience, as well as an education founded in the needs of the rural area. However she clearly criticizes the society that demands a great deal of
labor from its female population, yet still minimizes the women’s creative and intellectual contributions.

Critics of Fuller agree that she “accepted certain related ideas of separate gendered spheres and characteristics” (Gilmore 68). However, the revolutionary feminist constantly struggles with the social restrictions placed upon women both in her own society and in her nation’s increasing western population. Her observations of the pioneering women draws upon countless concerns for them: physically, intellectually, emotionally, and politically; her text often demonstrates little promise for the women in the west, yet holds out a small dose of optimism for the next generation’s wives, mothers, and daughters. However, much of Fuller’s concern seems to be the focus of the women themselves, and their fascination with European customs and traditions. To a great degree, her text is a call to those women who have followed their husbands and brothers out west, to begin reconsidering their own place in the New American scene.

Despite a sense of sadness, and perhaps even pity, at the circumstances that the western woman experiences, Fuller finds some blame to place on the women themselves. Primarily, their insistence on fashioning themselves in the European, or even eastern American traditions, hinders their development and chance for emotional and intellectual fulfillment. Fuller writes of the women: “Everywhere the fatal spirit of imitation, of reference to European standards, penetrates and threatens to blight whatever of original growth might adorn the soil” (my italics 107). Inasmuch as Fuller has elected to design the alternative character of the New American, using the lifestyle of the women as the basis for her design, their insistence of copying the traditions of Europe thwarts Fuller’s attempts to envision a new, original society. In another observation, she criticizes their
choice of musical instrument: “The piano many carry with them, because it is the fashionable instrument in the eastern cities. Even there, it is so merely from the habit of imitating Europe...” (108) To Fuller, the weight and size of a piano, regardless of a women’s ability to play, makes it unfit for western life. She recommends that women redirect their musical interest to the guitar, which is more practical and suitable for a family living in remote areas.

Fuller’s criticism toward the western woman is not limited to her choice of instrument. As the text is an eclectic collection of observations, anecdotes, and poems, Fuller inserts a lengthy description of a painting by the 16th-century artist Titian entitled “Venus and Adonis” (1555-1560). The picture depicts the goddess Venus trying to restrain her lover, Adonis, from leaving her and going on a hunt. A cherubic Cupid sleeps nearby in a tree, unable to assist Adonis from Venus’ grasp. Fuller uses her lengthy description of the painting as a metaphor for the women she meets who have abandoned their own interests and desires for the purpose of keeping their men:

‘Tis difficult to look at this picture without indignation, because it is, in one respect, so true. Why must women always try to detain and restrain what they love? Foolish beauty; let him go; it is thy tenderness that has spoiled him. Be less lovely – less feminine; abandon thy fancy for giving thyself wholly; cease to love so well, and any Hercules will spin among thy maids, if thou wilt. But let him go this time; thou canst not keep him. Sit there, by thyself, on that bank, and, instead of thinking how soon he will come back, think how thou may’st love him no better than he does thee, for the time has come. (137)
Fuller spends weeks in the company of various women, some of whom she believes have left their homes, families, and interests behind in the East to follow their men in search of their western Eden. Instead, however, the women have found grueling work, loneliness, and a loss of spirit to allow them to express their own identities. Fuller’s musings relating to a classical painting provide her with the visual picture to best convey her support, but also demonstrates that she senses that many of the women she sees feel powerless to change their lot and improve their future.

Fuller’s hope for the future of the western land, and the character of the New American, becomes more positive as her trip progresses: “We must not complain but look forward to a good result,” (96) she observes when recognizing the inevitability of the changing character. While in an area she describes as near Rock River, she spends three days in a home that she describes as having “a peculiar charm... where the choice of location, and the unobtrusive good taste of all the arrangements, showed such intelligent appreciation of the spirit of the scene” (96). Rather than remain critical of all new inhabitants and their intentions, she begins to recognize those who have settled and built modest dwellings while making few changes to the land. Shortly thereafter, Fuller becomes more optimistic about the future inhabitants:

If the next generation be well prepared for their work, ambitious of good and skillful to achieve it, the children of the present settlers may be leaven enough for the mass constantly increasing by emigration. And how much is this needed where those rude foreigners can so little understand the best interests of the land they seek for bread and shelter. It would be a happiness to aid in this good work,
and interweave the white and golden threads into the fate of Illinois. It would be a work worthy the devotion of any mind. (my italics 133) Fuller’s idea of preparing the next generation of inhabitants of the West, and integrating their ideas with those of the “rude foreigners” who are already living there, shows that the condition of the land is paramount to her character of the New American, and also demonstrates a willingness to recognize that many interests will determine the fate of the land. Her desire to “interweave the white and golden threads” depicts this understanding; her choice of colors, which are not opposites on the spectrum but rather resemble each other to a mild degree, shows that as both groups are white with European ancestry, they are closely aligned in history and custom, and, also, blending these two groups of people together to form one society may ultimately bring positive results to the western landscape.
Conclusion

At the end of *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* Fuller summarizes what she has observed about Native Americans on her long journey: “Although I have little to tell, I feel that I have learnt a great deal of the Indians... There was a greatness, unique and precious, which he who does not feel will never duly appreciate the majesty of nature in the American continent” (223). Clearly, the civilization of the Indians, to Fuller, was a passing era that has ended. Appreciating the soil upon which a superior American society is established is the strongest message in Fuller’s text. Sadly, the text also reveals that she had accepted the fate of the Native Americans even before beginning her journey, and the devastation she observed did little to change her mind about their humanity. However, the text also reveals that she was optimistic about America’s future, and she even describes a home that she declares could be the home of the New American she hopes to see thrive there:

As we approached [the home], it seemed the very Eden which earth might still afford to a pair willing to give up the hackneyed pleasure of the world, for a better and more intimate communion with one another and with beauty: the wild road led through wide beautiful woods, to the wider and more beautiful shores of the finest lake we saw. On its waters, glittering in the morning sun, a few Indians were paddling to and fro in their light canoes. On one of those fair knolls I have so often mentioned, stood the cottage, beneath trees which stooped as if they yet felt brotherhood with its roof tree. Flowers waved, birds fluttered round, all had the sweetness of a happy seclusion; all invited on entrance to cry, All hail ye happy ones! To those who inhabited it. (144-45)
Fuller’s depiction of the ideal home in Eden summarizes her characterization of what she hopes for America’s future. A family, living in an “intimate communion with one another,” with both sexes living their full lives harmoniously, comprises the inhabitants. As they are surrounded by an unspoiled landscape in the shadow of brotherhood, this suggests a communal lifestyle where neighbors’ concerns are considered, and little is done to alter the landscape. The Indians, however, are simply moving through this scene: they are not inhabitants, but merely passing through, and thus they are not among the “happy ones” Fuller describes.

Fuller’s ambivalence toward the Native Americans’ plight, and her desire to describe the character of the population that would replace the “Vanishing Indians,” may be better understood in a study written by Toni Morrison. In her book, Playing in the Dark (1992), Morrison argues that white European and American writers have long had difficulty in discussing issues of race: “In matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse” (9). She argues that “evasion,” and “substitute language” are present in place of this missing literature. This theory provides a better understanding of Fuller’s ambivalence toward the Native Americans. Through her use of colorful language and gothic images, as well as often over-romanticized descriptions, Fuller avoids addressing their dire circumstances, due to what Morrison describes as an American “mandate for conquest” (3). The Eurocentric values with which Fuller identifies do not allow her to provide any form of permanent home for the Indians. In the Eden she envisions for the future American population on the pristine western landscape, the Indians are passing through, but not a permanent part of, the American scene.
Works Cited


