



MARGARET FULLER'S PUBLICISTIC DIALOGUE WITH AMERICA'S PURITAN HERITAGE

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The article analyzes the work of Margaret Fuller (1810 – 1850), a key figure of American Transcendentalism; it focuses on Fuller's writings from the New-York Tribune in 1844 – 1846 and their religious dimension. Methodologically the article is based on a close reading of Fuller's writings and their analysis in the cultural and historical context. Fuller's works are divided into three groups. The first group is writings covering events in the religious life of the community. The second group is essays on social problems: Fuller here is both a journalist and a social reformer; she writes on slavery, poverty, homelessness, she informs the public and calls for action.

Significantly, these essays are rich in religious allusions involving the old Puritan heritage in the urgent public debate. The third group is works written in the form of sermons: Fuller demonstrates that she was a good preacher, as well as a journalist. It is shown that Fuller was immersed in the religious controversies of her time, but was free of religious prejudice; affirming the spirit of Christianity, she often went beyond denominational boundaries; her main accents were on the ethical and social aspects of religious faith and practices. Fuller criticized the New England Puritans; nevertheless, she regarded Puritanism as a source of American identity, the "noble" blood that could play an important role at the time when the country faced new waves of immigration.

The analysis leads to the general conclusion that Fuller's works as a publicist were a landmark in the history of American Transcendentalism as it moved beyond the boundaries of New England to encompass the emerging American nation in the international world.

Key-words: Fuller, publicist, American Transcendentalism, Puritanism, religion, The Dial, the New-York Tribune, journalism, slavery, social reform, urban problems.

Margaret Fuller (1810 – 1850), an eminent publicist, author of the philosophical treatise on the equality of women *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), was a prominent figure of American Transcendentalism – a major Romantic movement that developed in New England in the 1830's–40's under the influence of German idealism, English and German Romantic writers¹. The Transcendentalists adapted the European seeds to their native soil, and the harvest was rich and original; the movement embraced such important and diverse thinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Orestes Brownson. Fuller was the first editor of the Transcendentalist quarterly *The Dial*, described by its founder on the title page as a “*Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion*”.

This combination of the three spheres was a matter of principle for the Transcendentalists who aimed at a synthetic unity of the life of the mind. Religious matters were then of special significance in the United States: the established views, religious dogma and practice were challenged by the new generation of religious leaders; controversies between the old Puritan creed, the Unitarians, and a new emerging religious consciousness were sweeping the country. Indirectly but profoundly, these religious disputes reflected the new social realities of rapid territorial growth, dramatic increase in population, industrialization and urbanization, and, consequently, the social problems the nation faced.

All Transcendentalists were, in one way or another, involved in the religious debates; Margaret Fuller was no exception. The past few decades have witnessed a revival of scholarly interest in Fuller's work; however, the religious aspects of her thought have not yet received sufficient attention. Fuller was a person of deep religious sensibility; the mystical experience she had in her youth, her interest in the works of Emanuel Swedenborg and Jakob Böhme, the influence of Rosicrucianism on her early writings have been described by many

scholars, including Charles Capper [Capper, 1992; 2007], Bell Gale Chevigny [Chevigny, 1994], John Matteson [Matteson, 2012], Joan von Mehren [von Mehren, 1994], Joel Myerson [Myerson, 1980], and were the focus of research in Jeffrey Steele's monograph [Steele, 2001]. But little has been written on Fuller's relationship with the Puritan heritage and the development of her religious beliefs beyond the 1830's– early 1840's; in Russia nothing at all has yet been written on Fuller's religious views. The purpose of this article is to help fill the gap and understand better the part Fuller played in the religious controversies of her time.

Methodologically the article is based on a close reading of Fuller's writings and their detailed analysis in the cultural and historical context.

Fuller's work and her intellectual evolution can be divided into three major stages, specific in time and space. The first was connected with Boston and its environs and the publication of *The Dial*, when Fuller was its editor (1840–1842) and contributor. In the middle of the 1840's Fuller's life reached its turning point: she moved to New York to work for the *New-York Tribune* (1844–1846), this transition culminated later in her position as the foreign correspondent of the *Tribune* in Europe (1846–1850). Each of these stages was an important step in Fuller's growth as a publicist and a thinker, as well as in the history of American Transcendentalism. This article dwells on the second, intermediate, so to speak, stage – Fuller's work in New York.

The Dial was a quarterly with a limited circulation, it published philosophical, religious and aesthetic works for intellectual readers. The *Tribune*, on the other hand, was a commercial daily and weekly newspaper, its target reader was the average educated citizen of a growing metropolis; and Fuller was to cover the current literary and social life of the city for its motley population. The newspaper exercised a transformative influence on Fuller; it offered her new opportunities and prospects as a publicist who was to

¹ Scholarly works on American Transcendentalism are numerous; for a detailed analysis of its intellectual background see, for instance, Gura, 2007; Capper and Wright, 1999.

address the most urgent and pressing issues of contemporary life and invite to this discussion the vast readership of the big city.

Indeed, her readership was even larger, for historically Fuller's move to New York coincided with "the ascent of newspapers from local to national" [Bailey, 2015:3] and the *New-York Tribune* was a major example of this phenomenon. Moreover, the newspaper involved Fuller on a daily basis in the international discourse: "mirroring New York life in the 1840's", the *Tribune* displayed "a heteroglossia of urban cultures and international dialogue" [Bean and Myerson, 2000:xxi]; in 1846 the *Tribune* brought Fuller as its foreign correspondent into a direct contact with the European world. A telling evidence of Fuller's international status is the fact that in the 1850's Fuller was a figure of a truly popular interest in Russia, periodicals intended for the general reader discussed her life and work [Kizima, 2015: 211], and Russian reviewers stressed the importance of journalism for the development of American literature [Kizima 2015: 233].

Reading closely Fuller's writings from the *New-York Tribune* one can see that they always have some concrete event or fact to report to the public; on the other hand, they always aim at analysis: as a literary critic she reviews contemporary literature, art exhibitions, informing and enlightening the public; as a social critic she strives to uncover the roots of social ills and propose ways of ameliorating the situation. This broad and analytical approach leads her to a reconsideration of the existing system of values, to a discussion of the religious grounds of American society laid by the Puritan Fathers. Significantly, her essays written on social reforms and the social problems of new urban America are rich in religious content, involving the old Puritan heritage in the urgent public debate. We can see that Fuller's relationship with the New England heritage was far from simple rejection or simple acceptance; Margaret Allen justly remarked that Fuller "struggled against the bondage of her Puritan heritage, but she also shared its strengths" [Allen, 1979: 51].

From the religious perspective Fuller's essays can be divided into three major

groups. The first group is writings dealing primarily and directly with religious matters, covering events in the religious life of the community. Fuller's review of Theodore Parker's sermon "The Excellence of Goodness" (1845) is a good example. Parker expressed views in which he differed from the majority. Fuller notes Parker's "mental integrity" [Fuller, 2000:97], "perfect frankness", willingness to "to lay his mind completely open" [Fuller, 2000: 96]. She finds his position "too combative", she does not agree with his interpretation of the facts of religious history and does not find in him "a depth of spiritual discernment" [Fuller, 2000:97, 96]; nevertheless, she stresses that he deserves to be heard. Fuller welcomes an open discussion, but, as she points out, "it was almost impossible for Mr. Parker to obtain an exchange with any pulpit" [Fuller, 2000:95]. The clergy, Fuller thinks, refrained from discussion for lack of confidence in the principles they professed and fear of scandal. Moreover, they made an attempt to "put down bodily any willingness to make these exchanges" [Fuller, 2000:95]: members of the Boston Association of Congregational Ministers were forbidden to exchange with Parker because his views were believed to be heretical, and when two Unitarians (John Sargent and Fuller's friend James Freeman Clarke) allowed Parker to preach in their churches, the former was forced to resign, and the latter was reproved by the deacons of his church (Parker's sermon "The Excellence of Goodness" was preached in the Church of the Disciples founded by Clarke in Boston).

The controversy this reformist minister caused was an occasion for Fuller to discuss the state of religious consciousness in New England, for Parker faced "a tacit persecution" [Fuller, 2000:95] on the part of the clergy, supported in this attitude by a part of the community. Fuller was deeply worried at this situation, with great concern she writes that, as yet, in the United States, "after so many years of political tolerance, there exists very little notion, far less practice, of spiritual tolerance" [Fuller, 2000:93]. Her review is full of bitter irony: she employs the key images of the Reformation, reversing their

usage, e.g. she points out that "each little coterie" in New England now "has its private pope, distinguished, indeed, from the old by the impossibility of obtaining from him indulgencies (at least for heresy)" [Fuller, 2000:93]. Evoking memories of the old anti-papist Protestant position, Fuller stresses the need to return to "the great principle of Protestantism; – respect for the right of private judgment and the decision of conscience in the individual" [Fuller, 2000:93]. Historically this great principle suffered from Protestant intolerance: Lutherans, Fuller writes, were not distinguished for tolerating "any new evidences of the spirit of Luther", and in the United States, she stresses, this tendency has been manifested "in the most marked manner" [Fuller, 2000:93]: Puritans came to America to vindicate for themselves the rights of conscience, but they did not learn from their experience of suffering to respect those rights in others.

She criticizes also the Unitarians of New England, who "arrogated to themselves the title of Liberal Christians" [Fuller, 2000:93] but in fact, in Parker's case, showed little Liberalism. Of course, there have been Unitarians truly liberal in their Christianity, and Fuller writes with great respect of Rev. Clarke and of the late William Ellery Channing (1780 – 1842) – "the greatest man who has yet arisen among them"; she mourns his departure, for such a figure of a "Peace-maker", as she puts it, is much wanted [Fuller, 2000: 94]. Fuller calls for reviving in Christendom the spirit of Christ, who preached to the Jew and the Gentile, and believes that the agitation Parker caused in the atmosphere "will show, in its results, the purifying power of electricity" [Fuller, 2000:97].

The second group includes writings on social problems. Fuller here is both a journalist and a social reformer: she writes on racism and slavery, poverty, homelessness, the ills of the penitentiary system, she informs the public and calls for action, often offering steps – very pragmatic and realistic – to improve the situation. Religious faith and religious allusions are an integral part of her argument in these essays; she grounds her argument in the passages from the Bible and affirms Christianity as the foundation of life.

Let us take for instance Fuller's review of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845). She praises it as an excellent piece of writing, "simple, true, coherent, and warm with genuine feeling" [Fuller, 2000:131], showing the author's "powers of observation" and his "manly heart" [Fuller, 2000:133], and points out that it is "to be prized as a specimen of the powers of the Black Race, which Prejudice persists in disputing" [Fuller, 2000: 131]; she prizes all evidence of this kind. Fuller castigates defenders of slavery and draws on the Bible and the fundamental principles of Christianity stressing that slavery is incompatible with Christianity: "The inconsistencies of Slaveholding professors of religion cry to Heaven" [Fuller, 2000: 132]. " 'Bring no more vain oblations'; sermons must daily be preached anew on that text", Fuller writes, quoting Isaiah (1: 13-14). "Kings, five hundred years ago, built churches with the spoils of War; Clergymen to-day command Slaves to obey a Gospel which they will not allow them to read, and call themselves Christians amid the curses of their fellowmen" [Fuller, 2000:132]. She concludes the essay with the question God asked Cain: "the Avenger will not fail yet to demand – 'Where is thy brother?'" [Fuller, 2000:133].

Urban life brought about many new problems: crime, the urban poor, the homeless, the helpless elderly. Fuller visited the city charities and reported to the public on her visits ("Our City Charities. Visit to Bellevue Alms House, to the Farm School, the Asylum for the Insane, and Penitentiary on Blackwell's Island"). "The pauper establishments that belong to the great city take the place of the skeleton at the banquets of old", she writes. "They admonish us of stern realities <...>. They should be looked at by all, if only for their own sakes, that they may not sink listlessly into selfish ease, in a world so full of disease" [Fuller, 2000:98]. Fuller understood well that nothing could really be done till the right principles were discovered and she believed that "a deeper religion at the heart of Society would devise such means" [Fuller, 2000: 99].

In search for such "deeper religion" she turns to what once was anathema for the Pu-

ritans – the tradition of the Catholic Church. The big city, with its new immigrants (many from Catholic countries and suffering from local prejudice), gave Fuller a good opportunity to see people of other Christian denominations at a closer distance. She reviewed some of the Puritan mental stereotypes and found them wanting, in comparison with the Catholic views, habits and ways.

In her essay “Prevalent Idea that Politeness is too great a Luxury to be given to the Poor” Fuller writes that in America the purse-proud often dare offend and the poor endure the insults: “how rudely are favors conferred, just as a bone is thrown to a dog” [Fuller, 2000:129]. “In Catholic countries”, she points out, “there is more courtesy, for charity is there a duty, and must be done for God’s sake; there is less room for a man to give himself the Pharisaical tone about it. A rich man is not so surprised to find himself in contact with a poor one; nor is the custom of kneeling on the open pavement, the silk robe close to the beggar’s rags, without profit. The separation by pews, even on the day when all meet nearest, is as bad for the manners as the soul” [Fuller, 2000:129-130].

This critical view of the mind and religious practices of contemporary Puritans is very prominent in the third group of essays – essays written in the form of sermons. Fuller here demonstrates that she is a good preacher, as well as a journalist. Indeed, the genre of sermon has always had something in common with journalism: a good sermon is tied to an event or date, important to the listeners. Fuller’s “Thanksgiving” and “New Year’s Day” are examples of such sermon-like writings, combining the eternal with the pressing issues of the time, and tied to the holiday dates.

In “New Year’s Day” Fuller goes even a step further in her criticism, including among her positive examples of religious life heathens – Native Americans. Fuller begins by describing, with great respect, the religious traditions of some of the Indian tribes: once a year they used to extinguish all the fires and spend a day fasting and praying, then they produced sparks by friction, and lit up the altar with the new fire which was a sacred gift and a token of friendship. “They

enfranchised slaves, to show that devotion to the Gods induced a sympathy with men”, Fuller writes [Fuller, 2000:14]. She wants the civilized men to solemnize the New Year by a similar “mental renovation”, calls for a “spark from the centre of our system” to “begin a new year in a spirit not discordant with ‘the acceptable year of the Lord’” [Fuller, 2000:14].

Thanksgiving Day, a festival peculiar to Puritan New England, is for Fuller a good occasion to remind her compatriots of the Christian virtues as an essential part of American experience. She hopes that the holiday will not become an empty ritual and lose its original meaning, reminds the readers that enjoyment of a good dinner, turkey and plum-pudding “should not be the chief objects of the day”, that, “if charity begins at home, it must not end there”, “that no home can be healthful in which are not cherished seeds of good for the world at large” [Fuller, 2000: 8, 9, 10]. And again, for admonition she turns to an example from a different cultural tradition – a story told by “a noble Catholic writer, in the true sense as well as by name a Catholic” [Fuller, 2000: 10]: a deeply moving story of a tailor giving a dinner and boasting a little of the favors and blessings of his lot when suddenly a thought stung him and he put half of the food in a basket and sent it with a brotherly message to a widow near; his little daughter was the messenger in this “errand of justice”, as Fuller puts it [Fuller, 2000: 10].

Jeffrey Steele has justly pointed out the importance of the sentimental element in Fuller’s essays: “combining the intellectual discipline of Transcendentalist criticism with the emotional agendas of sentimentalist writing, Fuller constructs a hybrid discourse” that pairs “the enlightened heart, with the impassioned mind” [Steele, 2015: 138]. However, his subsequent statement, to my mind, does not do justice to Fuller; he remarks: “What is unmistakable is the new vein of *Christianized* sentimentalism that interlaces Fuller’s *New-York Tribune* articles” [Steele, 2015: 139]. In my opinion, what is unmistakable in Fuller’s *Tribune* articles is the new vein of Christian sentiment, not “*Christianized* sentimentalism”.

Fuller reminds her readers of the Good Samaritan *and* of the parable of the rich young man who wanted to follow Jesus, but when Jesus said unto him “go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor”, “he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Matthew, 19: 21–22). Knowing how difficult this commandment is for her compatriots, Fuller modifies it, writing with deep sadness and irony: “If they do not sell it *all* at once, as the rich young man was bid to do as a test of his sincerity, they may find some way in which it could be invested so as to show enough obedience to the Law and the Prophets to love our neighbor as ourselves” [Fuller, 2000:10].

Fuller stresses that the commandment “love thy neighbor” now demands social and political reform, she understands the urgency of this agenda. Referring implicitly to her Transcendentalist friends and herself she writes that it calls the Poet “from his throne of Mind”: “You must reform rather than create a world” [Fuller, 2000:11]. Fuller regards the meeting to organize an Association for the benefit of prisoners as a happy omen that Americans may be better than they seem: “We shall not, then, be wholly Pharisees” [Fuller, 2000: 11]. The Association was to promote the welfare of inmates in prisons, provide for them homes and employment when they were set at liberty: “It is but a grain of mustard seed, but the promised tree will grow swiftly if tended in a pure spirit” [Fuller, 2000: 12].

Fuller writes of “the cruel injustice of our fathers, the selfish perversity of the sons” [Fuller, 2000:18], but she never loses hope, believes in atonement and prays relying on the New Testament (John 5:14): “Teach us, oh All-Wise! the clue out of this labyrinth, and if we faithfully encounter its darkness and dread, and emerge into clear light, wilt Thou not bid ‘go and sin no more?’” [Fuller, 2000:18].

As we can see, Fuller’s is a deeply religious mind; writing about the nineteenth-century American society she affirms the spirit of Christianity, free of religious prejudice. Fuller criticizes New England Puritans for their pride, their narrow-mindedness, their failure to be true to the principles of Protestantism and the spirit of Christian-

ity. But even in her criticism she appeals to some of the most cherished Biblical symbols of New England saying, for instance, that religious bigotry and self-conceit some Puritans demonstrate is “mortifying to those who look upon Massachusetts as a candle set upon a hill” [Fuller, 2000:96].

Fuller compares Americans to “the Chosen People of the elder day”: “We too have been chosen”, she writes, and “the ark of human hopes has been placed for the present in our charge. Wo be to those who betray this trust! On their heads are to be heaped the curses of unnumbered ages!” [Fuller, 2000: 17]. Moreover, she regards Puritanism as a source of American identity, the “pure” and “noble” blood [Fuller, 2000: 17] that can play a very important role at the time when the country faces new waves of immigration. Stressing it, Fuller uses some of the key images of the Gospels: the Puritans and the Huguenots sought the shores of America from the British isles and France “for conscience sake”, she says, “too many have come since for bread alone”, but they must not be rejected: they must be given bread and taught “to prize that salt, too, without which all on earth must lose its savor” [Fuller, 2000:18]. Fuller believed that “there is still hope, there is still an America, while private lives are ruled by the Puritan, by the Huguenot consciousness” [Fuller, 2000:18].

The analysis leads to the general conclusion that Fuller was immersed in the religious controversies of her time, but was free of religious intolerance; in her writings, affirming the spirit of Christianity, she often went beyond denominational boundaries; her main accents were on the ethical and social aspects of religious faith and practices. Fuller criticized New England Puritans; nevertheless, she regarded Puritanism as a valuable source of American identity relevant for the future of the nation. Fuller’s writings for the *New York Tribune* were a significant contribution to the Transcendentalist thought and a landmark in the history of American Transcendentalism as it developed and moved beyond the boundaries of New England to encompass the emerging American nation as part of the international community of the World.

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ДИАЛОГ С НАСЛЕДИЕМ ПУРИТАН В ПУБЛИЦИСТИКЕ МАРГАРЕТ ФУЛЛЕР

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Аннотация: В статье анализируется творчество Маргарет Фуллер (1810 – 1850), одной из ключевых фигур американского трансцендентализма; в центре внимания находятся религиозные аспекты её публицистических работ, опубликованных в газете «Нью-Йорк Трибюн» в 1844–1846 гг. Методологически исследование строится на внимательном прочтении работ Фуллер и их анализе в историческом и культурном контексте. Произведения Фуллер подразделены на три группы. Первая включает работы, освещающие события в религиозной жизни американского общества. Вторая – это эссе на социальные темы: Фуллер в них выступает и как журналист, и как социальный реформатор; она пишет о рабовладении, бедности, бездомных, информирует общество и призывает к действиям с целью изменения сложившейся ситуации. Отмечается, что данные эссе содержательно опираются на религиозные принципы, вовлекают пуританское наследие Америки в обсуждение актуальных общественных проблем. Третья группа – это эссе, написанные в жанре проповеди, в них Фуллер проявляет себя не только как журналист, но и как хороший проповедник. Анализ показывает, что Фуллер была непосредственно вовлечена в религиозную полемику своего времени, но свободна от религиозной нетерпимости; утверждая дух христианства, она нередко выходила за рамки конфессиональных различий, акцентируя этические и социальные аспекты религиозной веры и религиозной практики. Фуллер решительно критиковала пуритан Новой Англии; тем не менее, она рассматривала пуританизм как один из источников американской идентичности, «благородную» кровь, которая по-прежнему может играть важную роль, особенно в связи с новыми волнами иммиграции.

В итоге анализ материала позволяет сделать вывод о том, что публицистика Фуллер была важной вехой в истории американского трансцендентализма; в ней отразилось его движение от региональных новоанглийских истоков к пониманию новой действительности молодой американской нации как части мирового сообщества.

Ключевые слова: Маргарет Фуллер, публицистика, американский трансцендентализм, пуританизм, религия, журнал «Дайел», газета «Нью-Йорк Трибюн», журналистика, рабство, социальные реформы, урбанистические проблемы.

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