

Fuller, *The Dial*, *The Tribune*, and Periodical Print Culture  
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From the first issue of *The Dial*, Fuller is at work not only contributing to but also theorizing periodicals. In “A Short Essay on Critics” she mentions the popular “magazine,” “journals,” and “the daily paper,” even as she is especially concerned to critique the quarterly “reviews,” whose “partisan spirit” and “dictator[ial]” reviewers have “brought them into disrepute.” However, her overview of “periodical writing” and criticism also argues that “their golden age cannot be quite past. They afford too convenient a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge; they are too natural a feature of our time to have done all their work yet. Surely they may be redeemed from their abuses, they may be turned to their true uses.”

This paper will chart Fuller’s evolving sense of the “true uses” of periodicals in the 1840s. Her *Dial* essay, unsurprisingly, defines the role of the critic writing for periodicals in Transcendentalist terms: the ideal critic is able to “enter into the nature” of a work and judge it by its aims but also “to put that aim in its place, and . . . estimate its relations . . . [because he] perceives the analogies of the universe, and how they are regulated by an absolute, invariable principle.” But when Fuller arrived in New York as the “Star” critic of Horace Greeley’s *New-York Tribune*, she entered into a quite different milieu, where daily newspapers (what Fuller calls “the paper wings of every day,” 15) and other urban print ephemera were surging in circulation and when the city was embarking on the economic boom that, as David Scobey has shown, transformed it into the national commercial metropolis—and that helped to create this efflorescence of textual matter. David Henkin has argued that “city reading” was “promiscuous read[ing]”; by “inducing . . . countless and disjointed acts of browsing,” the textual ephemera “of everyday city life cultivated reading subjects” who were modern, consumerist, and anonymous (12): in other words, a self at odds with the values of Fuller’s ideal critic in *The Dial*.

In a much-quoted letter to James Freeman Clarke, Fuller defines her journalism at the *Tribune* as part of the “great work of mutual education”; however, in addition to her emphasis on the dialogic, Fuller also describes her participation in newspaper work in New York as being “afloat in mid-stream,” not exploring “*the depths*” but engaging broadly (in “*the shallows*”) “all the signs of life” (Hudspeth SL 227). I propose to situate Fuller’s columns in the context of this urban textual world and in the “shallows” of modern life. As the *Tribune*’s first-page critic, Fuller’s job, in many ways, was to review the new flood of printed material at the advent of the “industrial book,” as the editors of the *History of the Book in America* call the period beginning in 1840. Given recent research into the textualized spaces of New York and into the history of periodicals in this era of their rapid growth, we can now see Fuller’s position more clearly as someone hired both to mediate and to help produce this emergent world of modern print culture, and we can see how she situates herself rhetorically in the discourses of this world.