

Monika Elbert  
Prof. of English, Montclair State University  
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*The Seeress of Prevorst* as Margaret Fuller's Field Guide to the Frontier (in *Summer on the Lakes*)

When Margaret Fuller found herself exhausted from travel and resting at a hotel in Milwaukee, she took to reading the strangest book considering she is on the American frontier: Justinus Kerner's *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, a book about German mysticism (worlds apart from the frontier hotel)! In an almost thirty-page excursion in her *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller discusses the significance of Frederike Hauffe (the Seeress)'s experience of the spirit world in the context of her own growing sense of mortality (on a personal and national mythmaking level). In my talk, I propose to examine the intersection of Fuller's interest in the spiritual realm as it applies to her increasing knowledge of death on the frontier—as she witnesses it among the Native American inhabitants (and the extermination of their culture) and the destruction to the natural environment (as a result of a growing industry around the Great Lakes). Her sense of a steady New England Transcendentalist thinking fails her as she becomes more aware of a mystical connection to her frontier landscape, and she draws some comfort from a spirituality that would have been anathema to her more pragmatic Transcendentalist brothers-in-arms, Emerson and Thoreau. Early on in *Summer on the Lakes* (the second page, in fact), Fuller writes about the feeling of self-annihilation when she witnesses the cascading Niagara Falls: she experiences “an undefined dread, such as [she] never knew before, such as may be felt when death is about to usher us into a new existence.” She feels the presence of some unknowable foe, which she translates into her fear of Indians (“naked savages”) “stealing behind [her] with uplifted tomahawks.” Her inclination is to merge what is foreign—“the mood of nature in which these waters were poured down” with the Indians, who were “shaped on the same soil.” The treatise by Kerner allows her to take a journey within, a journey for which she is not prepared, but which allows her to experience, what Justinus Kerner describes, using the idealist Kant's philosophy about ghost-seeing, the thin curtain between life and death.