

Fuller, Fourier, and the Coming Democracy  
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Writing to William Henry Channing from Rome in 1847, Margaret Fuller offered a remarkable synopsis of the course of European politics and philosophy: "I see the future dawning; it is in important respects Fourier's future." These words in themselves would no doubt have pleased Channing, an ardent champion of Fourier who had persistently urged the claims of "Association" on Fuller, despite her misgivings. Fuller therefore carefully qualified her grand prophecy: "But I like no Fourierites; they are terribly wearisome here in Europe" (L 4:217). Fuller's letter was part of a long conversation on Fourierism that Fuller had carried on with Channing and many others as her thinking had developed in the late 1830s and 1840s. Never a Fourierist, she was nevertheless Fourier's fellow traveler, holding his practical theories incongruous, but his social vision inspirational. Most importantly, Fourier "places Woman on an entire equality with Man, and wishes to give to one as to the other that independence which must result from intellectual and practical development" (WNC 73 Norton).

As Christina Zwarg has persuasively shown, the rising interest in Fourierism among the transcendentalists influenced the intense "conversations" between Fuller and Emerson that helped to frame *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. "The critique of domestic life at the center of Fourier's theory," Zwarg explains, made Fourierism a code for the necessary reconstruction of the most fundamental precepts of Western civilization (Zwarg, *Feminist Conversations* [Cornell 1995] 23). This code energized Fuller to criticize the barriers to open conversation, and challenged Emerson to follow his rebellious religious stance to its politically radical conclusions.

As Fuller launched her journalistic career in New York, her friendship with Channing grew. Channing's self-appointed mission was to merge Christianity with Associationism, the name that Fourier's followers had given to their organized efforts to publicize and enact his theories. While Fuller became more open to Fourier at this period, Channing was less valuable to her as a political theorist than as a working reform minister, one who knew the appalling conditions under which the New York poor lived. He helped Fuller find New York's destitute people and its reprehensible prisons and asylums, and thereby helped her develop a stronger sense of oppression by class in the supposedly democratic United States. Fuller took this sharpened recognition of the inadequacy of American democratic ideals to Europe, where, as she told Channing, she took "interest in the state of the people" (L 4:271). With this perspective Fuller became particularly interested in those European voices who offered a more hopeful future. Fuller met perhaps the most prominent of Fourier's students, Victor Considerant, and became a devoted reader of his periodical *Démocratie pacifique*, where news of the quickly growing democratic resistance in France, and the concept of a new democracy was under discussion. Perhaps more significantly, became a close friend in London of the exiled Giuseppe Mazzini, whose series of English language treatises, *Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe* were just being published in 1846-47. These theories came dramatically to life for Fuller during the Roman uprising, an ultimate defeat that pushed Fuller to her deepest and most anguished struggle with political principles.