

Margaret Fuller: A Publicistic Dialogue with the Puritan Heritage

The paper concentrates on the religious aspects of Margaret Fuller's (1810 – 1850) work. The analysis is focused on a close reading of Fuller's writings for the New York *Tribune* in 1844 – 1846; it shows that the religious dimension was an important part of the broad public debate at the time, and Fuller had a deep interest in it.

From the religious perspective of the analysis all Fuller's publications 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 an example. Parker was a reformist minister, and the controversy he caused was an occasion for Fuller to discuss the state of religious consciousness in New England, for Parker faced "a tacit persecution". Fuller was deeply worried at this situation, with great concern she wrote 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" and stressed the need to return to the great principle of Protestantism – respect for the right of private judgment.

The second group is writings on social problems. Fuller here is both a journalist and a social reformer: she writes on racism, poverty, homelessness, the ills of the penitentiary system, she informs the public and calls for action, often offering steps to improve the situation. Significantly, her articles of the 1840's written on the social problems of new urban America are rich in religious allusions involving the old Puritan heritage in the urgent modern public debate.

The third group is works written in the form of sermons: Fuller here demonstrates that she was a good preacher, as well as a journalist.

The analysis leads to the general conclusion that Fuller had a deeply religious mind, was immersed in the religious controversies of her time, but was free of religious prejudice; in her writings, affirming the spirit of Christianity, she often went beyond denominational boundaries. Considering American religious heritage, Fuller criticized New England Puritans for their pride, their narrow-mindedness, their failure to be true to the principles of Protestantism. Nevertheless, she regarded Puritanism as a source of American identity, the "pure" and "noble" blood that could play a very important role at a time when the country faced new waves of immigration. Fuller's position expressed in her publications in the *Tribune* made a significant and unique contribution to the American Transcendentalist thought.