SPEAKING TRUTH TO DIVERGENT POWERS: MARGARET FULLER, BETTINA VON ARNIM AND THE BROKEN BOND

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Introduction

Margaret Fuller (1810-50), the foremost nineteenth-century American promoter of German Romantic literature, had every good reason to forge a transatlantic bond with the Romantic writer Bettina Brentano von Arnim (1785-1859). To Fuller and the Transcendental devotees of the German Romantics, von Arnim embodied an enviable good fortune: she was the sister of one Romantic writer, Clemens Brentano; the wife of another, Achim von Arnim; and the granddaughter of the pre-Romantic popular novelist, Sophie von La Roche. La Roche’s friendship with the Goethe family spawned a letter friendship between Bettina and Goethe, and, in 1835, three years after Goethe’s death, von Arnim, then 50, published her first work, Goethe’s Correspondence with a Child [Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde].

Fuller, self-taught in German and the translator of several works by Arnim, Romantik · Revolution · Utopie (Düsseldorf, 1984). Ursula Püschel’s biographical volume pays closer scholarly attention to von Arnim’s political dimension: Bettina von Arnim — politisch. Erkundungen, Entdeckungen Erkenntnisse (Bielefeld, 2005). A substantive and reliable biography in English is waiting to be written. Loosely conceived is that authored by Arthur Helps and Elizabeth Howard, Bettina: A Portrait (London, 1957). The best scholarly edition of critical essays in English is the one edited by Katherine Goodman and Elke Frederiksen: » Bettina Brentano-von Arnim: Gender and Politics (Detroit, 1995). This volume includes a translation of the outstanding “letter-essay” by Christa Wolf: “‘Nun Ja! Das nächste Leben geht aber heute an!’ Ein Brief über die Bettine” can be found in Christa Wolf: Die Dimension des Autors, ed. Angela Drescher, 2 vols., 2: 116–54 (Berlin & Weimar, 1986).

Note: all translations are my own.

1 Two sizeable and well-documented biographies of Bettina von Arnim are those by Konstanze Bäumer and Hartwig Schultz: Bettina von Arnim (Stuttgart-Weimar), 1995; and by Ingeborg Drewitz, Bettine von Arnim. Romantik · Revolution · Utopie [The original, “‘Nun Ja! Das nächste Leben geht aber heute an!’ Ein Brief über die Bettine” can be found in Christa Wolf: Die Dimension des Autors, ed. Angela Drescher, 2 vols., 2: 116–54 (Berlin & Weimar, 1986).
Goethe, was naturally among the first Americans to read this epistolary novel based on von Arnim’s late adolescent friendship with Goethe, then middle aged. In November 1840, Fuller authored an endearing letter to von Arnim, assuming a collective voice on behalf of the Transcendentalist circle:

Dear Bettine,

For how can I address you by any title less near than that by which you have become so familiar to our thoughts. I write to you in the name of many men and many women of my country for whom you have wrought wonders.... How many have counted each pulse of your heart of love, how many more been kindled into flame at the touch of your genius! ... We ask all men who come from your land, Have you seen Bettine? ... Thou art dear to us, thou art the friend of our inmost mood, ...²

Von Arnim’s second epistolary novel, Die Günderode (1840), explored the intimate friendship and exchange of ideas between von Arnim and the poetess Karolina von Günderode (1780-1806).³ At the time of her reading (1841), Fuller was co-editor with Ralph Waldo Emerson of The Dial, the literary periodical they had co-founded in 1840. Here, where she had introduced readers to Goethe and the (male) German Romantics, Fuller published an extensive adulatory essay, “Bettine Brentano and Her Friend Günderode” (January 1842). Through her discussion of the Bettine-Karoline philosophical and poetic dialogue, Fuller generalized an intellectually and culturally superior German womanhood. To make the work accessible to others, especially women, Fuller translated the first third of its 600 pages.⁴

The few prior studies of the Fuller-von Arnim connection end here, with Fuller’s ardor for von Arnim intact. And not without good reason have students of the connection ceased their exploration, for Fuller never referred to or attempted to communicate with von Arnim again.⁵ And yet: within two years of Fuller’s reading of Die Günderode, von Arnim produced another major work. And yet: Fuller and von Arnim turned near concurrently from literary pursuits to urban social

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² Fuller to von Arnim, in The Letters of Margaret Fuller, ed. Robert Hudspeth, 6 vols., 6:328 (New York, 1984-91). Note regarding spelling: von Arnim spelled her first name “Bettine” in her epistolary novels; however, biographers have used the spellings interchangeably.

³ The friendship took place thirty years earlier, from 1804 to Günderode’s suicide in 1806. For this work’s impact on Fuller’s re-evaluation of female friendship, see Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos, “Fuller, Goethe, Bettine: Cultural Transfer and Imagined German Womanhood,” in Toward A Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism, ed. Jana Argersinger and Phyllis Cole, 80-101 (Athens, GA, 2014).

⁴ This was published in 1842 by Elizabeth Peabody. The last two-thirds were translated by Minna Wesselhoeft and published in 1861.

activism. The parallels along their life trajectories in the turbulent decade of the 1840s — their record of social activism as well as their writings pertaining to social and political justice — invite one to ask why Fuller fell off the von Arnim fan wagon. By being attentive to the silence — an unspoken but deliberate dismissal or resistance — we gain new perspectives of women activists’ transatlantic visions for societal transformation.

1840-45: Von Arnim in Berlin

During the 1830s the Prussian absolute monarchy became increasingly repressive under King Friedrich Wilhelm III. Social conditions worsened and the king, fearing rebellion, suppressed dissidents. In 1840, when von Arnim was fifty-five and completing Die Günderode, she was also conducting personal charity missions into impoverished neighborhoods.6 Von Arnim’s relief efforts were widely observed, as noted in the diary of her friend, the diplomat and literary biographer Karl Varnhagen von Ense: “I’ve read many reports about Bettine’s multi-faceted, ambitious, and beneficial activities for the poor; everything she strives for and fulfills is just astonishing; from her own means and from donations she has accomplished so much …”7

In 1840 the king died, and von Arnim could hope optimistically for reforms to alleviate social misery: the intellectual and culturally rounded Friedrich Wilhelm IV ascended to the throne. Six months into the new king’s reign, however, with the repressive measures still in place and no structural reforms proposed, von Ense recorded von Arnim’s concerns in his diary:

“She [von Arnim] is beside herself over the state of affairs … she distrusts all those close to and favored by the king, she wants a constitution, freedom of the press, … She wants to tell the king the truth, may she have the courage and skill to do it.”8

Von Arnim exercised her agency — as the widow of a prominent author and member of the landed gentry as well as an established author in her own right — to embark on a crusade to “tell the king the truth” via a personal correspondence with him. The preserved letters, written between 1839 and 1850, include forty-four from von Arnim to the king and twenty-one from the king to her. The content astounds, for to educate the king, von Arnim graphically described conditions of social misery. Careful not to hold the king directly responsible, she accused his self-seeking court advisors of shielding him from

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6 For highlights of von Arnim’s charity missions, see Kathleen Hallihan, “Envisioning an Ideal State: The Literary Politics of Bettina von Arnim from 1830 to 1852” (Ph.D. diss, Ohio State University, 2005), 33-34.
7 Karl Varnhagen von Ense, diary entry of September 30, 1841, quoted in Bettina von Arnim, Eine Chronik, ed. Heinz Härtl, (Wiepersdorf, 1984), 47. (“Ich las in diesen Tagen viele Zeugnisse von Bettinens vielfacher, eifriger und segensvoller Wirksamkeit für die Armen, was sie alles erstrebt und vollbracht, ist zum Erstaunen, aus eignen Mitteln hat sie viel geleistet …”)
8 Ibid., 35, diary entry of December 7, 1840. (“Sie [von Arnim] ist außer sich über die Wirtschaft … sie mißbilligt alle Vertrauten und Lieblinge des Königs, sie will Konstitution, Preßfreiheit, … Sie will dem Könige die Wahrheit sagen, sie habe den Mut und das Geschick dazu.”)
the people and their needs. She addressed the king as an innocent in need of sound, honest guidance to become a true advocate of the people and thereby a model leader. The letters have their own unique history: none were published for decades, until 1902, and several were discovered after World War II.9

While these letters were private, von Armin also produced a lengthy conversational novel in the spring of 1843. Titled This Book Is for The King (Dies Buch gehört dem König) and known popularly as The King’s Book (Das Königsbuch), it served as a platform for von Arnim to argue her positions on poverty, criminality, prison reform, education, corruption, and the death penalty. Fuller’s silence at this particular juncture constitutes the most mysterious gap in the expanse of Fuller’s public and private writings.10 Whether Fuller was aware of von Arnim’s charity missions via verbal reports from friends traveling to Berlin cannot be ascertained. However, the furor that the The King’s Book ignited, over both its content and its author, would not have eluded a von Arnim fan.11 Although Fuller had turned over editorship of The Dial to Emerson in 1842, she continued to contribute and surely would have read the three-page review of The King’s Book in The Dial’s October 1843 issue.12

Fuller, from Boston to New York

In 1844 Fuller ended the intellectual forum for women she had conducted in Boston since 1839. Inspired in part by the women who conducted the Berlin salons, including von Arnim, Fuller had called her forum “Conversations” and had designed these to encourage women’s critical thinking and articulation on a wide range of topics. Recruited by the New York Daily Tribune to produce a front-page column under her own byline, Fuller moved to New York. There she became actively engaged in urban social issues, as was von Arnim in Berlin. Like Berlin, New York was experiencing a population surge. Of the influx of new immigrants, 32 percent were Germans escaping political suppression as well as economic hardship. Like von Arnim, Fuller undertook personal charity missions into poor neighborhoods and initiated fundraising efforts.13

The excerpts below, taken from Fuller’s eyewitness account, “Our City Charities: Visit To Bellevue Alms House, to the Farm School, the Asylum for the Insane, and Penitentiary on Blackwell’s Island,” showcase her metaphor-laden conversational style, wherein the pronouns “we” and “us” assume readers’ compassion. In a blurring mix

Family embarrassment over von Arnim’s political stance, the dispersion of family-owned documents at a 1929 auction, and a locked attic all conspired to prevent the letters’ publication. See Marjanne E. Goozé, “The Reception of Bettina Brentano-von Arnim as Author and Historical Figure,” in Bettina Brentano-von Arnim: Gender and Politics, ed. Elke Frederiksen and Katherine Goodman, 349-401 (Detroit, 1995), especially 360-61.

Hallihan, “Envisioning an Ideal State,” 27.


For highlights of Fuller’s charity missions, see Charles Capper, Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life, 2 vols. (New York, 2007), I.204.
of pronoun usage, “they” hopscotches between victims, concerned public, institutions, and right principles.

The pauper establishments that belong to a great city take the place of the skeleton at the banquets of old. They admonish us of stern realities, which must bear the same explanation as the frequent blight of Nature’s bloom. 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. They should be looked at by all who wish to enlighten themselves as to the means of aiding their fellow creatures in any way, public or private …. For nothing can really be done till the right principles are discovered, and it would seem they still need to be discovered or elucidated, so little is done, with a great deal of desire in the heart of the community to do what is right.14

Fuller gestures vaguely toward governing powers to intervene, but more distinctly authorizes her audience’s and thereby her community’s reformist capacity, based on Christian charity, to predominate.

Newspaper journalism was of course a radically different medium for presenting social criticism than a conversational novel. Fuller was given free reign over topic selections: in addition to such eyewitness accounts, she used this most public stage to argue for abolition, voting rights, and women’s rights; to censure American seizure of Mexican land; to review new books of essays, poetry, and fiction; and even to promote foreign language study. Regarding journalism’s value with respect to a reformist agenda, she wrote an aunt, “I do not expect to do much, practically, for the suffering, but having such an organ of expression, any suggestions that are well-grounded may be of use.”15 She condemned the practice begun in the 1840s of jailing women for prostitution and public drunkenness. And she accused male policy-makers and prison administrators of hostility toward “fallen women,” of blaming women for men’s crimes and denying them rehabilitation resources.16 In her use of the journalistic pulpit to expand private philanthropy, she creatively appealed across class and gender, as seen in Asylum for Discharged Female Convicts:


15 Letter from Fuller to Mary Rotch, January 15, 1845, in Letters of Margaret Fuller, ed. Hudspeth, 4:46.

death. To the rich, to equalize the advantages of which they have received more than their share. To men, to atone for the wrongs inflicted by men on that “weaker sex,” who should, they say, be soft, confiding, dependent on them for protection. To women, to feel for those who have not been guarded either by social influence or inward strength from that first mistake which the opinion of the world makes irrevocable for women alone.17

Fuller’s exposés did not go unnoticed. They energized many women to become active in public affairs, and her appeals succeeded in raising enough money to establish the first halfway house in New York State for women parolees.18

Fuller’s fellow Transcendentalists would surely have approved of her use of the press as a vehicle to critique the crass materialism they observed as deforming American character. But it is important to clarify that Fuller departed from Transcendentalist attitudes about social activism. Fuller scholar Larry Reynolds notes that in the early 1840s both Emerson and Fuller “subscribed to the concept of organicism … and they believed that the soul, like the human race itself, was involved in an ongoing process of perfection…” For Emerson “the self was primary, social institutions secondary, for he believed that as one perfected the self the world would change for the better.” Fuller, however, gradually came to believe “that social conditions could thwart the spiritual growth of the individual, and thus one needed to strive to perfect society to allow for the more important perfection of the self.”19

Since philanthropic appeals rarely produce systemic change, we are invited to ask if and how Fuller addressed men of power. That is, was she committed solely to encouraging private philanthropy to combat social ills? Or did she hope for broader reforms based on institutional Christian charity? Or, did she envision the kind of systemic change achievable only through state political action? Regarding the potential for political action to reform the city’s charity institutions and prisons, she commented:

Nothing effectual can be achieved while both measures and men are made the sport of political changes. It is a most shameful evil ... that the men and measures are changed in these institutions with changes from Whig to Democrat, from Democrat to Whig. Churches, Schools, Colleges, the care of the Insane, and suffering Poor, should be preserved

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17 New York Daily Tribune, June 19, 1845, in Margaret Fuller, Critic, ed. Bean and Myerson, 135.

18 The halfway house, known as the Hopper Home, continues its work today. See Joan von Mehren, Minerva and the Muse: A Life of Margaret Fuller (Amherst, MA, 1995), 219.

19 Larry J Reynolds, “Righteous Violence: The Romantic Republic and Margaret Fuller’s Revolutionary Example,” in Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Crossings in a Revolutionary Age, ed. Charles Capper and Cristina Giorcelli (Madison, WI, 2007), here 177. Reynolds also discusses the influence of Fuller’s activism on Emerson’s re-evaluation of activism (and violence) in the decade leading to the American Civil War.
from the uneasy tossings of this delirium. The Country, the State, should look to it that only those fit for such officers should be chosen for such, apart from all considerations of political party ... without an absolute change in this respect no permanent good whatever can be effected.  

This critique of partisan politics and its capacity to undermine social welfare reform may well resonate with readers today.

Yet Fuller’s frustration with the shifting political winds that paralyzed reform interventions incited her neither to political action nor to the formulation of a political ideology. On the contrary, Fuller defended the American political system when she perceived it under rhetorical attack. In her review of a leftist immigrant German-language newspaper in early 1846, she alludes to the superiority of American republicanism over monarchical regimes:

[T]hough we hail the spirit of Reform wherever it seems to us to be a vital, creative, healthy, and not a feverish, restless, morbid spirit, yet, precisely for that reason, would we say to all concerned, “you must be sure your light is in proportion to your heat.” The spirit of defiance and haste exhibited by the Volks-Tribun is not the spirit for Young America. She needs it not. — She needs only a deep intelligence of principles, a religious devotion to them in practice, and all things would be hers.  

Clearly Fuller’s optimism about a future based on “principles” precluded a turn to political ideology, at least at this point in her activist engagement.

1846-48: Von Arnim in Berlin

By early 1846, when Fuller wrote the review above, conditions in Prussia had deteriorated. In 1846 and 1847 hunger riots erupted, and the clamor for political reform intensified.  

The Prussian absolutist monarchy was essentially a police state where suppression of free speech meant not only press censorship but also curtailment of academic study of liberalism, and unequal standards of justice applied to different classes.

While liberals called for a constitution, von Arnim continued to hold to the ideology expanded in The King’s Book, at least in her

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21 *New York Daily Tribune*, January 5, 1846, in *Margaret Fuller, Critic*, ed. Bean and Myerson, CD 235. Note regarding the Bean and Myerson volume: particular selections of Fuller’s columns are in print, while the remainder (and the entirety) are on an accompanying CD.

ongoing letters to the king. This ideology, “Volkskönigtum” (populist monarchy), draws from romantic concepts of an organic, symbiotic relationship between the “Volkskönig” (people’s king) and his people. Ancestral succession based on bloodline is assumed, as the king, representing the apex of evolution, is metaphorically united with his people in one body: “The ruler, considered from a spiritual perspective, also has a body. This is his people.”

Von Arnim still hoped for reform from the top, believing in the power of the word, of her word, to transform the king. *The King’s Book* can be viewed as a clever strategy for delivering the same critiques von Arnim voiced in her personal letters to the king. In the fictional round table of the book, Frau Rath, a highly intelligent and perceptive older woman, debates a mayor and a pastor. One questions immediately how the work passed the censors, for in addition to decrying serious societal ills, Frau Rath condemns censorship itself. Here she discusses a utopian state: “I have in mind no state where the censors can strike down my views; I mean a totally other state that lies beyond the Himalayas, one that is a reflection of the state to which I could be thinking of; however, should the censors even want to erase this one, too, then that’s not the one I mean either. I mean nothing which could be stricken out.”

How did von Arnim succeed in so publicly offending those who held the power to ban her work? First, she strategically lengthened it to 330 pages, as, to eliminate backlog in the censor’s office, only printed material under 320 pages (twenty print sheets) was necessarily subject to censorship. Secondly, Alexander von Humboldt, a friend of von Arnim and a favorite of the king, secured the monarch’s permission for the book to be dedicated to him — and thus to bear its unusual title. Naturally, this enraged the king’s advisors, who cautioned the king against any such future exceptions. Though these strategies thwarted Prussian censorship, *The King’s Book* was immediately banned in Austria and Bavaria. Further, its length and metaphor-driven circuitous prose limited its audience. A fifty-six page pamphlet (by another writer) that simplified its points was immediately banned.
Because the book exposed social conditions and promulgated the vision of a freer society, von Arnim was perceived as an oppositionist and admired by freedom seekers despite the fact that the means the book advocated were not revolutionary. Most open oppositionists were already living in exile in Paris and London or had emigrated to America. Ironically, in a letter to the king in summer 1845, von Arnim placed herself imaginatively in that camp. Here she situates the king within a fog created by his advisors’ disinformation, a fog that insulates the king from the truth. She, the people’s representative, cannot penetrate the fog. Ultimately, the advisors have so vitiated the king’s power that if he “should want to give me his blessing upon my emigration to America ... even that would be the option of the fog lovers.”

Aside from her book, von Arnim could address social justice issues only in the public-private space of her salon. By 1847, as unrest escalated across Europe, von Arnim risked continuing her salon, where ideologies and goals were freely discussed. Two of von Arnim’s older daughters did not share their mother’s views and, justifiably alarmed about her guests and debates, arrived at a two-salon solution. Daughter Maximiliane’s memoir offers a vivid, if somewhat biting, picture of von Arnim’s fearlessness:

It was impossible for our friends to cross paths with the revolutionaries who came to see Bettina without friction and recriminations. We could hardly allow the former legitimate French Ambassador, Count Circourte to meet his republican successor Arago, who often came to visit mother. We made an amicable arrangement ... In the Arnim home there should be two salons, a democratic and an aristocratic. On the left, in our space, we received our friends, on the right, in her rooms, Bettina received her “noble” world reformers.

Interestingly, von Arnim resisted backing constitution seekers, many of whom frequented her salon. On the one hand, such support would have conflicted with her idealization, which rejected any mediation between the king-people dynamic. On the other hand, she had voiced her wish for a constitution to von Ense several years earlier in a private, informal conversation. It would be the topic of another study to determine whether she adopted the ideology of Volkskönigtum as a years-long subversive ploy to sway the king. In any case, the public...
perception of von Arnim as a firebrand accrued to her public outing of social and political ills.

And indeed, von Arnim’s correspondence, her book, and her salon activities made her a target for increased surveillance. In summer 1846 the king’s circle, clearly seeking any petty but airtight means to silence the rabble-rousing von Arnim, arranged to have her arrested for running a printing press without proper authorization and tax payment. These charges stemmed from her status as resident of the rural home of her husband’s hereditary estate and not of Berlin. The authorities demanded she apply for Berlin citizenship; she, in turn, claimed that citizenship should be bestowed upon her for her manifold contributions to the city’s neediest. An unusual feature of the laws concerning court proceedings worked ironically to open up public space for von Arnim’s voice: court proceedings were reported in the newspapers! Major Berlin papers editorialized their support for von Arnim to receive honorary citizenship, in glowing recognition of her advocacy for the poor.31 The court case lasted seventeen months, ending in December 1847. Squarely in the public eye and in conflict with the regime, von Arnim used the occasion of her defense to articulate the need for expanded state assistance for the needy.

**Fuller in New York**

Fuller’s silence on *The King’s Book* and on von Arnim’s circumstances, from her 1841 reading of *Die Günderode* to mid-decade, raises the question of whether she was informed about German conditions and the restrictions on public expression. Until mid-1846 her column occasionally highlighted news first reported in the *Deutsche Schnellpost*, a New York newspaper for liberal German émigrés. Further, until *The Dial*’s closing in April 1844, she would have read reports submitted by members and friends of the Transcendentalist circle who spent considerable time in Berlin and other German cultural centers.32 Lastly, she would have received verbal reports from her friends in the New York German immigrant community. Her mention of Germany in a *Tribune* column about the value of newspapers indicates her awareness of censorship: “The lightest leaf of Germany shows the high culture which pervades that country, and her gazettes are a great class-book for the People, but owing to the circumstances of Government, they can only partially represent the popular mind in its present life.”33 Again, despite her cognizance of German conditions, Fuller avoided any reference to von Arnim.

31 For newspaper editorials, see Meyer-Hepner, *Magistratsprozess*, 17-18.


33 *New York Daily Tribune*, September 24, 1845, in Margaret Fuller, *Critic*, ed. Bean and Myerson, CD 191. Note: the term “Germany” is loosely applied, as until 1871 geographical “Germany” did not exist; instead there were German states united by culture and language.
Fuller’s European Odyssey

In mid-1846, during the period of rising tension in Europe that preceded the 1848 uprisings, Fuller realized a lifelong dream to travel to Europe, where she became the *Tribune’s* first foreign correspondent. She not only socialized with and reported on famed literati but met political exiles such as the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini in London and the Polish revolutionary poet Adam Mickiewicz in Paris. These reports she juxtaposed with eyewitness accounts of abysmal poverty in several industrialized cities. From France she might have continued to Germany, but circumstances made travel to Italian cities more feasible. In April 1847 she arrived in Rome and lived in its environs until her death in a shipwreck en route to New York in 1850. Thus, during the seventeen months of von Arnim’s court proceedings, August 1846 to December 1847, Fuller was in Europe. Persuaded by Mazzini, who had returned to Rome, to be an eyewitness to the upcoming insurrections there and across the Habsburg-controlled Italian landscape, she became the first accredited female foreign war correspondent.

In Milan Fuller developed an intimate intellectual friendship with a Viennese-born aristocrat and political activist, Costanza Arconati Visconti. Arconati Visconti, who had lived over twenty years in political exile in Belgium, spent long periods during the 1830s in Berlin. There she became a close friend of Bettina von Arnim’s. In a close study of the extant letters between Arconati-Visconti and Fuller, Sonia DiLoreto emphasizes an intimacy between them, no matter the topic: “from the private self ... to the debate about political solutions viable for Italy, to further transnational considerations about republicanism.” It would be hard to fathom that von Arnim was not a topic of discussion between them. Despite the publicity surrounding von Arnim’s legal proceedings as well as the public recognition of von Arnim’s social and political activism, from Fuller there was once again silence.

Von Arnim in Berlin

In February 1847, embroiled in her court case, von Arnim seized the opportunity offered by this public space to respond to the magistrate’s verdict in terminology redolent of the period’s percolating socialist ideology:

> The reasons why I hold the proletarian in the highest esteem, is because he is above disrepute, he is exempt from the baseness of profiting from the condition of society, for

34 “Italy” is loosely applied, as Italian states did not become independent and unified until 1861.

35 Sonia DiLoreto, “Forms of Exchange: Private Correspondence and the Formation of a National Idea” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2010), 78. Fuller’s *Tribune* dispatches during this period centered on the Italian states. Once the uprisings broke out in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin in February and March 1848, she naturally referred to these and applauded “the true Germans of Germany” for “showing [the native German heart] by their struggles.” [New York Daily Tribune, March 29 1848, Dispatch 23, in “These Sad But Glorious Days,” Dispatches from Europe, 1846-1850, ed. Larry Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith (New Haven, 1991), 212.]

36 Von Arnim was sentenced to two months’ imprisonment plus commuted fines. She wanted to be incarcerated to draw more public attention, but her jurist brother-in-law Karl von Savigny intervened to spare the family.
he gives everything, and in return he consumes no more than he needs in order to renew his energy so that others may profit ... And if I therefore prefer the crown of citizen to the state’s medal of honor, yet instead of that crown I would prefer the approval of the people, whose renunciations are heroic and whose sacrifices are the most selfless.\(^{37}\)

This terminology signaled a radical departure from von Arnim’s romantic organicist and metaphorical expression as well as from her faith in reform from above. The king’s betrayal of that faith, whether deliberate or passive, was a game changer: to subscribe any longer to Volkskönigtum was to be ideologically blind. The rhetoric von Arnim deployed in declaring her loyalty to the working class enhanced her public perception as a heroine of the opposition. In that same year a group of young German male émigrés sponsored by an organization of Freethinkers to establish a utopian “new Germany” in Texas named their settlement “Bettina” in her honor. As often happened with utopian missions, the community foundered for lack of structure and a poor harvest; it splintered in less than a year, its members joining other German communities in Texas.\(^{38}\)

**Fuller in Rome**

The conversations and readings surrounding Italian unification and independence nourished the development of a political ideology in Fuller. Her eyewitness awakening to social conditions, beginning in New York, had broadened during her travels to slums in London, Liverpool, Paris, and Lyon. Mazzini’s and Mickiewicz’s discourses on revolution as the means to unification, independence, and freedom informed her readings and informal discussions with Arconati-Visconti and others. Once the Italian uprisings began, her dispatches as foreign war correspondent melded reportage with sympathetic accounts of her partisan participation.

Most studies of Fuller view Rome as a topos where her search for self is fulfilled.\(^{39}\) In Rome she fell in love with Marquis Giovanni Ossoli, a lieutenant in the Italian Unification Movement, who had been disinherited by his family for his revolutionary activities. Fuller bore his child, they married, and all three perished in the shipwreck just off the coast of New York. The (male) Transcendentalist friends who compiled Fuller’s “Memoirs” after her death elided her revolutionary engagement and ideology to create a narrative of womanly yearning.

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37 Von Arnim’s defense letter to the magistrate, Feb 19, 1847, in Meyer-Hepner, *Magistratsprozess*, 38. [Die Gründe warum ich den Proletariat am höchsten stelle, ist, weil er der Gemeinheit enthoben ist, als Wucherer dem Weltverhältnis etwas abzuzwinnen, da er Alles gibt und nicht mehr dafür wieder verarzt ... um neue Kräfte zum Gewinn anderer sammeln zu können ... Und wenn ich daher die Bürgerkrone dem Ordensstern vorziehe, so würde ich dem allem noch vorziehen, vom Volke anerkannt zu sein, dessen Verzichtungen heroiisch und dessen Opfer die uneigennützigsten sind.”]


The Adelsverein bei Biebrich am Rhein (Verein zum Schutze Deutscher Einwanderer in Texas / Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas), better known as the Adelsverein (Nobility Society), founded near Mainz in 1842, purchased Texas land and sponsored various groups of mostly young university graduates. Among these were the Darmstädtler Vierziger (Darmstadt Fortiers), founders of the Bettina settlement.

39 Even Hudspeth, the editor of her letters, implies this in his commentary: “The intensity of her Italian life ... had made her a stranger to the United States” (6:5). For a full discussion, see Anna Scacchi, “Margaret Fuller’s Search for the Maternal,” in *Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Crossings*, ed. Capper and Giorcelli, 66-99.
for love and domesticity. Instead, Fuller’s Rome and its revolution became her passage to a political radicalization having more to do with America than Italy. I would argue, as has Leslie Eckel, that Fuller inverted the transatlantic paradigm wherein Old Europe looked to New America for revolutionary inspiration. While in (voluntary) exile, Fuller “turned her gaze back toward the United States and recognized the paradoxical fact that she ... could promote national progress more effectively from an offshore perspective than from a position at the hub of the country’s literary elite.”

Here it is essential to keep the American Tribune readership in mind when questioning Fuller’s decision to deliver a brief summary of early American history in her dispatch of January 1848. Along the trajectory to the American Revolution, which, we do well to remember, had ignited just seventy years prior to her writing, she lauds the American ideal and evokes the Old World/New World dichotomy in romantic terminology. First, readers are transported from the familiar narrative of the Old to the New World:

A noble, constant, starlike soul, an Italian, led the way to its shores, and, in the first days, the strong, the pure, those too brave, too sincere for the life of the Old World hastened to people them. A generous struggle then shook off what was foreign and gave the nation a glorious start for a worthy goal. Men rocked the cradle of its hopes, great, firm, disinterested men who saw, who wrote, as the basis of all that was to be done, a statement of the rights, the inborn rights of men, which, if fully interpreted and acted upon, leaves nothing to be desired.

From this inspirational narrative readers are brought to the present, to Fuller’s presence in the “Old World,” where the ideals that had been “America” are now to be found: “[T]hat spirit which made it [our country] of value in my eyes, which gave all of hope … is more alive here at present than in America.”

Having set the stage for Tribune readers to experience their common American world through her eyes, two months later Fuller levels a denunciation replete with censorious descriptors: spoiled, stupid, soiled, ashamed, selfish, petty, frivolous, venal: “My country is at present spoiled by prosperity, stupid with the lust of gain, soiled by crime in its willing perpetuation of Slavery, shamed by an unjust war, noble sentiment much forgotten even by individuals, the aims


of politicians selfish or petty, the literature frivolous and venal.” The idea of “America” as a democratic ideal could not be supported by the actuality of 1830s and 40s America. “America” as a topos representing democracy has been relocated to Europe where, as she writes, “amid the teachings of adversity a nobler spirit is struggling — a spirit which cheers and animates mine. I hear earnest words of pure faith and love, I see deeds of brotherhood. This is what makes my America.” Such a narrative can brook only one possible conclusion: America needs to be revolutionized: “I do not deeply distrust my country. She is not dead, but in my time she sleepeth, and the spirit of our fathers flames no more, but lies hid beneath the ashes. It will not be so long; bodies cannot live when the soul gets too overgrown with gluttony and falsehood.”

The month of this dispatch, March 1848, marked the height of the European uprisings, including that of Berlin. In the transformative vocabulary of socialist ideology, the now radicalized Fuller confronted and challenged her American audience to reclaim the spirit needed to effect equality:

Whatever blood is to be shed, whatever altars cast down, those tremendous problems MUST be solved, whatever be the cost! That cost cannot fail to break many a bank, many a heart, in Europe, before the good can bud again out of a mighty corruption. To you, people of America, it may perhaps be given to look on and learn in time for a preventive wisdom. You may learn the real meaning of the words FRATERNITY, EQUALITY: you may, despite the apes of the past who strive to tutor you, learn the needs of a true democracy. You may in time learn to reverence, learn to guard, the true aristocracy of a nation, the only really nobles, — the LABORING CLASSES. 

Like von Arnim, Fuller embraced socialist rhetoric to demonstrate full identification and unity with the underclass in the battle cry for freedom and equality. Fuller’s memoirists sought to excise this transgressive radicalization and justification of violence from her life narrative; Fuller fans can rightfully celebrate scholarship that counters the delimited domestic narrative.

Von Arnim’s and Fuller’s near synchronous rhetorical shift invites us to speculate whether they truly arrived at similar ideological
aspirations. Since Fuller did not break her silence, one cannot argue that she “heard” von Arnim’s testimony. What one can argue, however, is that their ideological trajectories originated in similar social activist endeavors. And, one can posit that socialist terminology supplied the endgame rhetoric in speaking to divergent powers.

Conclusion

To impute motives to one writer’s silence about another cannot, in good conscience, be the design of any comparatist. To conjecture, however, by mining one’s detective work, can enhance ongoing efforts to contextualize the two writers’ life works. I suggest that Fuller’s silence “speaks” to the following conjectures.

1) The “divergent powers” conjecture. In 1843, at the time Fuller learned of von Arnim’s *King’s Book*, her belief in American political superiority, grounded in a revolutionary break from monarchy and the pioneering of a republic, may have prompted her to dismiss it — and von Arnim — out of hand.

2) The “psychological conjecture.” Everything by and about Goethe fascinated Fuller, and thence came her appreciation of von Arnim. Fuller appears, however, to have distanced herself from Goethe by 1844: he is mentioned in only one of her *Tribune* columns, in reference to a monument dedicated to him in Weimar.44 And by 1845 Fuller had severed the Goethe cord in her seminal feminist manifesto *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Though she lauds Goethe’s dynamic female characters, the philosophy of individual self-development — *Bildung* — she had earlier embraced no longer sufficed as a solution to women’s oppression: “Goethe thinks, As the man, so the institutions! ... A man can grow in any place, if he will.... Ay! but Goethe, bad institutions are prison walls and impure air that make him stupid, so that he does not will.”45 For Fuller we could say this marked the end of an enthrallment in which she had found comfort as well as inspiration. She adopted and would continue to adopt new mentors and guides. Though von Arnim might have been included among these, based on shared social justice and literary-philosophical enthusiasms, Fuller had relegated her to a prior constellation, one that belonged to the “Goethe Years” of Fuller’s pre-New York intellectual and philosophical cosmos.

3) The “self-preservation conjecture.” Through her readings in German literature, culminating in von Arnim’s *Die Günderode*,

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44 New York Daily Tribune, December 16, 1844, in Margaret Fuller, Critic, ed. Bean and Myerson, CD 75.

Fuller perceived “Germany” as a topos where Woman is elevated, her education advanced, her intellect respected. For this imagined German womanhood to be sustained, Fuller needed to keep distance from Germany and its real-life women, including von Arnim. The closer such an encounter became geographically and socially possible — Fuller in Europe, Fuller intimate with von Arnim’s friend Arconati-Visconti — the louder the silence.

4) The “personal(ity) conjecture.” Could a transatlantic slight — intentional or not — have been operative in Fuller’s silence? The Transcendentalist and theologian Theodore Parker (1810-60) visited von Arnim in May 1843 and recorded in his journal: “She had forgotten Miss Fuller (though she remembered her at length), and the books, but had never read them.”46 Perhaps von Arnim’s remark circulated within the Transcendentalist circle and reached Fuller. The timing would correlate with Fuller’s silence: within a month of Parker’s visit The King’s Book was published, and three months later the Schnellpost review of it appeared in The Dial. This in turn invites one to ask: Was von Arnim’s momentary memory lapse upon hearing the name “Fuller” — the name of Die Günderode’s American promoter and translator — real or pretense? And perhaps the Arconati Visconti — von Arnim friendship should be questioned.47 In 1847, when Arconati-Visconti befriended Fuller in Milan, did she attempt to mend the broken bond between Fuller and von Arnim? Or had her own friendship with von Arnim turned sour, such that negative mention of von Arnim would have intensified Fuller’s ambivalence — if not resentment — and silence?

Readers of Fuller’s letters and the reliable biographies48 understand her complexity and can easily ascribe her silence to an intricate mix of these conjectures, as well as to any additional unknowables. And yet, what would appear meaningful for future studies is not a continued detective hunt about the loss of Fuller’s emotional, spiritual, or intellectual connection to von Arnim. Instead, broad-based questions about “speaking truth to divergent powers” open the door to wider exploration. To what extent did differences in national political systems complicate transatlantic bonds among nineteenth-century activist women? Did transatlantic differences also curb European activists’ borrowings of discursive and organizing strategies from their American counterparts? Von Arnim clearly saw no point to looking transatlantically, at least not in her writings. In fact, the only German women activists of this era who did so publicly were those who

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46 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Recollections of Seventy Years, 2 vols. (Boston, 1909) 2:551; eventually Parker’s papers were turned over to the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, see bMS 101/2 (1). Journal, Volume Two, January 1, 1841–October 26, 1843. The books refer to a packet accompanying Fuller’s letter to von Arnim; included was the first issue of The Dial and a volume by the poet and German translator John Dwight. See Hudspeth 2:181–82, Fuller’s letter of Nov. 7, 1840, in which she told Emerson what she was sending along with the letter to von Arnim.

47 In 1834, while Costanza Arconati Visconti and her husband Giuseppe were residing in Berlin, King Friedrich Wilhelm III — acting under pressure from the Habsburg monarchy’s repressive foreign minister and chancellor Klaus Metternich — expelled them on the grounds of their support for the Italian Unification Movement.

48 I have already referred to two of these in these pages, including Joan von Mehren, Minerva and the Muse (Amherst, 1995); and Charles Capper, Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life (New York, 2007); others include John Matteson, The Lives of Margaret Fuller: A Biography (New York, 2012); Meg McGavran Murray, Margaret Fuller, Wandering Pilgrim (Athens, GA, 2008); and Megan Marshall, Margaret Fuller: A New American Life (Boston, 2013).
emigrated to the United States upon the failure of the 1848 revolution to achieve a constitutional government.49

And these questions elicit still others: To what extent did awareness of divergent power structures contribute to transatlantic borrowing or dismissal? Which “lobbying” approaches — to monarchs, presidents, prime ministers, parliamentarians, congressmen, or local political figures — found transatlantic cross-fertilization? In which contexts were transatlantically shared outreach strategies empowering or, conversely, counterproductive? Along this line of inquiry, we might posit of Fuller and von Arnim that their synchronous turn to social-ist rhetoric offered a transnational bridge across, if not a break in, the silence.

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