

Radical Designs

The Emergence of the Progressive Editorial in the Nineteenth-Century Press

There are already mountains of facts, if anyone wants them. But people do not want them. They bring their opinions into the world...People respond to arguments.

Ralph Waldo Emerson,
“American Civilization,” 1862

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here is no coincidence that Horace Greeley was both the most powerful editorial writer of his era and the most dedicated promoter in the popular press of philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (Teichgraeber, 1995: 211).

Although the image we have today of Emerson—the brilliant yet detached founder of literary transcendentalism—does not typically place him at the center of journalism history, closer inspection reveals his surprisingly pervasive influence over the era’s most innovative editorial writers. Not only did Greeley hire Emerson’s protégé Margaret Fuller to be the first woman literary editor and foreign correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, then the nation’s most influential newspaper. He also drew from Emerson’s lectures and essays for an abundance of content for his literary journal, *The New-Yorker*. In addition to Fuller, journalists bearing Emerson and Greeley’s influence who spearheaded the emergence of the progressive editorial while extending its literary, philosophical and poetic dimensions included feminist

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

David Dowling, « Radical Designs. The Emergence of the Progressive Editorial in the Nineteenth-Century Press », *Sur le journalisme, About journalism, Sobre jornalismo* [En ligne], Vol 5, n°2 - 2016, mis en ligne le 26 décembre 2016.

URL : <http://surlejournalisme.com/rev>

columnist Fanny Fern (Sara Payson Willis Parton) of the *New York Ledger*, Harriet Martineau of the *Westminster Review* and *London Daily News*, and Karl Marx, foreign correspondent to the *Tribune* and former editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. This transformation in editorial writing at the time was not limited to these individuals, but affected broader changes in American and international journalistic culture.

This article traces the transformation of the newspaper editorial in the nineteenth century from a partisan platform narrowly focused on contemporary politics into a broader more inclusive genre engaging progressive cultural reform with a literary bent. After 1814, the newspaper editorial spread its wings and soared with lofty poetic rhetoric and increasingly metaphorical language (Hallock, 2007: 28). Editors frequently broke into verse in their columns, inspired by the powerful presence of poetry and oratory in antebellum culture. A key figure at the heart of that oratorical and poetic culture was Emerson, who held a prominent position in print culture through books and newspaper reports of his speaking engagements. In 1857, the *Atlantic's* first issue showcased his sixteen-line poem "Brahma" in addition to verse by John Greenleaf Wittier, James Lowell, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, establishing his lifelong association with the nation's leading literary journal (Goodman, 2011: 11).

Greeley, Marx, Fern, Fuller, and Martineau form the subjects of this study because they reflect Emerson's radical liberal influence—including literary stylistics blending poetic and philosophical rhetoric—on the emergence of the progressive editorial. In particular, they represent a diverse transatlantic mix of revolutionary and feminist columnists from the weekly and daily press who extended Emerson's purview, especially his critiques of capitalism and institutional corruption. This approach diversifies previous understandings of the evolution of the editorial reflected in Nevins's (1928) *American Press Opinion*, which exclusively focuses on American political editorials written by men. The more recent anthology of historical editorials by Sloan, et al. (1997) also excludes women and transnational journalism.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PROGRESSIVE EDITORIAL

The commercial press liberated the news industry from the partisan press, which Frank Luther Mott (1941) called "the Dark ages of American journalism." Bill Huntzicker (1999) described the rise of the commercial press from 1833–1865 as a tonic for cronyism: "Even while the penny editors continued to play politics, their interest in commercial success

gave them a sense of independence from partisan bosses, made New York City the center of the news media, and stimulated a number of modern journalistic practices," especially the reinvention of the editorial (164). Indeed, as Michael Schudson (1978) has demonstrated, "not until the revolution in the press of the 1830s did the editor's ability to express himself grow" so that the paper became "a more personal instrument" in part through the new editorial form (16). This provided new opportunities for Emerson protégés such as Fuller to capitalize on her literary prowess, transcendentalist sensibility, and female perspective to offer some of the most politically powerful and socially efficacious writing published in the *Tribune* (113). Martineau's correspondence reveals her deep and abiding respect for both Fuller and Emerson, whom she called "noble & serene, & humane to uttermost degree" (Arbuckle, 1994: 302). Greeley's connections to the literary world included his close friendship with Fern and her brother Nathaniel Parker Willis, editor of the *Home Journal*. Martineau maintained close contact with Emerson throughout her career, directly shaping her editorial perspectives on abolition and the Southern society from their correspondence. These editorialists reached beyond daily politics into issues of immigration, national expansion, the fine arts, and literature as an emblem of national identity. Marx would enjoy his most powerful command of an American audience of readers during his stint as *Tribune* foreign correspondent. He supported proletarian revolution just as Fuller had sympathized with the Risorgimento of the Italian uprisings. Greeley's agenda for labor reform and critique of materialism was rooted in socialist reform tracing back to Emerson by way of Brook Farm, the transcendentalist experiment in communal living established at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, the founder of which was on Greeley's editorial staff (Guarneri, 1991: 36–39; Tuchinsky, 2009: 126–164).

Nevins (1928) correctly identified newspapers like William Cullen Bryant's *New York Evening Post*, colored by the editor's poetic background and ties to the literary publishing industry, in connection with the efflorescence of the era's best editorials such as Greeley's "Just Once," and "The Prayer of Twenty Millions." Greeley stood out for "the vigor, vitality, and persuasiveness of his writings," as Nevins (1928: vi) pointed out. This study proceeds from his suggestion that for "the best example of the editorial page as a democratic force," anticipating Walter Lippmann, "one must still go back to the *New York Tribune of 1850–1860*" (Nevins, 1928: vi). I then trace the roots of Greeley's styles and subjects to Emerson, Fuller, and Martineau, all staunch labor reformers and abolitionists with an interest in the literary world. Their editorial sensibility extended

to Marx (especially his foreign correspondence to the *Tribune*) and the *New York Ledger's* independent-minded columnist, Fanny Fern.

The popularity of the human-interest editorial, as Sloan, et al. (1997) note, increased after 1850 when non-political subjects appeared more consistently. Many, including the columnists who comprise the focus of this article, did not abandon politics. Instead they humanized their subjects and wrote with compassion about laborers, soldiers, and the indigent with optimism (often expressed through utopian thinking and romantic idealism), faith in the common citizen, and criticism of materialism and elite favoritism in politics and business. The progressive democratic sensibility of these pieces represents an editorial aesthetic rooted in Emerson's democratization of culture. This was especially evident in transcendentalism's emphasis on the "*infinitude of the private man*" (Emerson, 1965: xv-xvi) his intellectual daring, and populist fervor that sparked a youth movement decried by detractors in British press as "*the Emerson mania*" (Anon, 1849: 139). His example inspired these writers to break free from the prior generic constraints of the editorial just as Emerson himself had when he abandoned the Unitarian ministry and the strictures of the formal sermon for the more liberating platform of lyceum lecture. The editorial's function as a secularized humanistic sermon traces back to Emerson's lectures, which were departures from the formal conventions of the Unitarian sermon.

The editorial evolved by carrying over, rather than abandoning, its emphasis on mediated deliberation and democratic discourse into a richer marketplace of ideas. That clearinghouse of public opinion grew to include an international omnibus of utopian thinking, social reform, egalitarianism, open government, institutional and capitalist critique, and experiments in communal living, as Underwood (2008: 96-7) explains. Developing out of the partisan press' culture of contention and dissent, the commercial press thus set the stage for the emergence of the progressive editorial in which "*free speech is less a concern than figuring out how to be heard above the din*" (Schmuhl and Pickard, 2005: 145). Editorials represent a movement between the 1840s and 1870s that was an outgrowth of earlier forms of opinionated writing.

Early forerunners of neutral reportage also inspired the development of the editorial. The editorial certainly was not a response to the inverted pyramid, which did not gain traction as a dominant news writing convention until the 1880s (Pottker, 2003). The editorial's efflorescence actually predates the heyday of the inverted pyramid as an in-

dustry standard by several decades. But the editorial's romantic bearing did position it in opposition to more mechanistic forms of expression when the penny press introduced a new emphasis on factual journalism that began with stories sent via telegraph by the mid-nineteenth century. This factual journalism became explicit by 1851 in the founding editorial policy of Henry Raymond's *New York Times*. Raymond avowed neutrality mainly as a means of differentiating himself from opinionated rival editors like James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* and Greeley of the *Tribune*. He refused to cast the paper as radical or conservative by asserting, "*We do not believe that everything in society is either exactly right or exactly wrong.*" Raymond, as Bill Kovarik (2011) points out, "*had a more neutral view of news in mind*" that stood in contrast to his rival Greeley's radical crusading. Indeed, the *Times* of the 1850s was Greeley's rival in large part because "*it foresaw a kind of neutrality that would later be called objectivity*" (55).

The emergence of the editorial thus simultaneously coincided with a shift in the development of discourse presentation in the 1840s, which the *Times* capitalized upon in the 1850s. Reports of speech events, such as an Emerson lecture or a political meeting, in early newspapers typically provided "*faithful accounts of the statements and speeches made at these meetings,*" as Jucker and Berger (2014) note. But "*while speech events were presented as coherent wholes in earlier newspapers, the focus has shifted towards a more selective use of individual statements that summarize an event or characterize it from different angles*" (82). This development initiated a surge of opinion writing as a form of reflection upon the news, with more outspoken renditions of news stories broaching toward editorial writing. Reports of events from a more neutral perspective were distinct from pieces that foregrounded and amplified, rather than distanced and muted, the journalist's unique voice. Voice was not simply the statement of an opinion, but rather a distinctive journalistic identity through which language increasingly bore the impression of the writer's ideological stance.

Literary figures, like those of this study, were embedded in the journalistic world and sought out periodicals as ideal platforms for their social reform agendas. Operative here is Carolyn Miller's (1984) definition of genre according to what it accomplishes rather than its formal properties, suggesting a better measure is in its use by historical actors. Thus the emergence of the editorial as an agent of progressive reform further corroborates James Mussell's (2014) sense of "*genre as a social action [that] provides a way of understanding the intersection between the*

material object and the wider virtual forms that give it meaning” (9). If the history of the popular press, according to Raymond Williams’s (2001) famous formulation, “*is the history of the expanding Sunday press,*” (216) it becomes apparent that editorials held a prominent place within their expanded format. Sunday editions, like the weekly papers, enjoyed greater freedom to range beyond breaking local news stories to include commentary about not only the reports rooted in politics, economics, and business, but also issues of cultural, literary, and historic significance often drawing on those topics. Further, the politics of Sunday and weekly venues allowed for more radical perspectives, and quickly came to showcase arguments for cutting edge progressive reform.

The editorial’s generic restrictions expanded with a repertoire of rhetorical and literary devices not seen in either soft news or the “*telegraphese,*” as Hemingway called it, of inverted pyramid hard news stories (as quoted in Baker, 1972: 32). By 1850 in the United States 20 different companies ran more than 12,000 miles of telegraph lines to supply news organizations with stories (Kovarik, 2011: 199). In the prior era, journals printed news received by mail without the strictures of the telegraph that emphasized standardization of information over storytelling or expansion of opinion. The inverted pyramid was a product of the telegraph insofar as it positioned only the most vital facts in the shortest form possible at the beginning of reports as a means of allowing editors to trim them to any length from the end to suit spatial demands. The inverted pyramid form also ensured a printable story in the frequent instances in which the later portions of the message failed to transmit (Pottker, 2003). Significantly, the editorial as a form of writing was not subjected to submission via telegraph and therefore never suffered from the abbreviated and truncated style associated with breaking news. Editorials enhanced rather than reduced the value of the journalist because they typically originated from in-house staff by editors like Greeley and regular columnists like Fern, or arrived via mail (because they lacked the time-sensitive urgency of breaking news) from overseas by correspondents such as Fuller and Marx. The effect of the telegraph on hard news writing styles was evident, as Schudson (1978) pointed out, in how wired Associated Press stories were “*more free from editorial comment than most reporting for single newspapers*” (126). The benefit of unbiased reporting, however, came at the cost of robbing stories of the perspective and analysis readers expected, which they now found in greater abundance and in richer variety on the editorial page.

HORACE GREELEY’S EMERSONIAN SIGNATURE

Whereas “*the information model of ‘hard news’ journalism purports not to be concerned with emotional effect, moral judgment, or how the story ends,*” editorials significantly lend meaning and interpretation to those hard news items (Fulton, 2005: 146). This interpretive function defined Greeley’s editorial role, which Emerson outlines in *Representative Men*. Writing more than a decade after meeting Greeley, who had done more to spread transcendentalism than any journalist at the time, Emerson defined the ideal editor with his friend in mind. “*His office is a reception of the facts into the mind, and then a selection of the eminent and characteristic experiences,*” one more respectable than “*The ambitious and mercenary [who] bring their last new mumbojumbo, whether tariff, Texas, railroad, Romanism, mesmerism, or California and, by detaching the object from its relations, easily succeed in making it seen in a glare*” to make “*the multitude go mad about it.*” He esteemed editorial writers “*who see connection, where the multitude see fragments, and who are impelled to exhibit the facts in ideal order, and so to supply the axis on which the frame of things turns.*” While encouraging democratic exchange, the best editors should not back down from controversy. “*It makes a great difference to the force of the sentence, whether there be a man behind it, or no,*” Emerson claimed. He rated Greeley’s *Tribune* among those that pursued a higher purpose than papers substituting a moral compass for “*some irresponsible shadow; oftener, some monied corporation, or some dangler, who hopes in the mask and robes of his paragraph, to pass for somebody*” (Emerson, 1994: 162).

Such an authentic personal conviction drives Greeley’s best editorials, especially “*Just Once,*” “*The Prayer of the Twenty Millions,*” “*The Death of Benton,*” and “*The Proclamation of Freedom,*” demonstrating journalistic expression liberated from the neutrality he deplored as moral cowardice in his rival Raymond of the *Times* (Pottker, 2003; Pottker, 2005; Fulton, 2005). The discovery of such expression traces back to the founding principle of his 1841 *Tribune*. His “*leading idea,*” rooted in his refusal to retreat from the role of tastemaker and principled guide of public opinion, was to establish “*a journal removed alike from servile partisanship on the one hand and from gaged, mincing neutrality on the other*” (Greeley, 1868: 137). He was adamant that the excessive bias of the partisan press should not be overcompensated for through self-silencing.

Greeley, whose “*The Prayer of Twenty Millions*” spurred Lincoln on to deliver the Emancipation Proclamation, embodied Emerson’s ideal role

of the press as “*A truth speaker [who] is worth more than the best police and worth more than the laws of governors; for these do not always know their own side, but will back the crime for want of this very truth speaker to expose them*” (1852: 306). The President was precisely such an elected official whom Greeley (1862a) exposed for backing the crime of slavery. To Emerson (1852), “*That is the theory of the newspaper—to supersede official by intellectual influence*” (306). Greeley firmly upheld this principle in his editorial he wrote on behalf of the North, excoriating Lincoln for being “*strangely and disastrously remiss in the discharge of your official and imperative duty with regard to the emancipating provisions of the new Confiscation Act.*” He targeted Lincoln for perpetrating “*timid counsels in such a crisis*” likely to prove “*disastrous*” because of “*mistaken deference to Rebel slavery*” (Greeley, 1862).

Greeley’s editorials carried this sermon-like conviction and oratorical force, precisely what characterized Emerson’s own lectures, orations that built upon his training as a Unitarian minister. On tour with Greeley, Emerson quipped, “*I could scarcely keep the people quiet to hear my abstractions, they were so furious to shout Greeley! Greeley!*” Greeley’s editorial presence clearly made him a sensation at the lectern. “*I may as well travel with an Express man or with Barnum,*” Emerson (1994a: 56) remarked. Emerson’s support for Greeley was rooted in his admiration of the editorial verve of the *Tribune*, as evidenced by his frequent journal references to its articles along with the dozens of pieces he habitually clipped and saved (Canada, 2011: 39–40). One telling Emerson (1977) journal entry reads: “*1852: Our four powerful men in the virtuous class are Horace Greeley, Theodore Parker, Henry Ward Beecher, and Horace Mann*” (49). Greeley would collaborate with Emerson in editing Margaret Fuller’s memoirs upon her tragic death in 1850 in a shipwreck off Fire Island, New York upon her return from Italy after supplying the *Tribune* with dispatches from Rome on the revolution.

**MARGARET FULLER’S PRAGMATIC
TRANSCENDENTALISM**

Of Emerson’s protégés, the most prolific and well-respected journalist was Margaret Fuller. She used her *Tribune* platform to advocate for reform measures drawn directly from her training under Emerson, focusing on topics such as asylum reform, government corruption, public education, and women’s rights. Her advocacy of the populist uprising of the Risorgimento placed her in perhaps the most in-

fluential of all her journalistic roles. Just as Greeley had fearlessly assaulted Lincoln in his most impactful editorials, Fuller also sharply critiqued her own nation’s government for failing to represent its populist base. Fuller’s domestic pieces represent a social history of reform from a transcendentalist perspective, while her dispatches from Rome she amassed with an eye toward chronicling a history of the Revolution of 1848. Fuller developed her editorial pragmatism under the learned optimism of Emerson, who “*For a Platonist has surprisingly little faith in general ideas,*” as Richardson (2009) aptly observes. “*An idea must be particular*” for Emerson to consider it “*legitimate and real*” (Richardson, 2009: 79).

Fuller’s defiant editorial style traces back to her tutelage under Emerson in the late 1830s, a time when her mentor drew a firestorm of controversy from the orthodox Unitarian church. Charges led by Andrews Norton alleged Emerson was corrupting the nation’s youth by encouraging independent thought unmoored from inherited doctrine. Emerson’s protégés rushed to his defense, dismissing the attack as “*the superficial charges of stiff, barren conservatives*” (Cranch, 1841: 46). Having trained under this radical leader of “*The Newness,*” as transcendentalism was called, Fuller joined Greeley’s *Tribune* emboldened with the charge to call a thing by its name and confront injustice where it lives, drawing inspiration from Emerson’s (1970) insistence that “*the way you write is to throw your body at the mark when your arrows are spent*” (400).

Although one can find vestiges of the sermon in editorials of the 1830s and 1840s, the Emersonian lecture/essay particularly spurred its movement toward radical progressive expression. Emerson’s charismatic combination of defiance and intellect was unmatched in New England during the late 1830s either in the press or pulpit. Crucial to the evolution of the editorial was Emerson’s secularization of the sermon with a politically engaged free ranging style, which directly influenced writers like Fuller. After abandoning the Unitarian ministry, he confessed, “*I hate preaching.*” To him, “*Preaching is a pledge, and I wish to say what I feel and think to-day, with the proviso that to-morrow perhaps I shall contradict it all. Freedom boundless I wish*” (Emerson, 1969: 239). This credo explains not only Greeley’s own notorious vacillation on topics—he would run for President as a Democrat after advocating for the Republican party for more than thirty years—but also why Fuller herself was so chameleonic in her ideological adaptability to her environment, from Concord transcendentalism to New York City journalism to Roman populist revolutionary activism.

Fuller lent the *Tribune* a confrontational critical edge that targeted industrial capitalism and its allegiance with bourgeois respectability. Her assault on government and financial corruption coupled with her support for marginalized and oppressed groups, particularly women, wage laborers, slaves, prisoners, and uneducated indigents. Her feminist writings in “*The Great Lawsuit*” Greeley published in pamphlet form, which later appeared as her pioneering book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Her confrontational style is visible in her dispatches from Rome, pieces concerned less with breaking news than editorial commentary. Inspired by the Risorgimento, she assaulted the gauzy idealism of Italiophilia, for example, favored in the United States by writers like James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving who located Manifest Destiny in revolutionary Rome. “*In Europe, amid the teachings of adversity a nobler spirit is struggling—a spirit which cheers deeds of brotherhood. This is what makes my America. 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 beneath the ashes,*” Fuller (1991) lamented, alluding to the immanent United States presidential election of proslavery Whig Zachary Taylor, the hero of the Mexican War she, along with Thoreau, deeply opposed (222).

In another editorial calling for justice, Fuller’s passion for the topic of racial inequality on the occasion of Fourth of July celebrations moved her to richly symbolic verse. “*America is rocked within/ Thy cradle, Liberty,/ By Africa’s poor palsied hand,/ Strange inconsistency,*” she wrote, highlighting the hypocrisy in extolling independence while slavery remained legal on U.S. soil. “*For though we fought the battle well/*” that defeated the British, “*We’re traitors at the last*” (Fuller, 1845a). In “*What Fits a Man to Be a Voter?*” she lamented the denigration of African Americans, voicing her staunch advocacy of abolition. The piece promotes Emerson’s abolitionist lectures and registers Fuller’s (1845) support for his refusal to speak at an event prohibiting the attendance of blacks. “*We rejoice to hear,*” she sang out, “*R.W. Emerson and Charles Sumner, who were engaged as lecturers, have declined addressing an audience whose test of merit, or right to the privileges of a citizen consists not in intelligence or good character, but the color of the skin*” (Fuller, 1845b).

Fuller’s advocacy of the poor was consonant with Greeley’s crusade against unemployment that led to his campaign on behalf of the free soil movement and successful petition before Congress on behalf of the Homestead Act. Economic inequality drove much of Fuller’s best editorials, such as “*Our City Charities,*” which painted moving, humanizing portraits of the New York City homeless who had taken refuge at

the Bellevue Alms House. Her feminism dovetailed with her advocacy for the financially disenfranchised in her editorial, “*Asylum for Discharged Female Convicts.*” In it, she revealed the ill effects of social stigmas preventing former prostitutes from attaining respectability and gainful employment. The injustices and inequality of free market capitalism came into sharp focus in such portraits throughout Fuller’s editorials.

KARL MARX’S POLITICAL BELLES-LETTRES

Sharp criticism of the free market appearing in the *Tribune* was not isolated to the editorials of Margaret Fuller. Karl Marx was a frequent contributor to the *Tribune* long before penning *Das Kapital* in 1867. Drawing from the socialist utopianism that regularly appeared in the *Tribune*, particularly in the daily and later triweekly front-page column by Albert Brisbane on Association, Marx established the foundation for dialectical materialism through his editorial contributions. They extended beyond partisan politics into a much larger philosophical orientation touching on social, cultural, and political issues. His collective portraits of the victims of Imperialism in “*The British Rule in India,*” the laborers and unemployed in pieces such as “*The Condition of Factory Laborers*” and “*Poor Houses,*” as well as bourgeois Britain in “*The English Middle Class*” reflect the broad humanistic currents of his dialectic that included poetry and impressions of culture. In June of 1858, he even penned an editorial called “*Aesthetics.*”

This was Marx before the *Manifesto*, a writer who regularly alluded to verse by Goethe and exhorted Friedrich Engels, who focused narrowly on military topics, to broaden his perspective and extend his oeuvre. “*You must your war-articles color a little more,*” Marx suggested, “*since you’re writing for a general newspaper, not for a scientific military journal.*” He encouraged Engels to infuse his writing with “*Something more descriptive and individual,*” a component essential in appealing to *Tribune* readers. “*I can’t stick it in myself, because there would be a discrepancy of style,*” he reasoned, showing an acute sensitivity to stylistic coherence within the editorial form (as quoted in Christman and Blitzer, 1966: xxi).

Marx considered formal coherence and rhetorical integrity vital components to a properly composed editorial. When Charles Dana had taken liberties with his submissions by publishing the first several paragraphs of his longer articles as anonymous editorials and placing the remainder elsewhere in the paper to appear as a separate submission with

Marx's byline or "*Our Correspondent*," he protested. The editorial, Marx urged in letters to Dana between June and September of 1854, should function as an autonomous piece of writing, rather than a fragment without proper thematic closure. Dana discontinued the practice, respecting Marx's insistence on the integrity of the editorial as a distinct genre with its own aesthetic demands. Of his 350 articles published in the *Tribune* from 1853–1861, 165 were editorials developing elements of the genre—brief stand-alone meditations with strong authorial presence and nuanced literary stylistics—distinguishing them from his other works (Christman and Blitzer, 1966: xx).

In one telling example of the importance of thematic unity and coherence in Marx's newspaper writing, he deployed a resounding conclusion with the verse of Goethe in a piece on British rule in India. "*Should this torture then torment us/ Since it brings us greater pleasure?/ Were not through the rule of Timur/ Souls devoured without measure?*" The quatrain deploys paradox as a literary device to emphasize the benefits and liberties that social revolutions brought in the wake of the violent Timurid takeover of Central Asia beginning in the 1320s. Drawing an analogy to that historical moment poetically captured in Goethe, Marx urges that although "*England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan, was actuated by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them,*" it became "*the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.*" His point here follows a moving humanistic portrait of the suffering before India's social revolution. It details life under "*barbarian egotism*" built on a village system that functioned to subjugate the masses under an "*Oriental despotism*" that enabled rulers to "*restrain the human mind within the smallest compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies*" (Marx, 1853).

In using Goethe as the lynchpin of this and many other pieces, Marx resonates with the German Romanticism favored by Emerson and transcendentalists in his circle including Fuller. Had she not become literary editor of the *Tribune*, Fuller might have fulfilled plans to write the biography of Goethe, a figure famous for his rejection of rigid rationalism and mechanistic views of reality. Goethe's embrace of intuitive modes of personalized expression and self-regulating organic systems combined well with critiques of capitalism and alienated labor at the forefront of the cultural fervor conjoining these intellectual movements (of Marxism, German Romanticism, and New England transcendentalism) at the time. In *Walden*, Thoreau (1971) asks why we labor

the way we do, wondering "*Where is the division of labor to end?*" (89). Emerson's alarm at the Industrial Revolution's claim on the integrity of the individual in "*The American Scholar*" anticipated Marx's concept of worker alienation. "*The fountain of power*" of each individual "*has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out,*" Emerson wrote, "*that it is spilled into drops and cannot be gathered,*" a process in which society members "*suffer amputation at the trunk and become so many walking monsters—a good finger, a trunk, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.*" Reification according to increasing specialization and the narrow repetition of tasks Emerson (1971) saw in the conflation of the tools of the trade with the self, such that "*The priest becomes a form; the attorney a statue-book; the mechanic a machine; the sailor a rope of the ship*" (53).

Marx felt at home amid such romantic revolutionary leanings in the *Tribune*. After Charles Dana had terminated his position, he confessed, "*I miss the sending of the Tribune sadly.*" Dana's own resignation at the hands of Greeley had prompted the former's firing of Marx from the *Tribune*. Dana and Greeley had struggled for editorial control over the paper since the beginning of the Civil War. Since Dana had originally hired Marx, and was more militant than Greeley, his departure meant the end of Marx's prominent role as editorial writer for the *Tribune*. Marx bitterly complained, "*This was a mean trick of Greeley and McElrath*" (Marx and Engels, 1937: 242). Marx wanted to remain with the *Tribune* because it was not only the most influential clearinghouse in the United States for socialistic critiques of capitalism, but also a potent platform for revolutionary romanticism.

Marx touted revolutionary romanticism of the sort practiced by Carlyle, Emerson and the English Romantic poets (especially Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley, and William Wordsworth) because it exposed the injustices and social inequalities perpetuated by capitalism. Reactions to the threats of divided labor and industrial mechanization imposed on the human spirit were the concerns of these figures, as opposed to others at the opposite end of the spectrum, such as Sir Walter Scott and Washington Irving, whose writing romanticized capitalist pursuits, and championed its historical development as steady linear progress. Whereas Irving glamorized the fur trade by accepting an offer to produce a commissioned biography of the industry's original tycoon and monopolist John Jacob Astor, others, like Stowe, Melville, and Fuller, advocated the repressed and forgotten casualties of the system. Their approach was consonant with Goethe's in rendering "*ideological reflections of the real contradictions in the life of society.*" Marx's contemporaries

recall him perennially immersed in his well-thumbed and copiously annotated copies of Goethe's poetry and *Faust*, captivated by "their rebellious spirit and indignation at the social system" (Baxandall and Morawski, 1973: xi).

Marx's appreciation of romantic revolutionaries was particularly evident in his editorial defense of Harriet Beecher Stowe. In it, he exposed the hypocrisy of the "broad humanitarian values" touted by the British despite their sympathy with the South. Although the Union at the time had not identified the abolition of slavery as its chief cause in the war, Marx (1861) wisely asked why England was not repulsed by the South's confession that their object in battle was to defend their liberty to enslave people. This was precisely Stowe's point in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in her widely publicized and controversial open letter to Lord Shaftesbury. Also responding to Stowe on abolition was *London Daily News* columnist Harriet Martineau, another prominent writer who took cues and inspiration for her editorials from Emerson.

**THE PROGRESSIVE EDITORIALS OF HARRIET
MARTINEAU AND FANNY FERN**

Harriet Martineau's radical abolitionist persona drew directly from the model of the public intellectual Emerson established through his lectures. His address celebrating Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, becoming a sounding board for critics and supporters. In her *London Daily News* column, one of the most widely read in the British press, Martineau defended Emerson's habit of institutional disaffiliation and defiance of pressure to conform to partisan doctrine that commonly degenerated into political dogma in the commercial press. The sanctity of radically subjective thought in his self-reliant purview that disdained ideological conformity, Martineau explained, left partisan leaders pondering his allegiances. "He was not joining in the organization, because he never joins any organization. He was doing more outside it than he could have done within it." Specifically, she admired how "he said what he thought" and "vindicated the liberty of speech of all who had anything to say," a point with unmistakable relevance to her own function as editorial writer. Her column shared Emerson's role as "seconder of every citizen who moved that men's souls were their own" challenging the presumption that "a barbaric and a civilized state could exist in union" (Martineau, 1862). Her professional self-definition was profoundly shaped by the example of Emerson, especially as articulated in his Phi Beta Kappa address delivered at Harvard

in 1837. When it appeared later as "*The American Scholar*," she quoted liberally from it in her 1838 *Retrospect of Western Travel* (Teichgraber, 1995: 178).

In her war of words against slavery, Martineau particularly embodied Emerson's (1971) edict "to defer never to the popular cry," such as Britain's Southern sympathies, nor to funnel all thought into controversy as if it were "some fetish of a government," but instead to focus on "preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history" (63). Martineau's own profiles of William Lloyd Garrison and Emerson combine with her pieces on Russian history and advocacy of education for rural laborers to reflect this ideal described in "*The American Scholar*." Martineau trumpeted the political import of Emerson's liberal philosophy that foresaw a surge of spirit and industry "in a more moral age" in the wake of the Proclamation in which freed slaves "will not only defend their independence, but will give them a rank among nations". Directing her pen at the British apologists for the South, she marveled at "How infinitely mean do the flatterers of a slaveholding aristocracy appear in the presence of a contemplative philosopher" such as Emerson "whose contemplation and philosophy make him a patriot!" (Martineau, 1862).

Martineau's progressive sensibility drew her to Emerson despite significant conservative British backlash against "his heretical lectures" that criticized orthodox Unitarianism. "I am sorry you think of Emerson as you do," she wrote to one disapproving friend, expressing her "unbounded respect for him." She touted his uncanny ability to raise his standard of quality with each new effort so "that his last oration is even more beautiful than the former," a feat (2007) she found particularly impressive since she faced similar pressure as a regular columnist with an international platform (3: 32). The admiration was mutual, as Emerson first hosted Martineau during her visit to New England in October of 1835, and she returned the favor accommodating him at her home in London in 1848. By then, she was regularly corresponding with both his protégé Fuller, then employed on the *Tribune* staff, and his wife, Lidian. Not only was she taken by "*The American Scholar*" as evidenced in her 1838 book, she was also deeply moved by *Essays*, which Emerson had sent her with an inscription. She regarded it as a work that "relieves me from, for the time—a self-questioning—a tenderness of conscience—and using up of old sins & of absurdities which one is ashamed to care for more than the sins" (3: 89). The inspiration would last throughout her career, as she published a glowing review of Emerson's "*English*

Traits” in the 13 September 1856 issue of the *Daily News*. Emerson’s broad thinking and liberal spirit expressed in plain language formed the model she emulated in her own. Her enthusiasm for his lecture on the topic of “*Plain Speaking*” delivered in Boston during the winter of 1839 directly influenced her editorial style, prompting her to consult exemplary prose in “*Goethe’s translucent style, so simple as to be almost an imperceptible medium of thought*” (3: 39).

“*Plain Speaking*” in Emerson often entailed expressing truths at his own peril, as seen in his willingness to shock a polite lyceum audience to its core by announcing “*if I am the devil’s child, let me speak as the devil’s child*” (as quoted in Fuller, 2007: 108). Martineau (2007) saw power in his reach beyond strict logic to “*conquer minds, as well as hearts, wherever he goes; &, without convincing anybody’s reason of any one thing, exalts their reason, & makes their minds worth more than they ever were before*” (3: 111). Perhaps the most visible influence on Martineau’s (2007) editorial writing was Emerson’s emphasis on individual moral reform as the key to social reform. This was a process dedicated to making readers “*stronger, wiser, better*” by expanding political discourse to encompass “*the speculative tendencies, poetry, & wit, which characterize their dearly-beloved lecturer*” (2: 181). His rare combination of philosophy, poetry, and wit designed to strengthen his readers were also vital elements of Fanny Fern’s editorial column.

The most widely read and highest paid columnist to revolutionize the editorial was Fern, who according to Nathaniel Hawthorne, “*writes as if the devil was in her*” (as quoted in Warren, 1992: 121). Her *New York Ledger* column treated child labor advocacy, feminism, institutional corruption, and commercial ethics. Her idiom ranged from homespun populism to sociological analysis of deviant behavior, vigorously engaging the core tenants of transcendentalism, including a rejection of society’s norms, reliance on self, commitment to equality, rejection of materialism, and a regard for nonconformity (Moses, 2008: 92). The transcendentalist concern for first-person writing is reflected in her close friendship with Walt Whitman, famous for free verse poems such as “*Song of Myself*” in *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman (1847) cultivated the first-person narrative voice into an art form in editorials for the *Brooklyn Eagle* with pieces such as “*The Philosophy of Ferries*,” a reflective rumination on how “*Our Brooklyn ferries teach some sage lessons in philosophy*” that was the prose forerunner to “*Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*,” his world-renowned poem celebrating the urban masses. Likewise, Fern would find urban

tableaus—from shopkeeper’s showrooms to theatre galleries—metaphorically evocative of social, political, and economic systems.

Fern’s advocacy of women in her writings was supported by her founding of Sorosis, an organization for female journalists in response to the Press Club’s male-only membership policy and refusal to admit women to a dinner for Charles Dickens in 1868 on one of his rare visits to the United States (Walker, 1993: 21). Her capacity to found such an organization derived from her status as the highest paid columnist of the nineteenth century (Fern, 1986: xvii). She was among the first celebrity journalists reaching an audience equally interested in entertainment and news. Her editorial, “*Every Family Should Have It*,” reflects her witty, often strident approach. In it, she skewers consumer culture via the advertising industry’s creation of a false need for “*the things no family can do without*.” Marketers, she quips, should stop to realize that, in “*their desires to furnish our houses*,” their slogans “*might be the means of sending us to a lunatic asylum*” (Fern, 1872: 155). Fern (1853) refused to mute her radicalism for her popular audience, instead exposing the ironies of the mutual dependency of consumption and production with scenes of women frenetically buying fashion apparel and accessories “*with the most reckless abandon...while their husbands and fathers, in another part of the city were hurrying from banks to counting-houses, sweating and fretting over ‘protected notes’*” (319). She applied her critique of capitalism and its impact on fashion to the male-dominated periodical press, asking “*why reporters, in making mention of lady speakers, always consider it to be necessary to report, fully and firstly, the dresses worn by them?*” (Fern, 1872: 114–115) As in Marx’s “*The Opinion of the Journals and the Opinion of the People*” in *Die Presse* in 1861, Fern launches a salient portrait of the press as a tool of mass communication that reified its disempowered subjects. Fern’s (1868) editorials often identified degrading stereotypes for examination, as in “*Some Things in New York*.” In it, the question regarding a female lecturer, “*What can she tell us that we did not know before?*” meets her retort: “*an intelligent woman’s standpoint*” (65).

The Emersonian lecture and essay paved the way for the progressive editorial that reached beyond narrow sectarian politics. Its political edge accordingly cut deeper into the cultural and social fabric, unleashing fearless critiques like those of Martineau that built on Emerson’s resistance to Lockean rationalism, orthodox Unitarianism, and industrial capitalism. Although historians commonly credit “*A Great Old Sunset*” by S.S. Cox for sparking the renaissance in editorial writing’s “*liberation from domination by*

political subjects,” the form expanded more broadly in the columns of Greeley, Fuller, Martineau, Marx, and Fern. There was no “*sudden rise in the popularity of human interest subjects*” that vied for space with political ones (Sloan, et al., 1997: 71, 85). This unhelpful binary obscures the broadening scope of political editorial commentary and opinion that could take on larger cultural and philosophical dimensions with an increasingly rich literary and poetic frame of reference. These writers enhanced their rhetorical power by drawing on literary techniques popularized by Emerson’s lectures and essays

to reinvent the editorial page as a space for worldly homilies thoroughly engaged with the political exigencies of the day. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the progressive editorial lies in its capacity to be the birthplace of dialectical materialism (Marx), feminism (Fuller and Fern), British abolitionism (Martineau), and Associationism (Greeley), for the development of the most influential thought of the century inspired by the charisma and dynamism of Emerson’s radical progressive example.

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En This article traces the transformation of the newspaper editorial in the nineteenth century from a partisan platform narrowly focused on contemporary politics into a broader more inclusive genre engaging progressive cultural reform with a literary bent. After 1814, the newspaper editorial spread its wings and soared with lofty poetic rhetoric and increasingly metaphorical language. Editors frequently broke into verse in their columns, inspired by the powerful presence of poetry and oratory in antebellum culture. A key figure at the heart of that oratorical and poetic culture was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who held a prominent position in print culture through books and newspaper reports of his speaking engagements. Horace Greeley, Karl Marx, Fanny Fern, Margaret Fuller, and Harriet Martineau form the subjects of this study because they reflect Emerson's radical liberal influence on the emergence of the progressive editorial, particularly through literary stylistics blending poetic and philosophical rhetoric. These figures represent a diverse transatlantic mix of revolutionary and feminist columnists from the weekly and daily press who extended Emerson's purview, especially his critiques of capitalism and institutional corruption. This approach diversifies previous understandings of the evolution of the editorial reflected in Allen Nevins' *American Press Opinion* (1928), which exclusively focuses on American political editorials written by men. The more recent 1997 anthology of historical editorials by Sloan, Wray, and Sloan also excludes women and transnational journalism. The commercial press liberated the news industry from the partisan press, providing new opportunities for Emerson protégés such as Fuller to capitalize on her literary prowess, transcendentalist sensibility, and female perspective to offer some of the most politically powerful and socially efficacious writing published in the *New-York Tribune*. These editorialists reached beyond daily politics into issues of immigration, national expansion, the fine arts, and literature as an emblem of national identity.

Keywords: editorials, Ralph Waldo Emerson, reform, progressive politics, literary journalism.

Pt Este artigo traça a transformação do editorial de jornal no século dezenove, a partir de uma plataforma partidária estreitamente focada na política contemporânea dentro de um gênero inclusivo e mais amplo, engajando uma reforma cultural progressiva com uma inclinação literária. Depois de 1814, o editorial do jornal estendeu suas asas e voou com uma retórica poética sublime e uma linguagem cada vez mais metafórica. Os editores frequentemente escrevem no verso em suas colunas, inspirados pela poderosa presença de poesia e oratória na cultura antes da Guerra da Secessão. Uma figura chave no coração dessa cultura retórica e poética foi Ralph Waldo Emerson, que ocupou uma posição de destaque na cultura de impressão através de livros e reportagens de jornais de suas palestras. Horace Greeley, Karl Marx, Fanny Fern, Margaret Fuller e Harriet Martineau formam os sujeitos desse estudo porque refletem a influência liberal radical de Emerson sobre a emergência do editorial progressista, nomeadamente através da estilística literária, misturando retórica poética e filosófica. Essas pessoas representam uma mistura transatlântica diversificada de colonistas revolucionários e feministas de jornais diários e semanais que alargaram o alcance de Emerson, especialmente sua crítica ao capitalismo e à corrupção institucional. Esta abordagem diversifica entendimentos anteriores da evolução do editorial refletido em *American Press Opinion*, de Allen Nevins (1928), que se concentra exclusivamente em editoriais políticos americanos escritos por homens. A antologia mais recente de editoriais históricos por Sloan, Wray e Sloan (1997) também exclui as mulheres e o jornalismo transnacional. A imprensa comercial libertou a indústria de notícias da imprensa partidária, proporcionando novas oportunidades para os pupilos de Emerson, como Fuller, capitalizar sobre seu talento literário, sensibilidade transcendentalista e perspectiva feminina para oferecer alguns dos textos mais politicamente poderosos e socialmente eficazes publicados no *New-York Tribune*. Estes editorialistas foram além da

política diária para discutir questões de imigração, de expansão nacional, de artes plásticas e de literatura como um emblema da identidade nacional.

Palavras-chave: editoriais, Ralph Waldo Emerson, reforma, política progressista, jornalismo literário.

Fr. Cet article retrace la transformation de l'éditorial du journal qui, au dix-neuvième siècle, passe d'une plate-forme partisane limitée et axée sur la politique contemporaine à un genre plus large et inclusif qui suscite une réforme culturelle progressiste et littéraire. Après 1814, l'éditorial étend ses ailes, une rhétorique poétique noble apparaît, de même qu'une langue de plus en plus métaphorique. Les rédacteurs rédigent fréquemment en vers dans leurs colonnes, inspirés par la présence de la poésie et de l'art oratoire dans la culture d'avant la guerre de Sécession. Une figure clé de cette culture oratoire et poétique est Ralph Waldo Emerson qui occupe une place importante dans la culture de l'imprimé à travers des livres et des journaux qui traduisent un engagement fort. Horace Greeley, Karl Marx, Fanny Fern, Margaret Fuller et Harriet Martineau sont cités, car ils reflètent l'influence libérale radicale d'Emerson sur l'émergence d'un éditorial progressiste, notamment par la stylistique littéraire mêlant rhétorique poétique et philosophique. Ces individus représentent un mélange transatlantique diversifié de chroniqueurs révolutionnaires et féministes de la presse quotidienne et hebdomadaire qui a étendu la portée de la pensée d'Emerson, surtout de ses critiques du capitalisme et de la corruption institutionnelle. Cette approche se distingue de précédentes études sur l'évolution de l'éditorial comme l'*American Press Opinion* d'Allen Nevins (1928) qui se concentraient exclusivement sur les éditoriaux politiques américains écrits par des hommes. La plus récente anthologie sur les éditoriaux historiques par Sloan, Wray et Sloan (1997) exclut également les femmes et le journalisme transnational. Avec la presse commerciale, l'industrie de l'information se libère de la presse partisane, offrant à une protégée d'Emerson telle que Fuller de nouvelles possibilités de mettre en avant ses prouesses littéraires, sa sensibilité transcendentaliste, et sa perspective féminine ; et à ses écrits politiques et sociaux de figurer parmi les plus marquants qui aient jamais été publiés dans le *New-York Tribune*. Ces éditorialistes dépassent la politique quotidienne pour faire figurer des questions d'immigration, d'expansion nationale, de beaux-arts et de littérature parmi les emblèmes de l'identité nationale.

Mots-clés : éditoriaux, Ralph Waldo Emerson, réformisme, politique progressiste, journalisme littéraire.

