

Sarah Margaret Fuller **1810-1850**

Sarah Margaret Fuller was born near Boston on May 23, 1810, the first of nine children. Her father, a lawyer had wanted his first child to be a son. His disappointment led him to raise Margaret as he would have raised a son; that is he gave her a difficult and thorough education. By the time she was six, she was studying Latin but by age fifteen the regimen was so rigorous, reading literature and philosophy from five AM until eleven PM, with exercise and music breaks, that she had a physical as well as emotional breakdown. This education coupled with Fuller's determined personality took her from being a home schooled prodigy to being an important historical figure in literature as well as in American feminism.

When Fuller's family relocated to Cambridge in the 1830s, she met the Harvard students who would come to be known as Transcendentalists and who would publish the *Dial*. Through Frederick Henry Hedge, Fuller discovered German literature and philosophy, which she pursued with vigor. However, her father's sudden death in 1835 caused her to have to enter a teaching career in order to support the family. She took her first job at Temple School in Boston in 1836. From there she moved to a higher paying job at the Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island. Simultaneously, Fuller became the first woman to join the Transcendentalist Symposium club. Fuller was unhappy removed from the Boston scene and soon resigned to return there. Back in Boston she taught private language lessons and worked on a translation of *Select Minor Poems, Translated from the German of Goethe and Schiller*.

Fuller resumed her interest in art, music, literature, and lectures. Her first book was published, *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of His Life*, the smaller result of her work on the larger Goethe translation. She also began her project, "Conversations With Women." This was a series of meetings where educated women could come together to "ascertain what pursuits are best suited to us, in our time and state of society, and how we may make best use of our means for building up the life of thought upon the light of action..." (DLB 73, p.115) Fuller annually held these meetings for the next five years.

In October of 1839, a month before the first "Conversation" was held, Fuller volunteered to edit the *Dial* for the Transcendentalists with whom she had remained very involved. She started this venture with the support of Emerson, and officially became the editor in January 1840, with the promise of a salary with which to support herself. For two years she struggled to get articles written by members of the group, often writing them herself to be able to fill the pages. Since she never received any salary, she also had to work at other ventures to pay her bills. Finally in March of 1842 frustration and poor health led her to resign from the *Dial*. Emerson took over as editor, and Fuller continued to be a regular contributor.

In 1844 Margaret Fuller accepted Horace Greeley's offer to relocate to New York as literary critic for the *New York Daily Tribune*. Her articles were popular and circulation grew. During her tenure there she wrote nearly 250 essays and reviews. In 1845 her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* was published. However, if Fuller's professional life was finally fulfilling, her personal one was not. Her health continued to be a problem, and she suffered an unhappy love affair with James Nathan.

In 1846 Fuller decided to ignore her fear of sailing and left for Europe. She arrived in Liverpool in August of that year and began writing immediately about her impression of the people and places she thought would interest New York readers. To her pleasant surprise she also learned that the *Dial* had been highly regarded in England as well as *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller received offers to contribute to various periodicals, but declined, as she was too busy. She met William Wordsworth, Thomas DeQuincey, and Carlyle. She also met Giuseppe Mazzini, an exiled Italian revolutionary. They became friends. A brief stay in Paris followed the weeks in England, and then Fuller sailed to Italy. On all of these travels she was faithfully visiting expatriate artists and reporting on their work, but it was an Italian noble with whom she fell in love. Marchese Giovanni Angelo D'Ossoli, ten years her junior, became her lover. As a couple they were caught up in the Italian Revolution. Fuller became pregnant and moved to Rieti, outside Rome, to wait for the birth of the child and to write a book on Italy and the revolution. September 5, 1848, she bore a son, Angelo Eugene Phillip. Whether Fuller and D'Ossoli ever married is debated, but whatever the case, his family found out about the relationship and disinherited him.

When the revolution failed, Fuller, D'Ossoli, and the Angelo sailed for America. It was disastrous. Just outside of New York on July 19, 1850, a fierce storm hit, running the ship aground. A few people were able to swim to shore. A steward took Angelo in an effort to save him. Fuller and D'Ossoli were never recovered, but the steward and the child washed ashore. The manuscript on the revolution was also never found. Following Margaret Fuller's death, her brother collected her surviving articles from her European impressions into a book, *At Home and Abroad, or Things and Thoughts in America and Europe* (1856) for publication. Also published posthumously was *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852), edited by Emerson, Channing, and Clarke. A fitting memorial to Fuller stands in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her life was short and controversial, but she held to the causes and ideals in which she believed, and despite all obstacles, lived to the fullest. Perhaps the impact of her example for women today is her greatest legacy.

--L. Margaret Pomeroy

Sources Used:

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