

# MARGARET FULLER:

## A MAN'S MIND AND A WOMAN'S HEART?

*Shipping out to Europe  
in her quest for human rights*



*Frederic A. Moritz*



*"Though the national  
independence be blurred by the  
servility of individuals; though  
freedom and equality have been  
proclaimed only to leave room for  
a monstrous display of slave  
dealing and slave keeping; though  
the free American so often feels  
himself free, like the Roman, only  
to pamper his appetites and his  
indolence through the misery of*

*his fellow beings, still it is not in vain, that the verbal statement has been made, "All men are born free and equal." There it stands, a golden certainty, wherewith to encourage the good, to shame the bad. The new world may be called clearly to perceive that it incurs the utmost penalty, if it rejects the sorrowful brother."*

**-Margaret Fuller**

**"The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men. Woman versus Women."**  
**The Dial, IV, July 1843**

**Margaret Fuller's European Dispatches**

*"Let me gather from the Earth,  
one full grown fragrant flower,  
Let it **bloom** within my bosom  
through its one blooming hour."*

**-Margaret Fuller 1844**

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## **THE INTELLECTUAL AS FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT**

**This courageous and intensely emotional woman became a shining legend in the years before the Civil War. She sunk into relative obscurity as the issues which drove her passions receded into the past.**

**Margaret Fuller was an American literary critic, feminist critic, pioneer. She is often considered the country's first woman foreign correspondent. Consider her also the mother of modern human rights reporting.**

**The New England intellectual broke new paths to use the power of a journalist to spotlight upon controversial issues of human freedom. Fuller - also a poet and an essayist - was perhaps the first great pioneer to make of journalism a "watchdog" to alert American readers to human rights issues abroad.**

**Margaret Fuller openly made her intellectual, emotional sympathy for the 1848 revolutions of Europe a part of her journalism. She became at one and inseparable from the events on which she was writing - even if that took her out of convention's way.**

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**Margaret Fuller became a foreign correspondent as the last stage in a personal voyage full of intense intellectual and emotional growth. She was an intellectual who became a foreign correspondent - rather than a journalist by trade.**

**She rarely was conventional. When she left the United States to write about the turbulence of 1848 Europe, she became "a part of the story" - a great journalistic sin from one point of view but a sign of her courage and humanity from another.**

**Seemingly unafraid of scandal, she became an unmarried mother of a baby boy by an Italian Catholic Nobleman, the Marchese Ossoli, eight years her junior. She married him secretly despite religious differences.**

**Even while pregnant, Fuller had continued to write for The New York Tribune, protected from public scrutiny by the hoop skirts of the time. At age 38 she retreated to the mountain village of Rieta for the birth of the baby on September 5, 1848, then returned to Rome in November to continue her coverage of the news.**

**By the time of her death at age 40 in a shipwreck while returning to the United States in 1850, Margaret Fuller had become a near legend for her courage, passionate political advocacy and unconventional lifestyle. Ossoli and the baby died with her when the barque Elizabeth washed aground in a morning gale off Fire Island, just outside of New York Harbor.**

## **A HIGH STRUNG PRODIGY SHIPS OUT TO THE WORLD**

**Margaret Fuller's emergence as a writer and journalist marked the transformation of America.**

**A young country looking primarily to overseas writers for its literary and intellectual life became a more self-confident nation with its own way of reaching out to view the world.**

**As a social critic, essayist, poet, feminist theorist, and letter writer, Margaret Fuller already had a national reputation when the Universalist Horace Greeley of The New York Tribune sent her to Europe in 1846 with a voyage by the day's standards of high tech speed - just ten and a half days - on the SS. Cambria.**

**Margaret Fuller was the eldest of nine children born to Unitarian parents in 1810 at Cambridgeport, Mass. She was raised with strong discipline by a her lawyer father Timothy**

**Fuller, who had originally wanted a boy. Margaret Fuller emerged as a high-strung child prodigy who could read Latin by age six.**

**Fuller's combination of domesticity and professional accomplishment has been attributed to the education she received from her father (Jeffrey Steele, [Essential Fuller](#), XII). Timothy Fuller, a distinguished graduate of Harvard College, was active in various branches of Massachusetts State government, a four-term US. Congressman, and Chairman of the House Committee on Naval Affairs. He has been described as an affectionate but demanding parent, who held Margaret, his oldest child, to an unusually high standard of intellectual and personal discipline.**

**Timothy Fuller held Margaret to an intellectual discipline unique among women of the age. Inhabiting the worlds of both mother and father, but perhaps totally at home in neither, she possessed what has been called a sense of "gender duality" (Steele, [Ibid.](#)) which gave her a special ability to analyze the strengths and limitations of both masculinity and femininity in the nineteenth century. "Will there never be a being to combine a man's mind and a woman's heart," she once asked. (Steele, XII) - see also summary "'Tis an evil lot to have a man's ambition and a woman's heart," she once commented.**

**(For an account of Margaret Fuller's life as the daughter of [Unitarian](#) parents, see the treatment of her in the [Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography](#).)**

**The death of Timothy Fuller from cholera in October 1835 led to a cancellation of Margaret Fuller's plans to study and travel in Europe. Instead she turned to fulfilling her family obligations, committing herself to a life of renunciation (Steele 14). For three years she worked as a teacher, first in Boston at the Bronson Alcott Temple School and then at the Greene Street School in Providence, Rhode Island.**

**Margaret Fuller experienced what one source called a delayed mourning for the death of her father, a mourning which finally in the winter of 1840-1841 led to her shifting of attention to issues of female creativity (Steele XI). Out of this intellectual growth came Fuller's experimentation with transcendentalism, involving a close relationship with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Fuller thus became a co-editor of *The Dial*,**

a quarterly literary journal of the Transcendentalists, in 1840. As an early feminist pioneer she published [Women in the Nineteenth Century](#) (1845) with the encouragement of [Tribune Editor Horace Greeley](#).

The volume laid the foundation for the Seneca Falls convention on women's rights of 1848. As a friend of the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, a habituee of Boston's Brook Farm Commune, she was firmly rooted in the American intellectual strivings of the 1840's.

### **NEW ENGLAND'S LITERATI TO NEW YORK'S WORD MONGERS**

Fuller shared the romantic emphasis of the time on both idealism and realism. Idealism could be expressed in the study of Greek and Roman history and literature, as well as German philosophy. Realism was expressed by emphasis on travel and observation, using journals to document and pass on to readers what had been learned through both mental and physical travel. This aspect of romanticism provided a powerful foundation for Margaret Fuller's journalism. Steele puts it (p XIII):

Sometimes the travel or "excursion" might be the foundation for an exploration of cultural or national or sexual character. By depicting excursions into other "worlds," Fuller drew attention to the ways she and other Americans - both men and women - had been "domesticated." Sometimes, as in the portrait of her mother's garden in her "Autobiographical Romance," she found another world in which the maternalized image of a pastoral retreat that offered escape from a masculine America. At other times the language of mythology and dreams provided her with visionary landscapes in which female figures were able to achieve a nobility and heroism unavailable in contemporary religious narratives.

The use of excursions as a way to explore alternate aspects of reality also became an underpinning for the development of

**Margaret Fuller's journalism. In her travels of 1843 she wrote of the American West, including Indian life in the Wisconsin Territory.**

**In 1844 [Horace Greeley](#) hired Margaret Fuller as The New York Tribune's first woman staff member, naming her literary critic. She worked closely with Greeley, living for a time in his New York City house.**

**Fuller's move from the New England literary establishment into the world of New York journalism working was controversial. Historian Perry Miller describes it as her "great act of treason in the eyes of New England intellectuals" (Margaret Fuller, *American Romantic*, xi.) Fuller's protege Ralph Waldo Emerson conceded the work Fuller was doing in New York might be "honorable," but maintained, "still this employment is not satisfactory to me." (Perry xl). Yet Fuller used her New York time to pioneer journalistically by visiting and analyzing the city's prisons and mental asylums as well as writing about contemporary practices such as prostitution.**

### **BEAMING IN ON A EUROPE IN FLUX**

**Greeley's decision to send Fuller to Europe came amidst technological revolutions which increased newspaper competition and the attractiveness of overseas coverage. By the 1840's rapid sailing and steam ship could bridge the Atlantic in little more than a week. Greeley was eager to weigh in against his rival James Gordon Bennett of the New York Herald as both New York dailies expanded their European coverage.**

**As American cities grew in size and population, the market for American news coverage of overseas events grew. The fast ship meant correspondents and newspapers could compete with each other to provide timely coverage of breaking events. Yet in this day before the transatlantic cable established in the 1860's high cable rates did not yet demand brief concise "inverted pyramid" spot-news coverage. A correspondent could file lengthy letters, descriptions and analysis in a discursive, even literary fashion, and have this output carried in packet by fast sailing or steam ship.**

**The revolutions of 1848, with their exciting royal and non-royal persona, their popular uprisings and their dramatic military campaigns, were perfect news events for the developing American media of the time. (Examine some of the [dispatches](#) in which Margaret Fuller passionately and sympathetically brought alive the doomed revolts.)**

**By 1848 many of Europe's major cities had grown into manufacturing centers with thousands of urban workers having migrated from the countryside. This migration, together with worker suffering during periods of business downturn, meant popular grievances which could be exploited by opponents of monarchical governments.**

**Urbanization, unemployment of factory workers, and discontent with unresponsive autocracy led in February 1848 to the popular overthrow of King Louis-Philippe in France. In March, the Kings of Prussia, Holland, and Piedmont-Sardinia, the Emperor of Austria and the Pope all agreed to grant liberal constitutions.**

**Rebellions in the Italian cities of Venice and Milan strengthened Republican forces there while the Austrian empire teetered on the edge of ethnic disintegration, with Hungarians and Czechs threatening to secede. The Italian kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, after taking Milan under its protection, declared war March 24 on Austrian forces stationed in Italy.**

**The weakening of Austria's position in Italy encouraged Italians who sought to unify the previously splintered country under Republican principles. The Italian poet-statesman Guiseppe Mazzini and the Sicilian guerrilla leader Guisuipe Garibaldi pushed their campaigns to create a united Republic Italy. However by August, the tide was turning. The Austrian commander in Italy had defeated the Piedmontese.**

**While the Austrians were forced to ignore the Pope's call for assistance against the Roman Republic, the French Republic gradually turned more conservative. After the December 1848 election of Louis Napoleon as President, in an effort to win support of the Royalist-Catholic Bloc Louis Napoleon dispatched an army corps in April 1848 to aid the Pope against the forces of the Roman Republic. French troops sailed for Italy in April and were at the gates of Rome by the**



**end of the month. There Garibaldi's and his Italian Legion inflicted a sharp, surprise defeat. Garibaldi was determined to prove wrong the French commander's comment, "Italians don't fight." Wrote Colin McEvedy:**

**"Garibaldi held Rome for a month. he couldn't win and in truth he didn't even direct the battle very well - he was always better at a war of movement than a formal siege - but he did get Italians to die for Italy. When the end came, he and his legions still refused to surrender. On the eve of capitulation he led his men out of the city, the idea being to make a fighting retreat across the Apennines to Venice. It proved impossibly far.**

**Most of the legionaries gave up at San Marino, the hill-top republic whose neutrality the Austrians had to respect; most of the rest died when the Austrians intercepted their squadron of commandeered fishing boats off the Adriatic coast. Garibaldi was rescued by the local peasantry and smuggled away, eventually to America." (McEvedy, pp.14.)**

**"For the moment it was all over. The Tuscan republic had collapsed in April, Sicily had been re conquered by the Neapolitans in May, Hungary was recovered by the Habsburg Empire by the combined forces of Austria and Russia in August. At the end of August the Venetian Republic, which had withstood Austrian bombardment, succumbed to famine." (Ibid, p14)**

***"Let me gather from the  
Earth,  
one full grown fragrant  
flower,  
Let it bloom within my  
bosom  
through its one blooming  
hour.***

*Let it die within my bosom  
and to its parting breadth  
Mine shall answer, having  
lived,  
I shrink not now from  
death.  
It is this niggard halfness  
that turns  
my heart to stone,  
'Tis the cup seen, not  
tasted,  
that makes the infant  
moan.  
Let me for once press firm  
my lips  
upon the movement's  
brow,  
Let me for once distinctly  
feel  
I am happy now.  
And bliss shall seal a  
blessing  
upon the moments brow."*

*-Margaret Fuller 1844*

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