
Anyone with a limited knowledge of the American Transcendentalists recalls that Margaret Fuller was a key figure in that circle, especially through her editorship of The Dial. Those more familiar with her are aware of the recent major effort to rescue her from the editors of her Memoirs. Fuller died (19 July 1850) by shipwreck at age forty returning from Italy on the USS Elizabeth. Henry David Thoreau among others searched for her body and manuscripts on the shores of Fire Island. Only the body of her son Angelino was found; some mementos and family papers were recovered, her manuscripts were lost.

Two years later (1852) The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, were published. This three volume set was edited by R. W. Emerson, W. H. Channing and J. F. Clark. Subsequent scholarship has revealed that her formidable literary executors were heavy handed editors:

The main critical effect of the Memoirs was to entrench a view of Fuller as having failed as a writer. By overemphasizing the quality of her conversations and personal communication, as well as judging harshly (and not always unreasonably) those areas in which she was demonstrably weakest (like the pastoral and poetry), the editors distracted attention from her more powerful and lasting work. (99)

As Watson notes, the major impetus to discredit the Memoirs editors' "Margaret myth" was the pioneering study by Bell Gale Chevigny, The Woman and the Myth: Margaret Fuller's Life and Writings (Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1975). Watson also notes that since 1975 "Fuller has become a minor industry (xvi)." For those wanting to understand the real Fuller without tackling a half dozen books and several dozen articles, Watson's brief book is the answer. His volume presents a concise, persuasive and even-handed summary of Fuller's life, influence and work.

Though Fuller was a charter member of the "Transcendentalists' Club," few if any of the Concord clique found her a comfortable companion. She was self-assured and aggressive--"Fuller confused, unsettled and quite simply scared many of the men she met. Edgar Allen Poe divided humanity into three classes: men, women and Margaret Fuller (109)." By the time she handed over The Dial to Emerson, she had been its largest contributor. Perhaps by default. A great many of submissions were rejected out of
hand; those accepted were house-styled as she "rigorously" edited even "the more illustrious contributions (there were some delightfully tart exchanges with Emerson, and both Alcott and Thoreau suffered rejection" (19).

Fuller's life after The Dial and Concord is the main emphasis of Watson's book. Fuller left Boston for New York and journalistic career with Horace Greeley's New York Tribune. "Greeley expected her to produce two or three articles a week on both literary and social topics (the two were frequently conflated, as a major device she came to use was the extended book review) and generally gave her space on the front page" (23). Her articles systematically worked out a theory of literary romanticism; in the process she introduced Goethe to America—"the case made for her pivotal position by scholars of the nineteenth-century American reception of German culture is unassailable (58)." Under Greeley, Fuller became America's literary critic at large.

At the age of thirty-six she left for Europe where she remained until her ill fated return voyage to America four years later. Abroad she shifted her critical angle of vision, becoming an informed commentator on America's social and political development. As Watson shows her social-political and ethical observations were perceptive and acute.

Beyond literary romanticism and social commentary, Fuller made an important, ground breaking contribution to feminism. Her essay "The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men; Woman versus Women" was, at Greeley's suggestion, expanded into a book. Her Woman in the Nineteenth-Century, published in 1943 was "America's first widely-read feminist tract (65)."

In his preface, Watson modestly states "if my book belongs to any genre it is to the rather old-fashioned one of the history of ideas." It is all that and more. Watson skillfully handles both philosophical and historical scholarship giving us a reliable picture of an important and unfairly neglected American thinker, journalism and feminist.

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CRITICAL THINKING: A SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE. Marjorie Siegel and Robert F. Carey. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills and the National Council of Teachers of English, 1989. viii+ 55. $7.50 paper.

While this work is a monograph for elementary and secondary teachers, it is of special note to members of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy. It introduces Charles Sanders Peirce to the educational community and provides a philosoph-