19th Century American Literature.

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**Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Woman in the 19th Century**

1. Biographical Information
   1. Sarah Margaret Fuller was born on May 23, 1810, the first of nine children to Margarett Crane and Timothy Fuller. Her father, an extremely well educated man, was an important lawyer and politician in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the home of Harvard University.
   2. Female children were not usually educated at that time, but Margaret’s father considered her to be a “living mind” and taught her to read Latin, Greek, French, and Italian. By the time she was ten she had read most of the major Greek and Roman writers, as well as Shakespeare.
   3. Her childhood was not easy. Her father demanded that she study long hours and she complained later that frequent nightmares and headaches were caused by her “unnatural childhood.” Nevertheless, she became one of the most intelligent women in America.
   4. Fuller wanted to become a writer and translator but her plans changed when her father died suddenly of cholera in 1835. Her mother was sickly so Fuller began to teach to support the large family. She did this until 1839, when her brothers and sisters were old enough to work.
   5. From that point until her death she supported herself by writing, speaking, and editing. She became friends with Emerson and edited the *Dial*, the journal of transcendental writings, from 1840-1842.
   6. In 1843 Fuller travelled to the Great Lakes and Wisconsin Territory, which was then a wild and dangerous place. She wrote and published a popular book about her travels: *Summer on the Lakes*. Poe called the book “remarkable,” high praise coming from him.
   7. Horace Greely, editor of the New York *Tribune*, saw her writing and offered her a job in 1844 as a permanent literary editor at the newspaper. During her time there she published over 200 essays and reviews. Greely helped publish *Woman in the 19th Century* in 1845.
   8. Fuller sailed to Europe in 1846 as a foreign correspondent for Greely’s newspaper. Travelling in Europe she met many of the important literary people of the day, most importantly the English philosopher Thomas Carlyle and the French novelist George Sand.
   9. She next went to Italy to write about the revolution there. She met and fell in love with a revolutionary aristocrat much younger than her named Giovanni Ossoli. In late October of that year she became pregnant. Since she was not Catholic a marriage was impossible.
   10. Fuller gave birth to a son, Angelo, in 1848. By this time Italy was in a state of civil war and Ossoli’s side was losing. Fuller and Ossoli left Italy with Angelo in May of 1850. The ship was caught in a storm and wrecked near New York. Their bodies were never found.
2. Key Ideas from Fuller’s Writings
   1. Women are equal to men in their intellectual abilities: It is difficult to believe now, but men in the 19th century actually believed that women were less intelligent than men and that women could not function in the world without a “strong and intelligent” man to help them.
   2. Women should be allowed to have rights and responsibilities equal to men: Women in those days were legally prohibited from owning property, divorcing a cruel husband, retaining custody of their children, or voting.
   3. A man is not really a man unless he has a wife who he considers his equal: Fuller believed that the male-dominated culture actually weakened men. She gave examples in her writings of men who were made more successful because they had a strong wife to help them.
   4. If a man does not consider his wife his equal then their marriage is a crime: Fuller was very skeptical about marriage, and it was no surprise that it was difficult for her to find a man who would accept her strong way of thinking.
   5. The situation of many married women is similar to that of slaves: Fuller observed that many women are forced into marriages that they don’t want, and argues that in this situation they are not the partners of their husbands, but rather their sexual property.
   6. The blind, the insane, and convicted criminals should all be treated humanely: Fuller was active in the empowerment of other groups as well. She believed that for a society to be strong, they should recognize the personhood of everyone, no matter their condition.
   7. Gender is fluid and the exclusive male/female cultural construction is therefore flawed. Fuller believed that each person is a mixture of qualities, and that therefore there are no such things as “female” and “male” characteristics. We are all just people.
   8. Women should attempt to live outside of their cultures gender boundaries. Fuller believed that merely talking about changing the way that women are perceived was not enough. Women would need to take action to be recognized as equal. She lived what she wrote.
   9. A strong woman can still be a kind and beautiful woman: many people said that for women to have an equal place with men they would have to sacrifice their beauty and femininity. Fuller disagreed. She said that a strong woman is a beautiful woman.
   10. A woman should not sacrifice her career for a family. She can have both. After the birth of her child Fuller continued to publish texts about the war in Italy. She would likely have continued to write and publish had she survived the journey home.
3. Other Important Figures in the History of Women’s Rights in America
   1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton. One of the earliest and most violent advocates for women’s rights, she was also an abolitionist speaker and social activist for many other causes. She said: “The best protection any woman can have is courage.”
   2. Susan B. Anthony. Anthony was also an early leader in the women’s movement. However, unlike Stanton, she advocated using the political system to gain rights. For this reason, the two were sometimes at odds with each other.
   3. Matilda Joslyn Gage. Matilda Gage was more radical than either Stanton or Anthony, especially in her hatred of the Christian church, which she felt was more to blame than any other institution for the oppression of both women and slaves.
   4. Sojourner Truth. A former slave, Sojourner Truth was a colorful speaker who thrilled the audiences at the many meetings where she spoke. She was known for a very plain way of speaking, and often spoke about the relationship between men and women in ways then considered shocking.
4. Important Events in the History of Women’s Rights in America
   1. 1848: The first women’s rights convention is held in Seneca Falls, New York. They draft and adopt a “Declaration of Sentiments” with twelve goals, including achieving the right to vote.
   2. 1850: The first National Women’s Rights Convention is held in Worcester, Massachusetts. Over 1000 people attend.
   3. 1869: Stanton and Anthony form the National Women’s Suffrage Association, an organization dedicated to gaining the national vote by Constitutional Amendment. Other organizations are formed to focus on changing the law at the state level.
   4. 1893: Colorado becomes the first state to allow women to vote. Other states soon follow.
   5. 1920: The 19th Amendment to the US constitution is signed into law, granting women throughout the country the right to vote.
5. Discussion Questions
   1. Think carefully about the way that gender is represented in popular culture in Korea (on television, in music, film, print media, etc.). Think about how men treat women in Korean media, how women are expected to act, what roles women are assigned in family and business life. Do you think that the media is accurate in its portrayal of women?
   2. Do you think that women and men are different in important ways (other than the obvious physical differences)? Should men and women have different roles in society? In the family? In the business world?
   3. Discuss how you would like to live when you are married. Will your marriage be different from your parent’s marriage? If so, describe how your marriage will be different? What things about your parent’s relationship do you admire?
   4. We have talked a lot about how men in the past have created systems to control women sexually, either through slavery or marriage. Do you think that women in Korean society have the same type of sexual freedom that Korean men have? Should they? Why or why not?