



MARGARET FULLER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Fuller Society Meeting And Two Special Sessions at 1996 MLA Convention

The fourth annual meeting of the Margaret Fuller Society will be held on Saturday, December 28 at 12:00 noon in the Calvert Room of the Sheraton Washington Hotel in Washington, D.C.

A session sponsored by the Fuller Society and chaired by Jeffrey Steele will follow. Entitled **Margaret Fuller and Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing**, the session will feature the following:

Brigitte Bailey, "Looking at 'Italia': Gender, Class, and the Tourist Gaze in Sedgwick, Kirkland, and Fuller."

Dorri Beam, "Margaret Fuller's Cinnamon Fires and the Birth of Female Erotica."

Nicole Tonkovich, "Inventing Margaret Fuller for American Women's Literary History."

The proposal for this session, written by Jeffrey Steele, appears on page 3 of this **Newsletter**.

A second session sponsored by the Fuller Society and chaired by Robert N. Hudspeth will be held on Sunday, December 29, at 10:15 a.m. in room Delaware B. of the Sheraton Washington Hotel. The session, entitled **Margaret Fuller and the Role of the Woman Intellectual**, will feature the following:

Elaine Showalter, "Fuller as a Feminist Intellectual."

Judith C. Breedlove, "The Elevation of Womanhood: Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Margaret Fuller."

Phyllis Cole, "Margaret Fuller in the Memory of Women's Rights Reformers, 1850-70."

Madeleine B. Stern: Response.

The proposal for this session, written by Robert Hudspeth appears on page 4 of this **Newsletter**.

CALL FOR PAPERS ALA Conference in Baltimore May 22-May 25, 1997

The 1997 Conference of the American Literature Association will feature two sessions sponsored by the Fuller Society, the first on the topic **Margaret Fuller's Circles**, the second on **Fuller and Feminism**. Anyone wishing to chair one of these sessions or present a 20-minute paper should contact Larry J. Reynolds, Department of English, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, ljr@tamu.edu. The deadline is **January 20, 1996**.

Margaret Fuller Society Information

President: Bell Gale Chevigny

First Vice-President: Robert N. Hudspeth

Second Vice-President: Joel Myerson

Executive Secretary-Treasurer

and **Newsletter** Editor: Larry J. Reynolds

Associate Editor: Amy Earhart

Advisory Board: Charles Capper (1998)

Joan von Mehren (1998)

Judith Mattson Bean (1997)

Susan Belasco Smith (1996)

You may enter or renew your membership in the Margaret Fuller Society by sending your dues (\$10 for faculty; \$5 for students and independent scholars) to the Margaret Fuller Society, Department of English, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843.

Presidential Farewell Address

Bell Chevigny

The editor of this newsletter urged me to send along some farewell thoughts on where we have been as a society and where we might go. He put it irresistibly—"Do it for the Queen."

In 1992, the abundance of arresting new work on Fuller prompted me to call a meeting of all those doing it. In 1993 we had our first MLA session and elected officers, and in 1994 we passed our by-laws. During the Society's short life, Bob Hudspeth's completion of Fuller's Letters and the richly complementary biographies of Charles Capper and Joan von Mehren, have established new evidence of Fuller's importance and interest. These books are stimulating new work on Fuller and giving us fresh means to do it. Together they broaden the ground on which study of her complex blend of personal and public experience and writing can take place. With her status as an avant-garde intellectual secure and her contributions detailed as never before, we can sound more deeply her links to world traditions of inquiry and to democratic culture. While projects exploring her link to writers, thinkers, public actors and movements in the United States will grow, we've only begun to mine the Transatlantic vein, subterranean or at the surface, that ties her to those in Europe. It's time to make more of her cosmopolitan preoccupations our own. We should also find more occasions and ways to invoke her to illuminate our own perilous historical moment, nationally and globally.

Exploration of Fuller and her writing in the light of contemporary theory, especially feminist theory, has been initiated at a very high level by several scholars and is flourishing. Moreover, a number of scholars have written comparative studies of Fuller in relation to individual female contemporaries and descendants. But in my few contacts with the Northeast Nineteenth-Century Women Writers Study Group, I have been struck by the degree to which Fuller appears to remain an outsider or an exception to the growing circle of interesting figures being re-read and inter-

interpreted there. Fuller's training and experience was in some objective ways exceptional; most of the other women writers specialize in fiction, and their work is considered most often from the standpoint of the sentimental tradition and domesticity. There are other reasons as well. While some endeavor to affiliate Fuller to sentimentality, it is worth seeking other bases for connection, perhaps drawing on terms from Fuller's own work and practice.

Miscellaneous Society activities include our nomination that resulted in Fuller's election to the Seneca Falls Women's Hall of Fame. When the DAR Museum presented an exhibit on anti-slavery women last winter, Fuller was included in the impressive exhibit and in a one-day forum. We should be on the watch for opportunities to enhance popular appreciation of her life and work. And at our request, the Houghton Library has begun to inventory Fuller's papers for conservation.

Presiding over the launching of the Margaret Fuller Society has been a delightful and sometimes thrilling experience. From the beginning it has been for me an imitative gesture in homage to Fuller herself, who sought always to supplement reading and writing with presence, contact—above all, talk. Our capacity for talk has been proven in the growing number of MLA sessions since our 1992 gathering, in the several ALA panels, and especially in the 1994 Babson conference co-sponsored with NEASA which Fritz Fleishchmann organized. There the style of the occasion—fine contemporary music, a film-in-progress, good food, and excursions to Fuller-friendly sites—brought Fuller closer. The mind boggles at the rich opportunities which a conference in Italy could provide, but we can also imagine wonderful meetings in Cambridge, in Nahant or another of her coastal retreats, in New York, the Midwest, and even Fire Island. It seems to me that a Society in Margaret Fuller's name could not do better than continue to seek means to emulate her gatherings and projects, to honor her ambitiously experimental and inclusive nature, her interest in new expressions of social meaning. If we keep alive her provocation even as we help show her relevance to the academy, we might end by making the academy more relevant to her.

1996 MLA Special Session Proposal:
Margaret Fuller and
Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing

Jeffrey Steele

The three papers of this panel all examine, in various ways, the relationship between Fuller's literary production and the genres of nineteenth-century American women's writing.

In her paper "Looking at 'Italia': Gender, Class and the Tourist Gaze in Sedgwick, Kirkland, and Fuller," Brigitte Bailey examines the ways in which the 1840s' travel writing of Catharine Sedgwick, Caroline Kirkland, and Margaret Fuller participated in and yet problematized the nationalist and class-based project of tourist perception. Recording their impressions of Italy, all three shared the cultural construction of "Italy" as a feminized and post-historical space that functioned as the counterpoint to the masculinized history-making of northern Europe and the United States. In these terms, their travel writings contributed to the formation of a colonizing national consciousness defined in opposition to the aestheticized terrain of Italy. But for nineteenth-century women writers, such investments in the male gaze were greatly complicated. In response to the public, cultural implications of the tourist gaze, Fuller and her female contemporaries both enacted conventional postures of looking at Italy and began examining the relationship between women tourists and feminized landscapes. The "double consciousness" of women writers abroad recapitulates in bold terms the complexities of their literary position.

Dorri Beam's paper, "Margaret Fuller's Cinnamon Fires and the Birth of Female Erotica," links Fuller's writing to a very different literary tradition. Highlighting the erotic cadences in Fuller's texts, Beam situates them in relation to what Nina Baym has identified as the anti-domestic tradition of "highly wrought" fiction. In contrast to the humility, restraint, and sexual purity valued in domestic fiction, the "highly wrought" novelist luxuriated in representations of a passionate, female selfhood beyond the bounds of domesticated female reproduction and literary production. Linking Fuller's writing to eroticized passages in the novels of Ann Sophia Stephens, Beam examines the ways in which both writers used the nineteenth-century language of flowers as a hieroglyphic discourse that hid and protected the female body from commodification and

objectification. Especially in Fuller's texts, this female erotic language brings into play a constellation of associations that facilitate a holistic sense of female sexuality. Her multi-layered, symbolic language allows the representation of bodily, emotional, and imaginative pleasures that are cultivated for their own sake, as embodiments of a female desire that is not fetishized or fragmented.

Finally, Nicole Tonkovich examines the issue of "Inventing Margaret Fuller for American Women's Literary History." Fuller's catalogue-like enumeration of women in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* participated in a popular (but since neglected) literary genre—the biographical encyclopedia of famous women and women writers (a genre utilized by Lydia Maria Child, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Josepha Hale, and Lydia Sigourney). After Fuller's death, her contemporaries were faced with the difficult project of reconciling her radical feminism and unconventional life with the conservative demands of this genre. Cutting the image of Fuller to fit the pattern of womanly domesticity, encyclopedists like Sarah Josepha Hale wrestled with the problem of stabilizing and authorizing a tradition for nineteenth-century women authors like Fuller without sacrificing all of the radical demands of their writing. The literary construction of "Margaret Fuller" functioned as an exempla in an era negotiating the challenge of activist women writers newly engaged in public enterprises. The encyclopedic treatment of Fuller demonstrates the subtle balance that was struck between viewing her as an exceptional, unique woman and seeing her life as representative of the demands faced by "domestic" women.

Perhaps what is most striking about these three papers is the way each addresses the complex negotiations and accommodations faced by nineteenth-century women writers working in a variety of genres. The current "boom" in Fuller studies is fueled, in part, by the growing recognition that many of the concerns faced by her female contemporaries intersect in her work. As these three papers show us, the examination of Fuller's writing and career helps us to understand the ambiguous relation of women writers to the male gaze, the symbolic languages used to represent female sexuality, and the difficult compromises needed to construct culturally acceptable models of women's literary history. Each paper makes an important contribution both to Fuller scholarship and to our understanding of nineteenth-century literary culture. In different ways, each paper raises general theoretical concerns that should attract a wide audience.

1996 MLA Special Session Proposal: Margaret Fuller and the Role of the Woman Intellectual

Robert N. Hudspeth

Margaret Fuller (1810-50) was quite conscious of her role as a woman intellectual. Educated by her father in the demanding tradition of New England young men, Fuller early mastered the intellectual tools to play the role of public intellectual. Moreover, in her lifetime she never lacked a forum for her ideas. From the *Dial* to Greeley's *New-York Tribune*, organs of opinion were open to Fuller, and she took full advantage of her opportunity by publishing essays devoted to literary criticism, the arts, social reform, and politics.

This panel has two aims: to assess her success in this role and to explore the effect she had on subsequent women intellectuals, for whom she was a very obvious role model.

Elaine Showalter will begin by exploring in detail Fuller's successes as a woman intellectual with emphasis on her feminist thought. She will draw on her previous work as a critic of the place of women in our Anglo-American literary tradition.

Judith Breedlove will begin by charting the construction that T.W. Higginson performed in his influential Fuller biography (1884). This version of her effect as an intellectual will be matched against Breedlove's exploration of the distortions that his colonization caused. Her intellectual abilities were a challenge to Higginson that drove him to subvert her accomplishments in favor of a more "acceptable" reconstructed version of Fuller. A clearer understanding of Fuller's power as an intellectual and how that power threatened a masculine set of assumptions will result from the paper.

Phyllis Cole will explore the influence Fuller's life and writing had on women's rights movement in the second half of the century. She will focus on Paulina Wright Davis, Julia Ward Howe, and Caroline Dall, influential women who were deeply affected by Fuller's life as an intellectual. The paper will thus focus on gender, culture and ideology in nineteenth-century American life and will be an apt conclusion to the discussion begun by Showalter's paper.

Finally, Madeleine B. Stern, the first and most influential of Fuller's modern biographers, will draw the ideas together and provide a framework for discussion by the audience.

The session will have a decided feminist cast, for it aims to understand Fuller in and of her time and of her impact on succeeding generations of women. The connection with the second half of the century is of special note, for much recent scholarship in Fuller's work has focused on her writing for the *Dial* and the *Tribune* and on her major work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Recent editions of her work (the letters and the *Tribune* essays from Europe) have made primary material accessible so that we can now see Fuller in a more complete context. We have begun to understand her feminist writings, especially *Woman*, but, despite the marked increase in scholarship devoted to her in the past quarter century, we still lack a thorough exploration of her role as a woman intellectual and of her influence beyond the Civil War. The panel should thus complement and extend the best of recent scholarship on Margaret Fuller.

Italian Meeting

Bell Chevigny

In our first conversations about forming a Fuller Society, we dreamed of a Fuller conference in Italy. The Society's success has inspired us to make practical moves. The Hawthorne Society is giving a conference in Rome in 1998 and has asked us if we would be interested in participating, but, despite our warm regard for the Hawthorne Society, our feeling—are we wrong?—is that Fuller's extraordinary relation to Italy would not be best served in a meeting shared with Nathaniel. In brief, she deserves a Rome of her own. Liana Borghi, a Fuller scholar at the University of Florence, carried our letter of inquiry to the Italian Association of American Studies. Many Association members were very keen on dedicating their bi-annual conference to Fuller in 1999, and former president Rosella Mamoli Zorzi—another Fullerite—is especially enthusiastic. The location of the meeting would depend on who becomes Association president in the fall of 1997, but it is unlikely that the meeting would be held in Rome. There is the possibility of the Italian Association co-sponsoring a smaller meeting in 1998 or 2000, the 150th anniversary of her death, and such a meeting could take place in Rome, if we find a location and a hospitable association. If it cannot take place in Rome, we might plan excursions to Rome and other Fuller sites to precede or follow the conference itself, for those who are interested and able to make a longer visit. Society members are invited to help plan such a meeting and to explore resources that their institutions might be able to provide, including sites in Italy.

Margaret Fuller's Ideological Interventions

Jeffrey Steele

[Abstract of paper presented 31 May 1996 at the 19th-Century American Women Writers in the 21st Century Conference in Hartford, Connecticut]

Margaret Fuller's writings restructure the ideological ground shaping the beliefs and actions of nineteenth-century Americans. Thus, in **Woman in the Nineteenth Century**, she analyzes the ways in which American women were fixated in postures of what she termed "idolatry"—a passivity that prevented them from challenging the attitudes and values shaping their lives. The goal of much of Fuller's writing was to shake her readers out of the unconscious state of idolatry by making visible the ideological structures inscribing them. The radical potential of Fuller's writing resides in her capacity to suggest that these structures are multiple—that female subjectivity in the nineteenth century was shaped by multiple "systems of reference." Thus, the challenge in reading Fuller is to find modes of analysis that do not superimpose upon her texts unitary models of interpretation that erase the very ideological diversity she attempted to highlight.

Working on a number of fronts simultaneously, Fuller constructs a text that eschews narrative unity in favor of diverse threads of argumentation. The "multiple voices" of **Woman in the Nineteenth Century** are discernible in the different genres that this text pieces together. In addition to conversational structures (examined by Annette Kolodny, among others), one finds elements of the sketch, the sermon, the book review, the travelogue, and the polemical essay. A similar textual diversity can be located in Fuller's revisionary use of Biblical and theological materials. In her use of Biblical materials, she illustrates the multiple discursive fields mapping women's subjectivity. Elsewhere, she disrupts prevailing ideological/theological definitions of womanhood through a diverse array of occult and mystical references (to alchemy, Rosicrucianism, mesmerism, Saint-Simon). Fuller's intertextuality counters unitary models of womanhood through the evocation of an ideological matrix composed of multiple materials, each one suggesting a different model of subjectivity.

Fuller's concern with such textual multiplicity is most evident in the numerous role models that she provides for her readers in **Woman in the Nineteenth Century**. Through the proliferation of available images of womanhood, she constructs a "smorgasbord" of potential roles. Connection with any of these figures entails a process of transformation; for each domain itself, this multiplication of female

roles makes an important political statement in an age when women found their choices and their roles severely limited. For this array of female figures fractures the limited reflections of selfhood mirrored for American women, by providing a wide repertoire of subject-positions, each one an ontological template mapping a different model of female being and power.

Encountering Hybridity: Margaret Fuller and America in Transition

Cheryl Fish

[Abstract of paper presented 12 October 1996 at the Society for Literature and Science Conference in Atlanta, Georgia]

In this paper, I examine how Margaret Fuller, one of the leading figures of the American Transcendentalist movement, formulated an evolving definition of national identity and what she called the American form of "genius" based on her travels to the American Midwest. The concept of hybridity—the mixing of different persons—in this case, persons of different ethnicities and races—is a central theme of **Summer on the Lakes** as well as a trope for her process of divesting herself of a Eurocentric, patriarchal education. For as she met with defeated Native Americans and emigrants from Europe and New England, hybridity presented a promise and threat in relation to her own search for positionality as an American woman and intellectual. Hybridity is also a form of "transition state" that Fuller, following Fourier, believed was a necessary stage until the American form of genius would emerge, "of a mixed race, continually enriched with blood from other stocks."

I discuss the influence of dominant theories of racial mixing as well as Romantic aesthetics on Fuller, and how her anxieties about being a public intellectual are often displaced or embedded in a discourse of loss and the deformed sublime. Fuller's poetics incorporate the idea of transgression, racial amalgamation and the desire for more varied gender roles, but her "melting pot" thesis, which claims that mixing people produces a new race with distinctly new characteristics, did not generally include Native Americans or African Americans. I read **Summer on the Lakes** as a text that posits an evolving formulation of the meaning of nationhood and gendered selfhood as mediated by familiar and different bodies in motion, approaching varying states of hybridity and social change. Fuller's definition of America in the present and future was expressed through her analysis of the hardships faced by frontier women and the Native Americans who had already been driven away, as well as her inclusion of the

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stories of three foreign, "hysterical" women who I read as case studies that formulate hybridity as a form of agency for women as well as a kind of cultural critique. Hence, her concept of heterogeneity contains an awareness of, yet contradictory acceptance of, the impact of race on her formulation of a "new order, new poetry" that is "to be evoked from this chaos" on the American frontier. I relate her use of hybridity and transition as a way of overcoming or gendering polarities, and show how racial and scientific theories that circulate in her text create contradictory impulses in this hybrid travelogue.

Fuller Sessions at 1996 ALA Conference

At the 1996 Conference of the American Literature Association held in San Diego, June 2-5, two Fuller Society sessions were held. The first, chaired by Leland Person, featured:

Judith Mattson Bean, "A New and Golden Harvest": Margaret Fuller's Vision of American Literature."

Kathleen McGinn, "Searching the Self: Margaret Fuller's Autobiographical Glimpses."

Mary-Jo Haronian, "Fuller's Ocular Mode."

The second, chaired by Larry Reynolds, featured:

William Hall Brock, "Fuller and Fourierism."

Stephanie Kay Barron, "A Time of Deep Life": Margaret Fuller, Caroline Sturgis, and the 'Wild Zone.'"

Judith Strong Albert, "The One-Sided Friendship: Caroline Healey Dall and Margaret Fuller."

Fuller Restoration at the Houghton Library

Joan von Mehren

In the spring of 1996 Bell Chevigny indicated to me that members of the Margaret Fuller Society were concerned about the condition of the Fuller Manuscript Collection (fMS AM 1086) at the Houghton Library at Harvard. She suggested that since I lived nearby I might get in touch with the library and sound them out on the possibility of beginning conservation efforts.

When I talked with Leslie Morris, the Curator of Manuscripts, she indicated that she was only too well aware that the collection was deteriorating, and that she was interested in beginning the three-stage effort with a conservation assessment. In April when Bell came to Cambridge, she talked with Ms Morris and was assured that at least the first stage would begin soon.

On 6 November 1996, Ms Morris called to say that the first stage, i.e., the Conservation Assessment, was completed. The report indicated that 28% of the material was in poor condition and was "at risk." Only 26% was in "acceptable condition" and 46% in "fair condition."

The next stage would require that a paper conservator remove everything from the folders, remove the adhesive, clean off any serious grime, and repair tears. The final stage would be to rehouse the material in separate archival folders.

As part of her report Morris stated that the restoration of the collection would require one technician twelve months of work. At \$12 an hour for 12 months and a 35-hour week, the total cost would come to roughly \$21,000. Morris indicated that outside financial support would allow the process to move ahead more quickly than it will as part of the general conservation effort at the Houghton Library. "Any little bit would help," she said.

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