Margaret Fuller, conversationalist, 1839-1844

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MARGARET FULLER, CONVERSATIONALIST

1839 - 1944

by

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B. A. Montana State University, 1953

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I am greatly indebted to the contributors whose generous assistance and constant en-
 deberá to provide the draft of the text.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
The difficulty which we all feel, in despair—

the...
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INTRODUCTION

Happy he who can lift conversation, without loss of its cheer, to the highest uses! Happy he who has such a gift as this ... by which he can make our common life rich, significant and fair, -- can give to the hour a beauty and brilliancy which shall make it eminent long after, amid dreary years of level routine!

J. F. Clarke

During the years, 1839-1844, Sarah Margaret Fuller, Marchesa d'Ossoli, (always referred to as "Margaret") conducted "Conversations for Women" in Boston, Massachusetts, as a "means of general cultural education."¹

While this study began out of a desire to examine the series of Conversations carried on by Margaret Fuller, during the course of research it became so evident that the Conversations were a reflection of Margaret Fuller that the Conversations became of secondary and Margaret Fuller of primary importance.

Margaret was a conversationalist. When she is referred to today, however, it is as "author," "critic," "social reformer," or "Transcendentalist." This is almost paradoxical, since, with the possible exception of the title, "Transcendentalist," Margaret had, at best, a dubious

claim to any of these appellations. Margaret did do some writing, did criticize the writings of others, did attempt to reform social evils, and did seek to arrive at spiritual truths, according to what has been written about her, to be sure, but it was not her achievements in these specific areas which made an impact upon her contemporaries so much as it was her dynamic personality, as reflected in her Conversations. This her biographers agree upon, almost without exception.

The Conversations, as reported by those who participated in them, will be studied, therefore, as the media through which was expressed Margaret's outstanding magnetism. The findings are not expected to constitute a complete biographical sketch, nor a historical evaluation of the era, but rather, the significance of Margaret Fuller as made possible by, and revealed in, the Conversations.

The steps will be to discover, 1) what it was in her personality that succeeded in influencing her contemporaries, and 2) the nature and extent of this impact.

Answers to these questions will be found in descriptions of and references to Margaret Fuller by her contemporaries as well as in her own letters and Journals. Notes taken of her Conversations by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and Caroline W. Healey Dall will be analyzed as the most closely approximated verbatim account of her speaking personality.
CHAPTER I

CONDITIONS

She was the emotional expression of a rebellious generation that had done with the past and was questioning the future.


To understand Margaret Fuller, one must place her as accurately as possible within the stream of transcendental thought, which represents one phase of the environmental ferment that she was to accelerate. Transcendentalism was the highly intellectualized philosophical expression of humanitarian Romanticism in America. It resulted from an intense desire on the part of the younger generation of intellectuals for "self-culture" and "self-expression."

This generation is epitomized in Margaret, whom James Freeman Clarke,\(^1\) in the *Memoirs*,\(^2\) described as one whose personal aim, from first to last, was self-culture -- "the profound desire for a full experience of life."\(^3\) He goes

\(^1\)James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888), Unitarian clergyman, author of religious works, and Transcendentalist, supported temperance, anti-slavery, and woman suffrage movements. His writings, such as *Self-Culture*, 1882, and *The Ten Great Religions*, 1883, reflect Transcendental thought.


\(^3\)Ibid., I, 132--3.
on to report Margaret as saying that "Very early I knew that the only object in life was to grow." 

Transcendentalism received "its chief American expression in Emerson's individualistic doctrine of self-reliance" and "became the inspiration of a liberal social and cultural renaissance in New England during 1830--45." Early nineteenth century New England provided a fertile soil for the implanting of Transcendentalism. It was in a state of ferment, a breeding place for innumerable "isms," all of which reached maturity at approximately the same time. These "isms" were found on all social, economic, and intellectual levels in New England. Of these "isms" Transcendentalism was the most purely intellectual, and New England was a fortuitous breeding place, probably due to the scholarly influence of the Brahmins. This was the time when the wild rhetoric of a sailors' apostle -- one of the voices of Bos-

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4 Ibid.


6 The term, "New England Brahmin," frequently misunderstood and misapplied, owes its origin to Oliver Wendell Holmes, American physician and man of letters, whose definition of this term is found in his novel, Elsie Venner, which appeared in 1860. By 1861 Holmes was writing in the Atlantic Monthly that the term Brahmin, "our poor Brahmins," was being used as a synonym for "bloated aristocracy," while actually the Brahmins "are very commonly pallid, undervitalized, shy, sensitive creatures, whose only birthright is an aptitude for learning." (M. A. De Wolfe Howe, Holmes of the Breakfast Table [London: Oxford University Press, 1930], pp. 12--3.)

7 Father Taylor.
ton -- could charm the elusive Emerson\(^8\) and inspire a
Transcendental conversation; when Sampson Reed, the Sweden-
borgian druggist, was better known for having written *The
Growth of the Mind* than for his pills and potions.\(^9\) Emerson pointed out the clash between the new thought and the
old thought as:

the strong current of thought and feeling, which
for a few years past, has led many sincere per-
sons in New England to make new demands on liter-
ature, and to reprobate that rigor of our conven-
tions of religion and education which is turning
us to stone, which renounces hope, which looks
only backward, which asks only such a future as
the past, which suspects improvement, and holds
nothing so much in horror as new views and the
dreams of youth.\(^10\)

This spirit of the times was a searching for the truth ra-
ther than adherence to conventions, by persons of every
temperament. Emerson described it as being:

felt by every individual with some difference, --
to each one casting its light upon the objects
nearest to his temper and habits of thought; --
to one, coming in the shape of special reforms
in one state; to another, in modifications of
the various callings of men, and the customs of
business; to a third, opening a new scope for
literature and art; to a fourth, in philosophi-
cal insight; to a fifth, in the vast solitudes
of prayer. It is in every form a protest against

\(^8\)Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803--1882), author of: Na-
ture, 1836; "The American Scholar," Phi Beta Kappa Ora-
tion, 1837; "Divinity School Address," 1838; *Essays*, 1841
and 1844.

\(^9\)Van Wyck Brooks, *Emerson and Others* (New York:E.

\(^10\)The Dial, I. No. 1 (July, 1840) in *Old South Leaf-
lets*, No. 137 (Boston: The Directors of the Old South Work,
1930), pp. 1--2.
usage, and a search for principles.\textsuperscript{11}

By nature and by training, Margaret so strongly typified this aspirant state of mind that Vernon L. Parrington\textsuperscript{12} termed her a "rebel" as he placed her within the ranks of the Transcendentalists. Emerson he referred to as the "Transcendental Critic,” Parker, as the "Transcendental Minister,” and Thoreau,\textsuperscript{13} as the "Transcendental Economist.” But Margaret he referred to without the qualifying adjective, "Transcendentalist.” She was simply, "Margaret Fuller: Rebel; An embodiment of Transcendental rebellions."\textsuperscript{15} In other words, she was primarily a Rebel and secondarily a Transcendentalist.

Her rebellion, he said, was "against Puritan asceticism and Yankee materialism."\textsuperscript{16} He conceived of her as a social barometer, "the emotional expression of a rebellious generation that had done with the past and was questioning

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., pp. 2--3.


\textsuperscript{13}Theodore Parker (1810-1860), a Unitarian minister, wrote for the Dial and the Massachusetts Quarterly Review.

\textsuperscript{14}Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), author of Walden or Life in the Woods, 1854.


\textsuperscript{16}Ibid. p. 433
the future."\(^{17}\) This twentieth century conception of her was earlier put forth by Margaret's contemporary, W. H. Channing,\(^{18}\) who referred to her as a delicate meter which "indicated in advance each coming change in the air-currents of thought."\(^{19}\) Her ability to predict these changes was demonstrated in her attitude toward the then prevalent religion. Unitarianism had had its place, she said, and the "time seems now to have come for reinterpreting the old dogmas."\(^{20}\)

Transcendentalism caught up Margaret Fuller just when her own romantic idealism had reached its peak.\(^{21}\) Hence, she was not only a rebel, but typical of the Transcendentalists, she was an optimist. Still, Margaret was practical as well as idealistic in her outlook. She believed it would be impossible to build up a Utopia, and noted that in this respect her hopes were "more limited than those of my friends."\(^{22}\) She refused, for example, to participate in the Brook Farm experiment. This idea "is...only a little better way than the others,...I doubt if they will get free from all they deprecate in society," she said, her rea-

\(^{17}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{18}\text{William Henry Channing (1810-1884), clergyman and essayist, was the nephew of William Ellery Channing, "the Elder."}\)

\(^{19}\text{Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 92.}\)

\(^{20}\text{Ibid., II, 85.}\)

\(^{21}\text{Parrington, op. cit., p. 430.}\)

\(^{22}\text{Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 29.}\)
son being that communitarian living was not enough to per-
fect imperfect individuals. She did not dogmatically
foredoom the venture to failure, but she wanted its adva-
cates prepared to face the possibility of failure. She
thought it should be considered merely as an experiment.
"Let us try it," she said, and "induce others to try it,"
but "it is not worthwhile to lay such stress on it."24

Nevertheless, she sympathized "with what is called
the 'Transcendental party,'" and felt "their aim to be the
true one," because:

They acknowledge in the nature of man an arbiter
for his deeds, -- a standard transcending sense
and time, -- and are, in my view, the true util-
itarians. They are but at the beginning of their
course, and will, I hope, learn how to make use
of the past, as well as to aspire for the future,
and to be true in the present moment.25

Despite Margaret's intimations that she was not a member of
the Transcendental party, Emerson, who knew what consti-
tuted a Transcendentalist, said "Margaret was in spirit and
in thought preeminently a Transcendentalist."26

Margaret was to become a member of the Transcendental

23Ibid., II, 58-9. Margaret wrote that "I feel and
find great want of wisdom in myself and the others. We are
not ripe to reconstruct society yet." (Ibid., II, 57)

24Ibid., II, 73.

25Ibid., II, 29.

26Ibid., II, 80.
"club," but did not attend the first meetings. The club began informally with a few members. The first meeting, attended by seven members, was held at George Ripley's home, September 19, 1836, with some optimism:

Thus has our 'Symposium' (sic) opened, and we hope to see each other not seldom. During the ensuing winter we may meet frequently. What good may come to us and to our people time must unfold. 27

The second meeting, October third, was held at Alcott's house. The eight members present discussed "American Genius -- the Causes which Hinder its Growth and Give Us No First-Rate Productions." This discussion was "lively, well sustained, and interesting" with many good things, as usual, contributed by Emerson. 28 Later the club included many of New England's young intellectuals. According to Channing, the only membership requirement was a hopeful, liberal mind; the only guest not tolerated, intolerance.

By their very posture of mind, as seekers of the new, the Transcendentalists were critics and 'come-outers' from the old. Neither the church, the state, the college, society, nor even reform associations, had a hold upon their hearts.... 29

Although the primary purpose of the club was conversation, more often than not the members found themselves


28Alcott's Journal, Oct. 3, 1836, as cited in Ibid.

29Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 14.
confronted by a barrier of Boston frigidity. Few of the members were in the habit of voicing their thoughts and feelings. The voices seemed distant, the pauses long and many. As might be expected, these conversations were seldom stimulating. Emerson said the club should have been named the "Lonely" club. Then it could have adopted a seal showing two porcupines meeting, spines erect, with the motto, "We converse at quill's end." Because of the diversity of interests and opinions among its members, it was given many names -- the "Transcendental Club," "Symposium Club," or the "Hedge Club." "Brotherhood of the 'Like-minded!'" was humorously applied to the group who had a reputation for no two members ever seeming to hold the same opinion on any given subject.

Although Margaret did not attend the formative meetings, being busy teaching, she was present September 18, 1939, when the members discussed the possibility of a journal to express their views. This possibility became a

30 Brooks, op. cit., p. 22.

31 The latter title was used because the meetings were frequently arranged to coincide with Dr. Hedge's visits from his Bangor, Maine, pastorate.

32 1836--7, Margaret taught at Alcott's Temple School in Boston; 1837--9, she taught at the Greene St. School in Providence, R. I. In 1838, she moved to Jamaica Plain, a suburb of Boston, and began the Conversations in Boston.

33 Alcott's Journal, October 3, 1836, as cited in Shepard, op. cit., p. 135.
reality in 1840, with the appearance of that ill-starred literary publication "of limited circulation, but destined to a kind of postmortem immortality,"\(^{34}\) the Dial. The Transcendentalists wanted their journal to measure "no hours but those of sunshine,"\(^{35}\) and therefore considered the name Dial appropriate.

Margaret became editor, a fact which shows that she was not only an early member but a recognized leader of the Transcendental club. Her hopes for the Dial were moderate. In a letter dated April 19, 1840, she remarked that "hearts beat so high, they must be full of something."\(^{36}\) She expected that most people, though, "will be disappointed, for they seem to be looking for the Gospel of Transcendentalism" in the Dial.\(^{37}\) She feared the public might be expecting more than the Dial could provide, just as Jouffrey\(^{38}\) wrote that the French populace expected more than was forthcoming from their ministeries:

\(^{34}\)Seth Curtis Beach, Daughters of the Puritans, A Group of Brief Biographies (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1905), p. 197.

\(^{35}\)The Dial, I, No. 1 (July, 1940) in Old South Leaflets, op. cit., p. 4.

\(^{36}\)Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 25--6.

\(^{37}\)Ibid.

\(^{38}\)Theodore Simon Jouffroy (1796-1842), French philosopher, was assistant to Roger-Jollard and Cousin at the Sorbonne and author of Melanges philosophiques, 1833, and author of Cours de droit naturel, 1835.
The public wants something positive, and, seeing that such and such persons are excellent at fault-finding, it raises them to be rulers, when, lo! they have no noble and full Yea, to match their shrill and bold Nay, and so are pulled down again. 39

She did not intend to be a frequent contributor to the Dial, remarking that "If I had wished to write a few pages now and then, there were ways and means enough of disposing of them." 40 She intended to contribute "a few critical remarks only, or an unpretending sketch now and then." 41

Margaret found little enthusiasm for the new publication:

All concerned are rather indifferent, and there is no great promise for the present. We cannot show high culture, and I doubt about vigorous thought. But we shall manifest free action... and... afford an avenue for what of liberal and calm thought might be originated among us, by the wants of individual minds. 42

As matters developed, much of Margaret's time was spent writing desperate pleas to her friends for something, anything, to fill the pages of the Dial. She ended by filling column after column with her own words. What finally appeared in the Dial was of pale complexion, a fact which many critics attributed to a female editor. In fairness to Margaret, it should be noted, however, that the Dial fared no better, if as well, when Margaret turned the edi-

39Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 25--6.
40Ibid.
41Ibid.
42Ibid., II, 24--5.
torship over to the unenthusiastic Emerson.

When, at last, the Dial was given up, it did not pass unnoticed. George William Curtis expressed the wistful reaction of a small group of loyal readers in a letter dated April 8th, 1844:

The Dial stops. Is it not like the going out of a star?... All who wrote and sang for it were clothed in white garments; and the work itself so calm and collected, though springing from the same undismayed hope which fathers all our best reforms.

Margaret's undertaking of the Dial had been characteristically founded on enthusiasm and vitality of spirit. What she lacked in an original mind to serve the ends of creative writing, she possessed in analysis and restatement. These were combined with remarkable powers of perception, interpretation, and adaptation. It was this spirit, penetration, and adaptability which permeated her oral expres-

43 Despite its eventual failure, the Dial had its place. Margaret noted in its pages that to enable American literature to grow up in our country, "an original idea must animate this nation and fresh currents of life must call into life fresh thoughts along its shores." (Frederick Augustus Braun, Margaret Fuller and Goethe, the Development of a Remarkable Personality, Her Religion and Philosophy, and Her Relation to Emerson, J. P. Clarke and Transcendentalism (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1910), pp. 15-8.) According to Professor Trent, that is exactly what the Dial did: "it gave a new impetus and in some ways a new direction to literary energy, especially in New England." (William P. Trent, A History of American Literature, 1607-1865 (New York: n. p., 1903), p. 518 as cited in Braun, op. cit., p. 5.)

44 Editor, lecturer, and civil service reformer, Curtis was a Brook Farmer and for thirty years editor of Harper's Weekly.
sion, and caused her to surpass her more intellectually-minded Transcendental associates. Their most successful means of expression was writing; Margaret's was conversation. Only Alcott⁴⁷ equalled her in this respect. Her conversational ability enabled her to do as much as, if not more than, many of her writer friends to spread the gospel of Transcendentalism, for she verbalized on the spot the Transcendental rebellions, thus giving them an immediate impetus.

Her not having won prestige throughout posterity while the other Transcendentalists did, may be chiefly due to the fact that her talent was in oral expression whereas theirs was in written expression. Her contributions, unlike the numerous writings of her associates, vanished with the breath that created them. In the nineteenth century, the conversationalist was every bit as much a genius as was the writer. Today that concept has changed. People have for-


⁴⁶Margaret was well aware of her own limitations, stating that "so far from being an original genius, I have not yet learned to think to any depth." (Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 26.)

⁴⁷Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), philosopher, poet, and educator, held advanced educational theories which led him to teach not by books, but through conversation; was a sponsor of the Fruitlands venture; contributed "Orphic Sayings" to the Dial.
gotten that conversation was an art, and consequently, Margaret's talent is underrated, though in that era she ranked equally with the other leading Transcendentalists. Margaret's writings are, in the opinion of those who knew her best and heard her most frequently, not indicative of the depth and beauty of her spoken words.
CHAPTER II

COHORTS

She drew all towards her by her potent and fascinating magnetism. Her scorn was majestic, her satire consuming, her wit the subtlest of any I have known,

A. Bronson Alcott

Since reputation indicates what people think of you and character is what you really are, these two aspects of Margaret Fuller will be discussed separately. This chapter will be concerned with the reputation of Margaret Fuller, while her character will be analyzed in the following chapter. That is, here will be noted the impressions she made on others, while the following chapter will note what accounted for those impressions.

Margaret's reputation will be considered in the light of the personal observations and recollections of her most intimate cohorts,

Many biographers have recorded impressions of Margaret Fuller, but with the possible exception of the more recent ones, none have been unbiased. They showed either a strong revulsion for Margaret or a great admiration for her. If a biographer recorded a strong revulsion, her friends would attempt to counteract this impression, but they, in turn, would go to the opposite extreme in proclaiming their
admiration. Thus, a reader is left with the necessity of interpreting Margaret from two extreme points of view.

Evidently there was something inherent in Margaret herself which made it difficult to give a fair report of her. Almost every sentence, it seems, had to be contradicted in the next.¹ Even among admirers, first impressions were invariably unfavorable, although upon closer acquaintance such impressions were recognized as superficial and even erroneous. What appeared in Margaret to be arrogance, for instance, came to be recognized as a fundamental devotion to truth. Too honest to feign modesty, she admitted her accomplishments and abilities as readily as she admitted her weak points. When she reported after an animated conversation with a new acquaintance, "He appreciates me,"² it could well have been not a mark of conceit but a frank assertion of his powers of penetration.

Margaret Fuller's reputation grew out of interpretations of such remarks. She gained a reputation of being egotistical, assuming, and ill-bred. As one acquaintance put it, "Miss Fuller remembers; it is very ill-bred to remember."³ Perhaps, gauged by the social customs of her day,

¹See Emerson's statement in Emerson et al., op. cit., I, p. 227.

²Ibid., I, 236.

Margaret was ill-bred. As a consequence of this reputation, people avoided meeting her, but once they felt the impact of her personality they often became her steadfast friends. W. H. Channing, for example, though piqued with curiosity, had never sought an introduction, but had "rather shunned encounter with one so armed from head to foot in saucy sprightliness," yet eventually he became her very good friend.

Margaret was aware of people's initial aversion to her. In order to meet a desired acquaintance she would therefore literally corner him (engage in "athletic efforts," some have called it) in order to force him to listen to her until he should "forget all he had heard of her;" forget, too, her plain face and her nasal voice.

Even Emerson, who was to know her best, was preconditioned to dislike her. He knew about her "dangerous reputation for satire" and about her conversation — "a comedy in which dramatic justice was done to everybody's foibles." Therefore, as Margaret wrote to a friend, he eluded her acquaintance. Nevertheless, once having heard him preach at

4Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 6.
5Katherine Anthony, Margaret Fuller, a Psychological Biography (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Howe, 1920), p. 58.
6Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 214.
7Beach, op. cit., p. 185.
8Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 202.
9Beach, op. cit., pp. 184--5.
the Second Church of Boston, Margaret had her mind set upon meeting him.

Persons were her game, specially, if marked by fortune, or character, or success; -- to such was she sent....Indeed, they fell in her way, when the access might have seemed difficult, by wonderful casualties....10

As he expected, Emerson was repelled upon meeting her. This, he attributed in part to "an overweening sense of power, and slight esteem of others" in Margaret and in part to "the prejudice of her fame."11 When Margaret was invited to spend a fortnight at the Emerson home, he made it clear that she was coming as a guest of his wife;12

For the first half-hour of their conversation, he resisted the impact of her personality.

Her extreme plainness, -- a trick of incessantly opening and shutting her eyelids, -- the nasal tone of her voice -- all repelled; and I said to myself, we shall never get far....I remember that she made me laugh more than I liked....She had an incredible variety of anecdotes, and the readiest wit to give an absurd turn to whatever passed; and the eyes, which were so plain at first, soon swam with fun and drolleries, and the very tides of joy and superabundant life.13

By the end of two weeks his skepticism was completely overcome by his admiration for her conversational ability, with the result that he was responsible for her appointment as assistant to Bronson Alcott in his Temple School in Boston, where the conversational method of teaching was

See footnote references next page.
employed.

The admiration that Emerson acquired for Margaret’s conversational abilities is evident in the description of her visits to the Emerson household over a subsequent period of ten years (1836 - 1846) during which he came to know her intimately.

In the evening, she came to the library, and many and many a conversation was there held, whose details, if they could be preserved, would justify all encomiums. They interested me in every manner; -- talent, memory, wit, stern introspection, poetic play, religion, the finest personal feeling, the aspects of the future, each followed each in full activity, and left me, I remember, enriched and sometimes astonished by the gifts of my guest. 14

No one was in a position to speak so accurately of Margaret as Emerson. Though they might differ on specific matters, intellectually they were kindred souls. Because of these kindred minds, in describing her conversations, "he, of all her friends, perhaps, best seized, and so can paint, its colors." 15

None can say and demonstrate her talents and disposition better -- her talents especially, for she gave to him all she thought and thirsted for as an intellectual devotee, and in the eagerness of a confidence that left little unres-

10 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 213.
11 Ibid., I, 201-2.
12 Beach, op. cit., pp. 184-5 cites Emerson's words: "she came to spend the fortnight with my wife."
13 Emerson cited in Ibid., p. 185.
14 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 217-8.
vealed of what was inmost and intimate of purpose.16

Emerson explained his relationship with Margaret as having been, from the beginning, "a war of temperaments" that "could not be reconciled by words." Yet he made it clear that "this incongruity never interspersed for a moment the intercourse"17 between them once it had been established. He recalled that at that time she wore her circle of friends "as a necklace of diamonds about her neck."18 He soon came to find in Margaret "an active, inspiring companion and correspondent" with "all the art, the thought, and the nobleness in New England"19 seeming to be related at that moment to her and she to it. He would accompany her, for example, to the Sculpture Gallery, where he found that she was a glowing companion but a dubious guide. She was, he complained, too personal, too idiosyncratic in her evaluations; but she was honest and sympathetic and shared to an unusual extent the artist's protest against the commonplace conventions of modern life. Margaret, so aware of the artist's feelings, transmitted those feelings to Emerson, thus making him feel a bit of the glow, too.20

15Shepard, op. cit., p. 255; Alcott's opinion.
16Ibid.
17Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 288--9.
18Ibid., I, 213.
19Ibid.
20Brooks, op. cit., p. 9.
In her conversation, Margaret was always dramatic but never insincere. Emerson found in her a "rich composite energy," which had its only satisfactory outlet in her conversation,

a conversation which those who have heard it, unanimously, as far as I know, pronounced to be, in elegance, in range, in flexibility, and adroit transition, in depth, in cordiality, and in moral aim, altogether admirable; surprising and cheerful as a poem, and communicating its own civility and elevation like a charm to all hearers.21

Emerson noted that Margaret's method of presentation varied according to the character and composition of her company, with the result that there was "almost an agreement in the testimony to an invariable power over the minds of all."22 He thought that she had more "personal influence, speaking strictly, -- and efflux, that is, purely of mind and character"23 than any other person he knew, and he attributed this to the fact that "she was infinitely less interested in literature than in life."24

His admiration for Margaret continued to grow, so much so, that in 1843, Hawthorne, who felt antagonistic toward Margaret, recorded a conversation with Emerson in which the latter "apostesized her as the greatest woman,

21Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 311.
22Ibid., I, 312.
23Beach, op. cit., p. 194.
24Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 214.
I believe of ancient or modern times, and the one figure in the world worth considering."\(^25\)

Emerson's views, however, need not be accepted on his authority alone. There is other abundant testimony from the recollections of those who knew Margaret -- many longer, if not so well -- which supports Emerson's views. Alcott, a Transcendental cohort, had noted that her power of personal magnetism was manifested through her conversational capacities.

She was sure to say extraordinary things, surprising to all who heard her....She drew all towards her by her potent and fascinating magnetism. Her scorn was majestic, her satire consuming, her wit the subtlest of any I have known.\(^26\)

Hedge\(^27\) remarked with similar pride that Margaret seldom failed to be the center of attention in any social gathering. She was:

always conspicuous by the brilliancy of her wit, which needed but little provocation to break forth in exuberant sallies, that drew around her a knot of listeners, and made her the central attraction of the hour. Rarely did she enter a company in which she was not a prominent object.\(^28\)

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\(^{26}\)Shepard, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

\(^{27}\)Frederick Henry Hedge (1805 - 1890), Unitarian clergyman and German scholar, was professor of ecclesiastical history at Harvard Divinity School for nineteen years and professor of German at Harvard for twelve years.

\(^{28}\)Beach, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
By implication, Channing, too, respected her mind and personality when he expressed his pleasure over finding her treated as an equal by the Transcendentalists.

Men, -- her superiors in years, frame, and social position, -- treated her more with the frankness due from equal to equal, than the half-don-descending deference with which scholars are wont to adapt themselves to women. 29

Such men neither talked down to her nor resorted to popular phraseology in speaking to her, but trusted to her ability to comprehend their meaning.

It was evident that they praised her verdict, respected her criticism, feared her rebuke, and looked to her as an umpire. 30

Further esteem for Margaret is indicated in Clarke's analysis of the way she clothed her ideas, poetizing the prosaic.

It was by her singular gift of speech that she cast her spells and worked her wonders...Full of thoughts and full of words; capable of poetic improvisation, had there not been a slight over-weight of a tendency to the tangible and real; capable of clear, complete, philosophic statement, but for the strong tendency to life which melted down evermore in its lavasurrent the solid blocks of thought; she was yet, by these excesses, better fitted for the arena of conversation. 31

He was amazed and delighted by the fluency of her wit, which furnished ample entertainment hour after hour as

29 Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 16--9.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., I, 105.
She chattered about recent happenings. Yet, he noted, part of her charm was undoubtedly in her ability to change from gay to grave. Always she preferred more serious conversation, conversation that plummeted the depth of existence.

Not only did Margaret converse beautifully herself, but she possessed the ability of awakening latent powers in others. Her "quick mind seems to have been an electric current that stimulated other minds to activity, and created a vortex of speculation wherever she passed," a point of view well sustained by the recollections of her contemporaries.

The companion was made the thinker, and went away quite other than he came. The circle of friends who sat with her were not allowed to remain spectators or players, but she converted them into heroes, if she could. The muse woke the muses, and the day grew bright and eventful. She could adapt herself to any mood.

No one ever came so near. Her mood applied itself to the mood of her companion, point to point, in the most limber, sinuous, vital way, and she drew out the most extraordinary narratives; yet she had a light sort of laugh, when all was said, as if she thought she could live over that revelation. And this sufficient sympathy she had for all persons indifferently, -- for lovers, for artists, and beautiful maids.

32 Ibid.
33Parrington, op. cit., p. 486.
34Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 312.
and ambitious young statesmen, and for old aunts, and coach-travellers. Ah! she applied herself to the mood of her companion, as the sponge applies itself to water. 35

Little wonder that under her spell few could resist confiding in her. The Memoirs contain the statement that Margaret possessed "the power of so magnetizing others, when she wished, by the power of her mind, that they would lay open to her all the secrets of their nature." 36 That power worked because of her firm conviction that each human being was an individual capable of a certain fixed development.

She had an infinite curiosity to know individuals, -- not the vulgar curiosity which seeks to find out the circumstances of their outward lives, but that which longs to understand the inward springs of thought and action in their souls. This desire and power both rested on a profound conviction of her mind in the individuality of every human being. A human being, according to her faith, was not the result of the presence and stamp of outward circumstances, but an original monad, with a certain special faculty, capable of certain fixed development, and having a profound personal unity, which the ages of eternity might develop, but could not exhaust. 37

She realized from her own experience how invalid were outward appearances in revealing inward potentialities. She always saw what a person was capable of becoming, not what a person was. In order to make him discover his own resources she insisted upon a frank and honest self-analy-

36 Ibid., I, 65--6.
37 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 312.
sis -- the same frankness that she always applied to herself -- a quality which caused an initial abhorrence for her and now turned it into a lasting adherence.

Her search for the truth in every person was seen in her ceaseless efforts to understand the "germinal principle, the special characteristic, of every person whom she deemed worthy of knowing at all." Margaret, in other words, studied character, and used her findings to influence the individual for his own good.

This evaluation is in keeping with what Emerson considered her outstanding characteristic, her devotion to truth and her ability to speak it. Margaret, he said, 

crowned all her talents and virtues with a love of truth, and the power to speak it. In great and in small matters, she was a woman of her word, and gave those who conversed with her the unspeakable comfort that flows from plain dealing.

Her scathing remarks were never unprovoked, but neither were they knowingly unkind. She was not a gossip. In fact, the trivia of tea-table talk repulsed her, as is revealed in her note to a young friend:

I am repelled by your account of your party.

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38 Ibid. She asked of her friends only that they possess some "extraordinary generous seeking." See footnote, Ibid., I, 64.

39 Ibid. "In great and small matters she was a woman of her word..." (Ibid., I, 303.)
It is beneath you to amuse yourself with sartorial satire, with what is vulgarly called quizzing. When such a person as chooses to throw himself in your way, I sympathize with your keen perception of his ridiculous points. But to laugh a whole evening at vulgar nondescripts, -- is that an employment for one who was born passionately to love, to admire, to sustain truth?  

The above also illustrates Emerson’s statement that Margaret knew how “without loss of temper, to speak with unmistakable plainness to any party, when she felt that the truth or the right was injured.” He quoted one witness as having told him that “I have known her, by the severity of her truth, mow down a crop of evil, like the angel of retribution itself.” Such occasions were apparently frequent, and did little to enhance Margaret’s popular reputation. Yet many might have said as did one victim of her frankness, “I shall never speak ill of her. She has done me good.”  

Margaret suffered no vice to insult her presence, but called the offender to account, when the law of right or of beauty was violated. She did not have to go far to find such violations, but, when she did find them, "she chose to clear herself of all complicity, by calling the act by its name," even when others might have remained silent.

40Ibid, I, 203.  
42Ibid.  
Emerson told the following story as illustrative of Margaret's honesty even in trifles: One evening when Margaret and some friends were visiting the Boston Academy of Music, a young lady and two gentlemen seated directly behind them whispered throughout the entire performance, much to the distress of the others present. When the program ended, Margaret caught the girl's eye and asked, "May I speak with you one moment?" When the girl leaned forward, she was startled to be told, "I only wish to say that I trust, that, in the whole course of your life, you will not suffer so great a degree of annoyance as you have inflicted on a large party of lovers of music this evening." Emerson assured those who might question Margaret's tact that "This was said with the sweetest air, as if to a little child, and it was as good as a play to see the change of countenance which the young lady exhibited, who had no replication to make to so Christian a blessing." 46

Emerson summed up this side of Margaret's personality by stating that "'Be to the best thou knowest ever true!' is her language to one. And that was the effect of her presence." 47 Her belief was, "Let free air into the mind, and the pestilence cannot lurk in any corner." 48

44 Ibid., I, 306.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., I, 304-5.
Margaret did have her weaknesses. Emerson felt obliged to admit that she betrayed the presence of a rather mountainous ME, in a way to surprise those who knew her good sense. 49 He admitted that she at first astonished and repelled by her complacency. 50 Nevertheless, he remarked, she defended herself with such good, broad humor, basing her case upon the truth of her statements, that her arguments "were not easy to set aside." 51

As Channing remarked, "Truth at all costs" was plainly her maxim. 52 People were offended by that maxim because they were unaccustomed to persons who seek the truth even at the expense of social conventions. Her typical comments were made "as if she were stating a scientific fact." 53 "She spoke, in the quietest manner, of the girls she had formed, the young men who owed everything to her, the fine companions she had long ago exhausted." 54 Having been asked if she thought herself better than any one else, she thoughtfully

47 Ibid., I, 222.
48 Ibid., I, 304.
49 Ibid., I, 236.
50 Ibid., I, 234.
51 Ibid., I, 237--8
52 Ibid., II, 7.
53 Ibid., I, 236.
54 Ibid., I, 234.
replied, "Yes, I do." She told her friends coolly that, "I now know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable to my own." 

Margaret repelled others by her frank nature, as well as by her unattractive physical make-up. Yet, once they had been obliged to come into close contact with her, and had heard her converse, they would almost always feel the pull of her magnetic personality as expressed by that conversation.

In conclusion, it must be said that Margaret was truly hampered by the first impressions she gave. From these impressions was derived her widely known contemporary reputation and many of the myths which have survived her. Those who really knew her realized how misleading her reputation was. The great minds with which she was associated recognized that their first violent aversions were based upon superficial impressions.

Emerson's warm words are far better testimony to the influence Margaret exerted over the minds of her associates than any "facts" of her life or the opinions of her many other, and later, biographers. Margaret and her friends,

55 Beach, op. cit., p. 165.

56 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 234. Very early Margaret had written: "My museum is so well furnished, that I grow lazy about collecting new specimens of human nature." (Ibid., I, 286.)
he thought, were an integral and indispensable part of America's heritage and deserved recording for posterity. 57

Feeling the "costly loss which our community sustains in the loss of this brave and eloquent soul," 58 he felt that no one could ever take Margaret's place in the life of her country. He felt, as one author put it, that he had lost his audience 59 when Margaret went down abord the Elizabeth off Fire Island, so near, yet so far to home.


58 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 305.

59 Brooks, Life, p. 222.
CHAPTER III

CHARACTER

She did not merely speak the truth, but it was the basis of her thought and life.

Ednah Dow Cheney

Chapter two, in considering Margaret Fuller's contemporary reputation, pointed out that she was seen quite differently by those who knew her and by those who knew her not. It pointed out her reputation, which grew out of superficial impressions, and the attempts by her friends to rectify the faults in that reputation. This chapter will go beyond her reputation, it deal with her character. In other words, it will account for the impressions which led to myths surrounding Margaret Fuller.

This will be done, firstly, by noting the delineation of her character in the standard Fuller biographical works; secondly, by enumerating her outstanding characteristics revealed therein; and, thirdly, by attempting to explain the many complexities and apparent contradictions so encountered.

The Memoirs are the most prominent among standard references. They are, however, full of deliberate omissions and misinterpretations, and cannot be accepted as completely accurate. Written by well-meaning friends who
wished to present nothing derogatory about Margaret, they
do not provide a complete portrait. According to scholars
who have had access to the Fuller manuscripts in the Boston
Public Library and the Harvard library, the Memoirs reflect
great and unwarranted liberties taken with the materials u-
tilized. Not only have the manuscripts been altered, in-
cluding the deletion of certain pertinent material, but in
treating the preserved materials, the language has been so
colored as to distort its original meaning.1

The Memoirs, moreover, do not provide a unified pic-
ture of Margaret Fuller. Emerson, Channing, and Clarke, in
their attempt to treat her many aspects, presented a por-
trait that lacked coherence, perhaps for the very reason
that there were "so many aspects to her soul that she might
furnish material for a hundred biographers, and all could
not be said even then."2 Margaret emerged, consequently,
a compilation of virtues and peculiarities, without the

1Braun, op. cit., p. 247 contains the following com-
ment regarding Margaret's religious Credo reprinted there-
in: "Those parts of the Credo which have been published
before in Margaret Fuller's Memoirs, are full of interp-
lations and omissions. Many of the words are changed and
sometimes whole sentences are re-written in such a manner
that the original thought is often very much obscured." Such
comments are frequently included by Margaret's biog-
graphers.

2James Freeman Clarke to T. W. Higginson, May 15,
1883, as cited in Ibid., p. 8.
warmth of a human being. A warmer character might have emer-
gaged from the pen of Mrs. Dall, had she written the biogra-
phy of Margaret that the Fuller family asked her to write.

But it was never written due to the untimely death of Mar-
garet's brother, Richard. Hence, these Memoirs, however
inadequate they may be, are the primary source of knowledge
of Margaret's character, because they were written by con-
temporaries who knew her best and because they contain ex-
cerpts from Margaret's own letters and Journals.

Biographers who came later realized the weaknesses
in extant writings, and each, in turn, felt that Margaret's
character should be reinterpreted and re-evaluated in terms
of her influence upon her contemporaries and upon posterity.
Higginson and Howe, each writing in the late nineteenth
century, cast divergent lights upon Margaret's character.
The Howe book emphasizes Margaret's role as a prime influence

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3Caroline W. Healey (Dall) whose short-hand notes on
the Evenings of Mythology are contained in the Appendix.

4Caroline W. Healey Dall, Margaret and Her Friends, or
Ten Conversations with Margaret Fuller upon the Mythology of
the Greeks and Its Expression in Art, Held at the House of
the Rev. George Ripley, Bedford Place, Boston, Beginning
March 1, 1841 (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), pp. 13--5.

5Thomas Wentworth Higginson, whose book, Margaret
Fuller Ossoli ("American Men of Letters;" Boston: Houghton,
Mifflin, 1893) is referred to here.

6Julia Ward Howe, whose book, Margaret Fuller (Mar-
chesa Ossoli) ("Famous Women Series;" Boston: Roberts Bros.,
1893) is referred to here.
in the movement for the emancipation of womankind. Higginson, while recognizing her role in this respect, extended it beyond that of a leader of women. She was, in his account, a woman of all-round action.

Katherine Anthony, writing in 1920, during the era of Freudian popularity, pointed out the weaknesses in previous biographies and stated that Margaret deserved consideration by a sympathetic feminine nature in accordance with the findings of modern psychology. Her attempt at re-evaluation, however, resulted not so much in a picture of Margaret Fuller as in an expose of her own psychological predisposition. In her sympathetic efforts to give a psychological interpretation to the myths surrounding Margaret, she made her appear more the eccentric, more the freak, than ever before. Consideration of Margaret Fuller merely as a psychological phenomenon of sexual frustrations demonstrating the Freudian theory of hysteria is no more a complete explanation of the character of a woman who so impressed the great minds of her day than are explanations based upon her role as a leader in the emancipation of womankind or as a woman of action. Nor do the appellations, "Bacchante," "Sybil," "Pythoness," and "gorgeous pedant," by which she was variously called, fully describe her.

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7Anthony, op. cit., pp. iv-vv

8Ibid., p. 23: "So far as Margaret's case is concerned, Sigmund Freud's theory of hysteria is a perfect fit."
Due to the destruction of source materials, the unreliable nature of available biographies, and the fact that Margaret wove her magic spells from the fragile fibres of spoken words, one can never hope to arrive at an analysis of her character which will be beyond dispute.

There is, nevertheless, a definite need, according to Margaret's more recent biographers, to explain the past to the present generation. Margaret's life, according to Eleanor Roosevelt, herself a leader of women, should provide a challenge and inspiration to today's American woman.

Having rejected in the preceding pages any single existing interpretation of Margaret's character as beyond dispute, the second step in analyzing her character is to note her outstanding characteristics (upon which those interpretations were based), and finally, from an analysis of these characteristics, try to arrive at a plausible interpretation of Margaret Fuller as a woman of influence.

Today it is recognized that many elements contribute to the character of an individual. In order to understand

9Madeleine B. Stern, The Life of Margaret Fuller (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1942), p. xv: "Each reader knows that with each generation comes the need for reinterpreting the past to the present."

Margaret's characteristics, therefore, it is necessary to understand her background, both hereditary and environmental.

his (the leader's) biological inheritance, his social environment, his social training, his life experience, his developed traits and characteristics, measured as closely as may be and with increasing precision; -- these are the factors from which the great man may be understood.11

Charles Merriam points out in his book, Four American Party Leaders, that in order to understand the leader it is necessary to know as much as possible about him:

increasing attention is being given not only to the social entourage out of which the leader comes, but also to the analysis of the individual qualities of the leader, and finally to the interrelation of these qualities to the environment. We want to know what sort of an environment makes a Lincoln or a Roosevelt, and also what the special qualities of these types are, as they may have come out of inheritance or been shaped by environment and experience, and to know how these special traits or types of behavior react upon the environment.12

It is, then, by an examination of Margaret Fuller's background as well as her characteristics that we hope to unearth the "secret of personality"13 -- the personality of a woman possessed of such a powerful personal magnetism that she was able to win not only the adherence of such


12Ibid.

13Ibid., pp. xii-xiv.
men as Emerson and Carlyle,\textsuperscript{14} but the adulation of the
women who composed her conversation classes.

The single characteristic upon which all Margaret's
biographers agree is that of leadership. It was in the
Conversations that Margaret most evidently displayed her
leadership ability. That being the case, the attempt here
will be to discover a pattern in her characteristics to
account for her leadership.

The characteristics of Margaret which will be in-
terpreted in this chapter did not first appear during the
period of the Conversations. They were obvious prior to
1839. This is evident, not only in descriptions by her
biographers, but in her own writings, which provide almost
a clinical record of her psychological development.\textsuperscript{15}

Enumerating the outstanding characteristics, which
seem to have been responsible for Margaret's leadership
ability, they are: 1) her combination of a feminine na-
ture with a masculine mind; 2) her regal appearance; and
3) her ability to express herself clearly in oral expres-
sion. These abilities are frequently referred to by her

\textsuperscript{14}Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), author of Sartor Re-
sartus, 1834, met Margaret Fuller when she went abroad
in 1846.

\textsuperscript{15}Anthony, op. cit., p. 21, states that "Her (Mar-
garet's) reminiscences are a distinct contribution to
the psychology of normal childhood."
biographers. For the first time in any study, they will be considered here in relation to her ability as a leader and as a woman of influence.

Margaret Fuller's character was an enigma to her contemporaries. Emerson presented the consensus of her cohorts in capsule form with his statement that she was "something of a duality." She possessed the then unusual combination of a feminine nature with what was called -- in a woman -- a "masculine mind." Hedge defined a masculine mind as a mind whose "action was determined by ideas rather than by sentiments." In Margaret, he said, the combination of such a mind with "a woman's appreciation of the beautiful in sentiment and the beautiful in action" gave her an intellect "rather solid than graceful," but left her very much "alive to grave." Because of this duality, her life was to be, as one author has so aptly stated, "a vindication of her belief, as an intellectual woman, in the reality of the instinctive life" and "a vindication of her belief, as an instinctive woman, in the reality of the intellectual life."

Emerson recalled that Margaret had found a fairly ac-

16 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 316.
17 Ibid., I, 95--6.
18 Anthony, op. cit., p. 213.
curate portrait of herself in "a disagreeable novel... in which an equivocal figure exerts alternately a masculine and a feminine influence on the characters of the plot."19 She wrote verses "To the Moon" in which appear the following lines:

But if I steadfast gaze upon thy face,
A human secret, like my own, I trace;
For, through the woman's smile
looks the male eye.20

Channing thought the source of this duality was to be found in the clash between, rather than in a combination of endowment with, environment.21 Margaret's nature took part from her mother's tenderness and part from her father's sternness. A passionate disposition was in direct contrast to her Puritan New England environment.

Margaret's naturally quick intellect had been forced prematurely by an ambitious father and by her own lack of beauty for which she determined to compensate by a superior brilliancy of mind. Margaret recalled that as a result of her father's business-like attitude toward her education, he "thought to gain time, by bringing forward the intellect as early as possible."22 The result was "a premature de-

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19 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 229.
20 Ibid.
21 Parrington, op. cit., p. 426, considers Channing's statements "the acutest analysis of her (Margaret's) character."
22 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 15.
velopment of the brain, that made me a 'youthful prodigy' by day, and by night a victim of spectral illusions, nightmare, and somnambulism." Margaret felt that this early forcing had been harmful to her health. It induced, she said,

continual headache, weakness and nervous affections, of all kinds. As these again re-acted on the brain, giving undue force to every thought and every feeling, there were finally produced a state of being both too active and too intense, which wasted my constitution.

Her poor eyesight has generally been blamed upon too much late evening reading by candle-light.

Margaret, realizing that she was not beautiful but that she was bright, began during adolescence to keep a rigorous schedule. In 1825, she wrote to her former school-teacher, Miss Prescott, the following account of her daily activities:

I rise a little before five, walk an hour, and then practise (sic) on the piano, till seven, when we breakfast. Next I read French, -- Sismondi's Literature of the South of Europe, -- till eight, then two or three lectures in Brown's philosophy. About half-past nine I go to Mr. Perkin's school and study Greek till twelve, when the school being dismissed, I recite, go home, and practise (sic) again till dinner, at two. Sometimes, if the conversation is very agreeable, I lounge for half an hour over the dessert, though rarely so lavish of time. Then, when I can, I read

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., I, 95-6.
two hours in Italian, but I am often interrupted. At six, I walk, or take a drive. Before going to bed, I play or sing, for half an hour or so, to make all sleepy, and, about eleven, retire to write a little while in my journal, exercises on what I have read, or a series of characteristics which I am filling up according to advice. Thus, you see, I am learning Greek, and am making acquaintance with metaphysics, and French and Italian literature. 25

In the same letter is the following expression of that feeling of increasing ambition which was to become so characteristic of Margaret in later years:

I feel the power of industry growing every day, and, besides the all-powerful motive of ambition, and a new stimulus lately given through a friend, I have learned to believe that nothing, not perfection, is unattainable. I am determined on distinction, which formerly I thought to win at an easy rate; but now I see that long years of labor must be given to secure even the 'succes de societe,' -- which, however, shall never content me. 26

Her aims were high, but even at the age of fifteen, she was well aware of her own innate handicaps:

I see multitudes of examples of persons of genius, utterly deficient in grace and the power of pleasurable excitement. I wish to combine both. I know the obstacles in my way. I am wanting in that intuitive tact and polish, which nature has bestowed upon some, but which I must acquire. And, on the other hand, my powers of intellect,

25 Ibid., I, 52--3.
26 Ibid., I, 53--4.
though sufficient, I suppose, are not well disciplined."

She felt that "all such hindrances may be overcome by an ardent spirit." If she should fail, her "consolation shall be found in active employment." Margaret's intellectual hunger was to continue unabated throughout the remainder of her life, but it gave no fulfillment of her nature. She considered that hers was the destiny of the thinker, and (shall I dare to say it?) of the poetic priestess, sibyl-line, dwelling in the cave, or amid the Libyan sands.

She was different from other women, she believed. She did not "look on any of the persons, brought into relation" with her, with "common womanly eyes."

As a result of her intellectual aura, her natural strong impulse to be loved remained unfulfilled. It is generally assumed that the reason for her not being loved was due to her lack of physical attractiveness, yet in view of the fact that she could win friends in spite of her

\[\text{27Ibid.}\]
\[\text{28Ibid.}\]
\[\text{29Ibid.}\]
\[\text{30Ibid., I, 99.}\]
\[\text{31Ibid.}\]
looks, and that she did have several love affairs in her lifetime, it seems to be indicated that she was not entirely repugnant, but that her inability to evoke love was due to something more fundamental than just an unattractive exterior.

She did not follow the pattern of the day. Instead of being coy and demure, she put her associates on the intellectual defensive so that, even had they been romantically inclined, they either did not know how to approach her romantically, or, if they had the audacity to do so, they soon found that they did not know how to cope with her. Her magnetism and personal influence could draw friends, but when it came to drawing romantic love, the power broke down.

This craving for love was present from babyhood and long unfulfilled. Her mother being a negative character, reflected little affection. Her father, a worshipper of the human intellect, did not give it to her. By his very training, he virtually predestined her to a life of unfulfilled longing for love. However much he suppressed her passion, however, he could not eliminate it. A "haughty, passionate, ambitious" child\(^32\) grew up to be "an affectionate and passionate woman,"\(^33\) obliged to state, "No one

\(^{32}\)Beach, op. cit., pp. 176--7.

\(^{33}\)Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 321
loves me."  

With the intellect I always have, always shall, overcome; but that is not the half of the work. The life, the life! Oh my God! shall the life never be sweet?  

Her father superimposed upon her "woman's heart" a "man's ambition," but Margaret knew that her "character is, after all, still more feminine than masculine," and blamed this disposition for sometimes allowing her emotions to color her judgment. She admitted that she sometimes "put more emotion into a state than I myself knew." It was this intensity, both of intellect and of emotion, which frightened her potential suitors. She gave herself to her friendships "with an entireness not possible to any but a woman, with a depth possible to few women."  

Never having found satisfaction in a romantic love, Margaret sublimated this passion to a passion for intellectual intimacy, though never leaving the realm of a personal relationship. This intensity of her desire for love found its outlet in her strong personal impact upon each individual with whom she came in contact. In the intensity of her

34Ibid., I, 293.
35Ibid., I, 237.
36Ibid., I, 229.
37Ibid., I, 99.
38Ibid.
39Ibid., I, 281--2
emotions she was willing to give and she expected to receive in return. Nothing short of the complete truth was acceptable to her. She herself was always sincere, and she expected a like response from those dealing with her:

My own entire sincerity, in every passage of life, gives me a right to expect that I shall be met by no unmeaning phrases or attentions.

She demanded the best of each individual.

This was true both in private conversations with her and in group conversations. She made no distinction. It was this ability of hers to look at a group as composed of individual units which made her a strong personal influence. Her sincerity and her truth were evident in her leadership, and yielded almost unanimous personal confidence.

To anyone whose confidence she had once drawn out, she was thereafter faithful. She could talk of persons, and never gossip; for she had a fine instinct that kept her from any reality, and from any effect of treachery.

This is why "Every one of her friends knew assuredly that her sympathy and aid would not fail them when required." This is why "all came and held out their palms to the wise

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40_Ibid.,_ I, 305--6: "nothing but the truth will do; no love will serve that is not eternal."

41_Ibid.,_ I, 304.

42_Ibid.,_ I, 300.

43_Ibid.,_ I, 302.
woman, to read their fortunes, and they were truly told.\footnote{Ibid., I, 306-7}

Alcott, an advanced thinker for his day, summarized her character as "the intellect of a man inspired by the heart of a woman, combining in harmonious marriage the masculine and feminine in her genius." He thought that Margaret came very near to "our conception of the ideal woman."\footnote{Sheperd, op. cit., p. 411.}

Margaret relied upon these two qualities to develop lasting friendships. With her "masculine energy" she attracted them, and with her "feminine receptiveness" she held them.\footnote{Emerson, et al., op. cit., II, 21. Channing applied to her the words, "Thou large-brained Woman, and large-hearted Man," saying she blended "feminine receptiveness with masculine energy."} Her feminine attributes alone could not have attracted them; her masculine attributes alone could not have held them. Realizing her assets and her limitations, Margaret astutely blended these two qualities, to weave them as a web about her friends. This blending resulted in a dynamic personality, which, while not conducive to romantic attachments, compensated by making her a leader among both men and women.

As in the first phase, Margaret sublimated her emotional intensity to an "intimate, intellectual inter-
course," so, in the second place, she compensated for her lack of the usual feminine appeal by emphasizing her regal appearance.

While regal bearing is not always essential to leadership, in the case of Margaret Fuller it was a necessary compensation. "Had she lacked this characteristic, would she have been a leader?" could scarcely be answered in the affirmative. Although she was said to have had beautiful hands and soft, brown hair, there was nothing about her physical appearance, except her regal bearing, that would have commanded favorable attention.

When she was twelve, she had a determination of blood to the head. 'My parents,' she said, 'were much mortified to see the fineness of my complexion destroyed. My own vanity, for a time, was severely wounded.'

Out of fairness to her, it might be noted, however, that Margaret considered her mother exceptionally beautiful and fragile -- beautiful and fragile as the while amaranth. She was, therefore, perhaps oversensitive about her own adolescent condition.

Margaret never forgot her own lack of beauty -- her high forehead, long nose, wide mouth. One May she con-

47 Ibid., II, 41. Margaret wrote to a friend, "Your idea of friendship apparently does not include intellectual intimacy as mine does."

48 Ibid., I, 289--9.
fided to her Journal that:

When all things are blossoming, it seems so strange not to blossom too; that the quick thought within cannot remould its tenement....I am such a shabby plant, of such coarse tissue. I hate not to be beautiful when all around is so. 49

She found that a passionate nature combined with an unappealing exterior did not lead to happiness, and confided, once again to her Journal, that:

Of a disposition that requires the most refined, the most exalted tenderness, without charms to inspire it; -- poor Mignon! fear not the transition through death; no penal fire can have in store worse torments than thou art familiar with already. 50

In her early attempts to cultivate a regal appearance, Margaret impressed T. W. Higginson, who played with her brother Eugene when they were boys, as being "rather staid." 51 Her own girlhood companions frequently inferred an aloofness and a hauteur which turned them away from her. 52 This bearing was an attempt to compensate not only for unattractive features, but for certain disturbing manner-

49Ibid., I, 291--2.
50Ibid., I, 291.
51Bell, op. cit., p. 28.
52Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 41--2. Margaret explained in later years that "My book-life and lonely habits had given a cold aloofness, a hauteur which turned all hearts away."
isms as well. Oliver Wendell Holmes, as a classmate, had felt a hypnotic fascination for her neck, which he described as:

long, flexible...arching and undulating in strange sinuous movements, which one who loved her would compare to those of a swan, and one who loved her not to those of the sphidian who tempted our common mother. 53

These movements may have been due to her difficulties in vision. Typical of Margaret, she developed them into an asset which contributed to her general queenly appearance to such an extent that Alcott later fancied her as some "sacred bird, Indian or Egyptian, so Sibyl-line and changeful were the hues and motions of that powerful yet graceful neck of hers." 54

Margaret's near-sightedness is said to have been responsible also for her eccentric and distracting habit of alternately opening and shutting her eyelids. This, too, she turned into an asset by affecting a queenly deliberateness in applying her prinz nez and surveying her auditors before she spoke. Everything Margaret did was done with a flourish, often to the envy of her less effectively dramatic companions.

53 M. A. De Wolfe Howe, op. cit., p. 17.
54 Shepard, op. cit., p. 255.
Margaret, "imperial creature that she was," seems to have been born with a strain of queenliness in her character. At least this trait was developed at an early age. In later years, she recalled how she had thought of herself during childhood as a European princess, a "changeling," cast upon the uncongenial New England shore by some malignant fate. Surely she could not really have been born to a typical New England family! This impression was intensified by an incident which Margaret frequently recalled. Her father, watching her in the family garden, had said, "Inse-do regina." From that day forward Margaret thought of herself as a sovereign, a queen, Juno, and carried herself accordingly. During her school-days in Cambridgeport, Margaret would fling her cloak with its great hood full of books over her shoulder with such an imperial air that her classmates beseeched their mothers to make them similar hooded cloaks.

55 Ibid.

56 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 11.

57 Anthony, op. cit., p. 21, contends that this was indicative, not of an air of sovereignty on Margaret's part, but of "an unhealthy emotional relationship...between the Puritan child and her father." If so, the fact still remains that this incident left a deep impression upon Margaret's young mind.

58 Beach, op. cit., p. 176, quotes the girls as saying, "We thought that if we could only come into school in that way, we could know as much Greek as she did." Therefore, "We wished that our mothers would let us have hooded cloaks, that we might carry our books in the same way."
Her imagined royal heritage began very early. In a childhood letter pertaining to a proposed marriage between her three-year-old brother, Eugene, and an imaginary Elsie K. Greene, Margaret addressed herself to an equally imaginary family in Liverpool: "I, as you well know, am a queen" and "I am besides being a queen, the Duchess of Marlborough." Margaret's fancy of herself as royalty was to remain with her throughout her adult life.

Alcott said Margaret had always appeared to him to think that there was "a crown somewhere awaiting her," a fact which he considered "characteristic." Emerson added that "She looked upon herself as a living statue, which should always stand on a polished pedestal, with the right accessories, and under the most fitting lights." Because she was very conscious of the necessity for the proper "accessories" to complete the impression, Margaret always dressed with care, always added a touch of the dramatic -- a flower, perhaps.

Margaret's friends played up the imperial image which she had created of herself. Sophia Peabody, for example,

59 Bell, op. cit., p. 34.
60 Shepard, op. cit., p. 255.
61 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 233--9.
62 A sister of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, married Nathaniel Hawthorne.
in confiding her wedding plans to Margaret, wrote a letter
in which she included a sonnet addressed "To a Priestess
of the Temple not made with hands," and concluded with the
couplet,

Behold! I reverent stand before thy shrine
In recognition of thy words divine.63

As a girl, then, with her peculiarly rhythmic walk,
her peering eyes, and her undulating neck, Margaret was
"plain in appearance, but of dashing air."64 She used her
queenly appearance to enhance her leadership.

The third characteristic, and the ability which most
contributed to Margaret's recognized leadership, was her
facility in oral expression.65 This may be considered a
compensation for her failure to achieve her aspirations in
written expression. One evening, during a discussion of
American literature, Margaret had "laid bare her secret
hope of what Woman might be and do, as an author, in our
Republic." Channing discerned that she was painting a
self-portrait in this Woman.66

63 Nathaniel Hawthorne, The American Notebooks, based
upon the original manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Li-
brary and edited by Randall Stewart (New Haven: Yale Uni-

64 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 5, 6.

65 Merriam, op. cit., p. 14, states that "Another sig-
ficant quality of ... leaders is facility in dramatic
expression."

66 Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 7, 8.
Because Margaret lacked talent for writing, she took no pleasure in it; and because she took no pleasure in it, the products of her pen were probably poorer than they otherwise would have been. Emerson, after explaining Margaret's inability to write expressively, saying "Her pen was a non-conductor," revealed that "She always took it up with some disdain." She felt that "It is a mockery thus to play the artist with life, and dip the brush in one's own heart's blood," and that one might better exist as merely "a soul ever rushing forth in tides of genial life."

To be sure, possessed both of great intellectual curiosity and of a strong desire for creative expression, Margaret produced writings which were published. The products of her pen in no way revealed the vibrance of her personality, however. What she wrote showed a strong, clear, intelligible style, but lacked any touch of inspiration. She had "an ebullient sense of power, which she felt to be in her, but which as yet had found no right channels." Her published writings give evidence of the great effort which their author had to exert in order to find a fitting form for her thoughts. She expressed this by saying, "I feel within myself an immense force, but I cannot bring it out." One reason that she

67Ibid., I, 294.
68Ibid.
69Ibid., I, 236.
70Ibid.
could not "bring it out," was that Margaret was too impatient to be an author.

How can I ever write with this impatience of detail? I shall never be an artist; I have no patient love of execution; I am delighted with my sketch, but if I try to finish it, I am chilled.\(^7\)

Her friends were aware of her abilities and limitations. They knew that her abilities were not shown to advantage in her writings. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, writing after Margaret's untimely death, stated flatly that "Her written works are just naught." She also pointed out that Margaret was aware of this, as were her friends:

She said herself they were sketches, thrown out in haste and for the means of subsistence, and that the sole production of hers which was likely to represent her at all would be the history of the Italian Revolution,\(^8\)

the manuscript of which was apparently lost at sea during the disaster which took Margaret's life. In view of the opinions of Margaret's friends, it is easily understood what Elizabeth Barrett Browning meant when she said that Margaret's "reputation, such as it was in America, seemed to stand mainly on her conversation and oral lectures."

Mrs. Browning felt so strongly the disparity between Margaret's abilities in writing and in speaking that she

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\(^7\)Ibid., I, 295.

said, "If I wished anyone to do her justice, I should say, as I have indeed said, 'Never read what she has written.'" She indicated, too, a significant difference between Margaret's private and public writings, stating that her letters, however, are individual, and full, I should fancy of that magnetic personal influence which was so strong in her.\textsuperscript{73}

Hedge, too, noted that despite Margaret's many abilities, "for some reason or other, she could never deliver herself in print as she did with her lips."\textsuperscript{74} Emotions swelled up in her, her mind filled with ideas, but she could not convey them with written words:

\begin{quote}
For all the tides of life that flow within me, I am dumb and ineffectual, when it comes to casting my thought into form. No old one suits me. If I could invent one, it seems to me the pleasure of creation would make it possible for me to write.
\end{quote}

Margaret looked at her verses and was ashamed of them:

\begin{quote}
...there is scarce a line of poetry in them, -- all rhetorical and impassioned...
\end{quote}\textsuperscript{76}

None of her writings gave her any consolation:

When I look at my papers, I feel as if

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., pp. 98--9.
\textsuperscript{74}Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 295.
\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., I, 297.
\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., I, 295.
I had never had a thought that was worthy of the attention of any but myself; ... 

There are indications that Margaret's father influenced both Margaret's inferior writing ability and her superior speaking ability. In respect to the first, should be noted Mr. Fuller's letter, which he wrote home to his seven-year-old daughter while he was in Congress:

give me sometimes a short passage of Latin of your own composition or at best translated from some very plain and easy passage in English. Take for instance the ten or twelve first verses of the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, which is very easy. 78

Drilled thus in the classical style of writing and being innured with the classics from early youth, Margaret found it unsatisfactory to write in the contemporary style. "After all, this writing is mighty dead." She yearned for release through the spoken word:

Oh, for my dear old Greeks, who talked everything -- not to shine as in the Parisian saloons, but to learn, to vent the heart, to clear the mind! 79

It did not take Margaret long to find that conversation was her "natural element." Writing was dead; but speech was living. What she had lacked in her ability to make the printed word live, she successfully compensated for in the inflections and sparkle of her oral expression. In a letter

77 Ibid.
78 Bell, op. cit., pp. 33--4.
79 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 106--7.
written in 1832, she stated:

Conversation is my natural element. I need to be called out, and never think alone, without imagining some companion. Whether this be nature or the forces of circumstances, I know not; it is my habit, and bespeaks a second-rate mind.³⁰

Being "accustomed to the clearest and fullest,"³¹ her "conversation gave a far better measure of her remarkable powers than her writings, wherein she seemed constrained and ill at ease."³² Whereas Margaret's impulsive nature was not suited to so exacting a task as writing, requiring both rigid mental discipline and painstaking organization of materials, in speaking she was not obliged to be concerned with either. Whereas in writing she was hampered because she was not able to visualize her audience, "When I meet people," she wrote, "it is easy to adapt myself to them." In oral expression she moved "into another world."³³ The world was her "forte."³⁴ There "she felt at home...felt her power," and the "excitement which the presence of living persons brought, gave all her faculties full activity."³⁵

³⁰Ibid., I, 107.
³¹Ibid., I, 324.
³²Shepard, op. cit., p. 409.
³³Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 24-5.
³⁴Ibid., I, 106-7.
³⁵Ibid.
Margaret needed to speak her thoughts out loud. Again her father's influence is evident in her early training. For instance, after she had learned to read Latin at the age of six, she was obliged to read it daily for some years thereafter. Her father expected her "to understand the mechanism of the language thoroughly, and in translating to give the thoughts in as few well-arranged words as possible, and without breaks of hesitation; -- for with these my father had absolutely no patience." She had, from the beginning, recited her lessons aloud. Possibly as a result of this training, Margaret's Journals and letters contain numerous statements such as "I have not anybody to speak to, that does not talk common-place" and:

I feel quite lost; it is so long since I have talked myself. To see so many acquaintances, to talk so many words, and never tell my mind completely on any subject -- to say so many things which do not seem called out, makes me feel strangely vague and movable.

Moved by her own need for expression, she awoke one morning "thinking of the monks of LaTrappe; -- how could they bear their silence?" In speech Margaret could give vent to her pent-up emotions, to the "gushings of thought na-

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86 Ibid., I, 17--22.
87 Ibid., I, 119--20.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., II, 11.
naturally excited." It was a saying of hers that had she been a man she would probably have become an orator. Probably her hope would have been realized, because, according to Emerson, she "had great energy of speech and action, and seemed formed for high emergencies." 

Her shortcomings to some appeared in an air too formal, too stilted, too dogmatic and pedantic, giving the impression of arrogance. This, too, may be traced to her father's influence.

He had no conception of the subtle and indirect motions of imagination and feeling. His influence on me was great, and opposed to the natural unfolding of my character, which was fervent, of strong grasp, and disposed to infatuation, and self-forgetfulness.

The arrogance which impressed unfavorably in her oral expression was her father's characteristic superimposed upon her natural feminity.

"But," "if," "unless," "I am mistaken," and "it may be so," were words and phrases excluded from the province where he held sway. Trained to great dexterity in artificial methods, accurate, ready, with entire command of his resources, he had no belief in minds that listen, wait, and receive.

Margaret's conversational abilities began early. She was always able to hold the center of attention, even

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90 Ibid., I, 110.
91 Beach, op. cit., pp. 169-90.
92 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 227.
93 Ibid., I, 17-22.
during her boarding-school days. She would catch attention by spinning about like a top, then halt suddenly, and improvise.

During Margaret's years in Cambridge, Hedge noticed that Margaret's conversational capacities had continued to grow until they were beyond a doubt her "most decided gift." 95 When she was a mature woman, Alcott considered her "the most brilliant talker of the day." 96 He found her possessed of "a quick and comprehensive wit, a firm command of her thoughts, and a speech to win the ear of the most cultivated." 97 In the "arena of conversation," Margaret "found none adequate for the equal encounter; when she had laid her lance in rest, every champion must go down before it." 98 Her leadership abilities were, in a large part, due to the fact that "Whoever conversed with her felt challenged by the strongest personal influence to a bold and generous life." 99 Her friends all

94 Ibid.
95 Beach, op. cit., p. 179.
96 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 172.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., I, 105.
99 Ibid., I, 232.
"dated back to this or that conversation with Margaret." 100

While most of Margaret's friends seem to have been most impressed with her powers of conversation during private discourse, Emerson thought that she "always appeared to unexpected advantage in conversation with a large circle." There "she had more sanity than any other; whilst, in private, her vision was often through colored lenses." 101

In view of the facts that Margaret could not write but could speak well and easily and that she enjoyed speaking, it was not without cause that, when she needed a paying occupation, she turned to use her natural abilities by conducting Conversations for Women.

These Conversations epitomize her leadership. She had demonstrated that liabilities could be turned into assets. She could overcome obstacles which might have discouraged anyone of less stamina. She compensated for her "masculine mind" by blending it with her "feminine nature" and creating a dynamic personality. She compensated for her lack of physical charm by cultivating a regal bear-

100 Ibid., I, 107--8.
101 Ibid., I, 216.
ing. She compensated for her inability to express herself in writing by utilizing her facility for oral expression. In this way she manifested that leadership which was the outstanding characteristic acknowledged by her biographers.
CHAPTER IV

CONVERSATIONS

...the famous conversations in which, more fully than in quight else, Margaret may be said to have delivered her message to the women of her time.

Julia Ward Howe

One needs to understand the Conversations in order to understand Margaret Fuller. There existed a synonymity between Margaret Fuller and her Conversations. Had she not been what she was, they would never have existed in their particular character.

The idea of Conversations for Women may have had its incipiency during a lecture which Margaret heard while she was teaching in Providence, Rhode Island. She heard an address by Mr. John Neal to the girls of the school, "on the destiny and vocation of Woman in this country," and was deeply impressed. She wrote in her Journal that he had given "truly, a manly view, though not the view of common men."¹

Perhaps it was this Providence lecture, as one author has suggested,² which started Margaret thinking about

¹Ibid., I, 181-2

²Mason Wade, Margaret Fuller, Whetstone of Genius (New York: Viking Press, 1940), p. 69.
organizing Conversations for Women, to help them determine what their destiny and vocation should be. She confided her idea in a letter to her sympathetic friend, Sarah Ripley. Mrs. Ripley circulated this letter among her friends, to ascertain what response might be expected.

In this letter, Margaret stated that her idea was to hold weekly meetings for the purposes of conversation in order to supply "a point of union to well-educated and thinking women." This alone, she felt, might "be great enough to repay the trouble of attendance...in a city (Boston) which, with great pretensions to mental refinement, boasts, at present, nothing of the kind." She had heard many women wish for "some such means of stimulus and cheer" and for "a place where they could state their doubts and difficulties, with a hope of gaining aid from the experience or aspirations of others." In her role as a leader, she

3Wife of George Ripley, the Unitarian clergyman, who was President of the Brook Farm Association and literary editor of the New York Tribune.

4Margaret's letter to Mrs. Ripley, selections from which are included here on pages 87-88, is contained in Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 324--8.

5Ibid., I, 324.

6Ibid.

7Ibid., I, 324--5.
hoped to be able to suggest subjects which

would lead to conversation of a better order
than is usual at social meetings, and to turn
back the current when digressing into personal-
alties or common-places, so that what is val-
uable in the experience of each might be brought
to bear upon all. 8

These were to be the minimal results expected.

Margaret's ambition was, in addition, "to pass in
review the departments of thought and knowledge, and en-
deavor to place them in due relation to one another in
our minds," thus offering the women an opportunity to
systematize and classify their knowledge and experience
in order to make it useful to them.

To systematize thought, and give a precision
and clearness in which our sex are so defi-
cient, chiefly, I think, because they have
so few inducements to test and classify what
they receive. 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 life of action. 9

She asked Mrs. Ripley whether she thought a circle
could be assembled "in earnest," interested in answering
such questions as, "What were we born to do? and how shall
we do it?" 10 She was confident that if twenty persons were
"brought together from better motives than vanity or pedan-
try, to talk upon such subjects as we propose," they would

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8Ibid., I, 325.
9Ibid.
10Ibid.
soon find in themselves "great deficiencies, which they
will be very desirous to supply." These questions, she
remarked, "few ever propose to themselves till their best
years are gone by." She personally felt that such an at-
tempt would be "a noble one," and she would be willing,
"if my resources should prove sufficient to make me its
moving spring," to devote considerable time to the venture
during "those coming years, which will, as I hope, be my
best." So far as I have tried them yet, they have
met with success so much beyond my hopes,
that my faith will not easily be shaken,
or my earnestness chilled.

Her enthusiasm, she felt, was well warranted.

I look upon it with no blind enthusiasm,
or unlimited faith, but with a confidence
that I have attained a distinct perception
of means, which, if there are persons com-
petent to direct them, can supply a great
want, and promote really high objects...
I do not fear, if a good beginning can be
made.

She had complete confidence in her own capacities. She knew
that, during the course of her life, she had overcome many
obstacles, and felt that this made her competent to assist

11Ibid., I, 325--6.
12Ibid., I, 325.
13Ibid.
14Ibid., I, 325--6.
15Ibid.
others in facing similar problems. If they did not follow, she would be disappointed, but theirs would be the loss. She had succeeded before in drawing others out to their own benefit; she would succeed again.

In the event of failure, she said, "it will be either from incompetence in me, or that sort of vanity in them which wears the garb of modesty." Failure was not likely to be due to her own incompetence, she thought. When she said, "On the first of these, I need not speak," she was dismissing that prospect. When she said, "I have not given my gauge without measuring my capacity to sustain defeat," it was not in anticipation of failure on her part, but in recognition of frailties among the participants. They might seek shelter in "vague generalities, the arts of coterie criticism, and the 'delicate disdains' of good society."

Nevertheless, even in the face of these human weaknesses, Margaret was certain that the plan would succeed. At least it was worth trying, for:

without such generous courage, nothing of value can be learned or done, I hope to see many capable of it; willing that others should think their sayings crude, shallow,

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16. Ibid., I, 326.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
or tasteless, if, by such pleasant means, they may attain real health and vigor, which need no aid from rouge or candlelight, to brave the light of the world. 19

She wanted one thing understood from the beginning: she would not tolerate passive auditors. She was proposing to conduct a conversation class, not a series of lectures. She hoped to supply subjects which would give rise to lively discussions in which all those present would participate. Having been "told of persons who are desirous to join the class, 'if only they need not talk,'" she was "so sure that the success of the whole depends on conversation being general" that she did not want "any one to come, who does not intend, if possible, to take an active part." 20 Of course, no one would be forced to take part, but those who did not should not expect to get the full value of the conversations.

No one will be forced, but those who do not talk will not derive the same advantages with those who openly state their impressions, and can consent to have it known that they learn by blundering, as is the destiny of man here below. 21

Silence on the part of any member or members would handicap Margaret in her attempt to direct the conversation.

General silence, or side talks, would paralyze me. I should feel coarse and misplaced, were I to harangue over-much. 22

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19bid., I, 326--7.
20bid., I, 327.
If each member contributed her share, however, the venture would be enjoyable for all as it had been on previous occasions, where

I have been able to make it easy and even pleasant, to twenty-five out of thirty, to bear their part, to question, to define, to state, and examine opinions.23

If she were unable to do so with this group, she would consider herself unsuccessful and withdraw. She realized, however, that it might take some time for the members to become accustomed to the arrangement, and was willing, in the meantime, to carry the main burden of responsibility for the group.

I shall expect communication to be effected by degrees, and to do a great deal at the first meetings.24

Not wanting to pledge herself to any specific series of subjects, Margaret explained that they would in general, be "such as literature and the arts present in endless profusion."25 Nevertheless, she wanted to remain free during the first few meetings to determine the probable wisdom of

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., I, 328.
following the particular design she had in mind, a design which, she remarked, would at that time "look too grand on paper." Since, at the time of this letter, Margaret was not certain that the Conversations would ever materialize, she wanted to "see whether there will be any organ, before noting down the music to which it may give breath." 27

The method which had brought Margaret previous success, and which she intended to follow during the proposed Conversations would

open a subject, -- for instance, Poetry, as expressed in --
External Nature;
The life of man;
Literature;
The fine arts;
or, The history of a nation to be studied in --
Its religion and civil institutions;
Its literature and arts;
The characters of its great men;

and, after as good a general statement as I know how to make, select a branch of the subject, and lead others to give their thoughts upon it. 28

If the members were not successful in the oral expression of their thoughts, she would ask them to write out their views. Then, during the succeeding Conversation, she would

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., I, 327--8.
read these "skirts of pen and ink" to the others without mentioning the authors' names, and "canvass their adequacy." So far as using this latter method, however, she did not care to rely upon it any more than was absolutely necessary. Previously she had found this

less necessary, as I proceeded, and my companions attained greater command both of thought and language; but for a time it was useful, and may be now. Great advantage in point of discipline may be derived from even this limited use of the pen.

Boston, she believed, would be the logical place to undertake such a venture, and "Should I...be disappointed in Boston, I could hardly hope that such a plan could be brought to bear on general society, in any other city of the United States."31

The possibility of the Conversations for Women became a reality in the fall of 1839 when Margaret undertook that project in which, as Mrs. Howe expressed it, "more fully than in aught else, Margaret may be said to have delivered her message to the women of her time."32

The series of Conversations for Women were to be held thereafter each winter, finally terminating in April of

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29 Ibid., I, 328.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., I, 326.
32 Julia Ward Howe, op. cit., p. 104.
1844, six years later. An evening series for mixed
groups was attempted, but these have come down as the
ill-fated "Evenings of Mythology."

To the present-day reader there may appear to be
little that was spectacular about the Conversations. To
the typical Bostonian in 1839, however, they presented
a startling spectacle. There was some doubt as to whether
it was respectable for a woman to express her views in pub-
lic. There was, moreover, some apprehension concerning
where this freedom of expression might lead. The women
themselves, on the other hand, considered the opportunity
of sufficient importance to pay twenty dollars apiece to
attend a series of thirteen two-hour conversation sessions.

That is not to say that in 1839 the idea was complete-
ly new. During Margaret's generation, conversations were
common both here and abroad. In England, Carlyle and Col-
eridge were conducting conversations. Their writings were
well known to Margaret. In the States, Alcott, Emerson,
and Channing were "leaders of a talkers' guild." Margaret
knew them intimately. In fact, it has been suggested
that she undertook the Conversations in imitation of Al-

33Nason Wade, op. cit., pp. 77-8, suggests that the
Conversations may seem today merely "a homespun imitation
of the salon without its social charms and amenities."

34Anthony, op. cit., p. 61.
cott, who had earlier held similar systematized conversations for men. 36

A closer and perhaps more influential precedent than Alcott's was Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's 36 "conferences for women" six years earlier. These conferences, held first in 1833 and then again in 1836, were apparently conducted in much the same manner that Margaret intended to employ in the Conversations: a brief lecture was given, then essays were read, then there was a group discussion. 37

With the Conversations, as with all other aspects of

35 Margaret's idea had been received enthusiastically by Alcott when she confided it to him during the summer of 1839. He noted in his Journal at that time that: "She is the most commanding talker of the day, of her sex, and must sway society: such a position is worthy of her gifts. I trust those who shall hear her will reap a rich harvest of thought and become powers of like seed in the bosom of the Age." (Wade, op. cit., pp. 68-9.)

36 A close friend of Margaret's, whom Mrs. Dall described as: "a woman of remarkable accumulations of learning, and as remarkable a breadth of sympathy.... a teacher, -- an enthusiastic advocate of Kindergarten ...(who) opened at No. 13 West St., Boston, a foreign Circulating Library....Her own great powers did not accomplish all they ought, because it was impossible for her to apply them systematically." (Dall, op. cit., pp. 17-9.)

37 Wade, op. cit., p. 68.
her life, Margaret created considerable consternation among Boston's elite, from which she drew her members. She elicited no lukewarm support and no lukewarm opposition, but, rather, devoted followers and equally determined detractors.

No single motive can be interpreted as being responsible for Margaret's undertaking these Conversations. There was a combination of motives which compelled her to do so. In fairness to her, then, they must all be considered. Typical of human nature, Margaret had motives which she never admitted, not even to herself; she had motives which she admitted to herself and to a few close friends; and then she had motives which she publicized.

The motives which Margaret publicized were 1) to provide an opportunity for women to express and exchange views on topics of significance, and 2) to determine the destiny and vocation of Woman in contemporary life.

The motives which she admitted to herself and to a few close friends concerned her economic condition as well as her talents. When Margaret was twenty-three, her father died, leaving the family in financial straits. Margaret sacrificed her long-awaited trip to Europe, which had been promised to her before her father's death, and for a period
which she considered would have been her most productive years and would have provided for her a literary career, she assumed the financial responsibility for her mother, younger brothers, and sister.

She found teaching distasteful and detrimental to her health, and now was searching for an agreeable means of earning an income. In her day a reputable woman's career was limited to writing or teaching children.

Prescriptions almost invincible the female lecturer or professor of any science must encounter; and, except on points where the charities which are left to women as their legitimate province interpose against the ferocity of laws, with us a female politician is unknown.38

Margaret knew her limitations as a writer, and was equally aware of her talents as a speaker. Her friends were aware of her need for a remunerative as well as an agreeable means of income. Mrs. Dall remembered that Margaret had "great need of money." Mrs. Dall stated that, as for her own participation in the evening Conversations, she "was very young to join such a circle," and believed that the invitation was extended more out of regard for "Margaret's purse, than to... fitness for the company."39

Margaret's friends were not only aware that she needed

38Emerson in Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 322.
39Dall, op. cit., pp. 9-11
an income. They were equally aware of her inability to write and make a living in that manner. Emerson expressed their attitude that it was quite natural that, "When, there-fore, she had to choose an employment...she consulted her own genius," so turning to speaking rather than to writing. 40

In addition to her published ideas and the practical motives which her friends were aware of, there were the motives which Margaret never admitted as influencing her to conduct these Conversations and which, it may be assumed, she was probably not aware of. These motives are construed from later admissions regarding her inner needs. She was, she said, "accustomed to deference" from her hearers, and needed it for the "boldness and animation" expected of her. 41 The need for deference as a motive for the Conversations is implied from the lifelong tendency to become the center of attention. She achieved this, as Emerson implied, not so much by overrating herself as by underrating her associates. "In vain," he said, "I once professed reverence for a youth of genius," only to be told by Margaret, "No, she was intimate with his mind," and knew that the others spoiled him "by overrating him." Everson was an-noyed that "Meantime we knew that she had never seen, nor would see, his subtle superiorities." 42

40 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 324.
41 Ibid., II, 75.
42 Ibid., I, 284.
The need to satisfy a dramatic instinct is suggested as a second motive. This can be construed from the fact that she surrounded herself with all available glamour. She arrived only after her audience was poised and expectant, then she would insist upon being placed in the right light, having her prinz nez properly adjusted, and thereafter doing all with a flourish. Hawthorne, with no love for Margaret, recalled in retrospect that she had been a "great humbug." Yet, even he had to add, "of course, with much talent and much moral reality, or else she could never have been so great a humbug." His objection was that "she had stuck herself full of borrowed qualities which she chose to provide herself with, but which had no root in her." 43 Perhaps what he saw was what one author referred to when she stated that Margaret's entire life "seemed to be a studied act, rather than a spontaneous growth." 44

The first Conversation was convened at Elizabeth Peabody's foreign book-shop, No. 13 West Street, Boston, (the gathering place of Boston's intelligentsia), 45 at eleven o'clock in the morning, November 6, 1839. Margaret met her

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43 Arvin, op. cit., p. 271.
45 Brooks, Emerson, p. 10.
match in the twenty-five women who attended. T. W. Higgin-
son called these women the "most alert and active-minded
women" in Boston. Emerson referred to them as "some of
the most agreeable and intelligent women to be found in Bos-
ton and its neighborhood," at that time. Names which were
to appear regularly among those attending -- Channing, Gar-
diner, Jackson, Lee, Loring, Putnam, Russell, Shaw, Sturgis,
Tuckerman, Ward, and Whiting -- have been designated as Bos-
ton's best. These were the wives and daughters of mer-
chants, ministers, and Harvard faculty members. Membership
was to vary little over the years, although there would be
an occasional visitor.

Among these elite were represented the extremes of at-
titude. Some were of liberal mind. Others typified the
formality of the old theology. Thus the "extremes of bigo-
try and skepticism" were represented. Margaret thought it
well to seat the ladies with care therefore.

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46 Higginson, op. cit., p. 115.
47 As cited in Wade, op. cit., p. 70.
48 Ibid., pp. 74-5.
49 Emerson et al., op. cit., pp. 337-8, included the
following note: "A friend has furnished me [Emerson] with
the names of so many of the ladies as she recollects to
have met, at one or another time, at these classes. Some
of them were perhaps only occasional members. This list
recalls how much talent, beauty, and worth were at that time
constellated here: -- Mrs. George Bancroft, Mrs. Barlow,
It may appear an incongruity that in her letter to Mrs. Ripley Margaret had stressed the importance of these meetings for helping women determine what should be their true destiny and vocation, and then, on November 25, 1839, she wrote a letter to Emerson stating, "I assure you, there is more Greek than Bostonian spoken at the meetings."

The first day's topics were, the genealogy of heaven and earth; then the Will (Jupiter); the Understanding, (Mercury); the second day's, the celestial inspiration of genius, perception and transmission of divine law, (Apollo); the terrene inspiration, the impassioned abandonment of genius (Bacchus). Of the thunderbolt, the caduceus, the ray, and the grape, having disposed as well as might be, we came to the wave, and the sea-shell it moulds to Beauty, and Love her parent and her child. Actually, however, while a change in purpose seems to be implied in the letter to Emerson, the fact is that is merely indicates the general theme whereby the original purpose stated in the Ripley letter would be approached. Margaret pointed out in suggesting this theme to the members that she had no intention of discussing current events on Olympus. Emerson expressed her purpose in making this particular choice when he said that:

Under the mythological forms, room was found for opening all the great ques- 

Miss Burley, Mrs. L. M. Child, Miss Mary Channing, Miss Sarah Clarke, Mrs. E. P. Clark, Miss Dorr, Mrs. Edwards, Mrs. R. W. Emerson, Mrs. Farrar, Miss S. J. Gardiner, Mrs. R. W. Hooper, Mrs. S. Hooper, Miss Haliburton, Miss Howes, Miss E. Hoar, Miss Marianne Jackson,
tions on which Margaret and her friends wished to converse.\textsuperscript{52}

Grecian mythology was a good theme to follow because:

It is quite separated from all exciting local subjects. It is serious, without being solemn, and without excluding any mode of intellectual action; it is playful, as well as deep. It is sufficiently wide, for it is a complete expression of the cultivation of a nation. It is objective and tangible. It is, also, generally known, and associated with all our ideas of the arts.\textsuperscript{53}

Finding that there were several members who were shocked at the prospect of Christian ladies in Christian times envying the Greeks, Margaret explained that that was not what she intended. She had no desire to revert, because contemporary civilization possessed the element of a deeper civilization. It was, however, still in infancy, while the Greek civilization could be viewed at its maturity. She scarcely thought that one could afford to view the expression of a great nation’s intellect as insignificant. She explained, one member recalled, that:

Mrs. T. Lee, Miss Littlehale, Mrs. E. G. Loring, Mrs. Mack, Mrs. Horace Mann, Mrs. Newcomb, Mrs. Theodore Parker, Miss E. P. Peabody, Miss S. Peabody, Mrs. S. Putnam, Mrs. Phillips, Mrs. Josiah Quincy, Miss B. Randall, Mrs. Samuel Ripley, Mrs. George Ripley, Mrs. George Russell, Miss Ida Russell, Mrs. Frank Shaw, Miss Anna B. Shaw, Miss Caroline Sturgis, Miss Tuckerman, Miss Maria White, Mrs. S. G. Ward, Miss Mary Ward, Mrs. W. Whiting.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{50}Julia Ward Howe, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 108--9.

\textsuperscript{51}Emerson \textit{et al., op. cit.}, I, 331--2.

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Ibid.}, I, 33.

\textsuperscript{53}Elizabeth Palmer Peabody’s \textit{(E.P.P. in Mrs. Dall’s}
These fables of the Gods were the result of the universal sentiments of religion, aspiration, intellectual action, of a people, whose political and aesthetic life had become immortal; and we must leave off despising, if we would begin to learn.54

Margaret hoped to transcend partisan politics and religion; to go beyond local happenings and local beliefs to truly universal concepts.

While Grecian mythology was the general theme for the first winter's series of Conversations, thereafter a new general theme was chosen for each series, and specific subjects for discussion chosen at each meeting, within the framework of the general theme.

During the first Conversation, Margaret followed the procedure which she had outlined in her letter to Mrs. Ripley. She began with a brief introductory lecture. In so doing, she expanded upon topics which she had discussed in that letter. She expressed her belief to the group of women assembled that their educational opportunities were definitely and needlessly limited. "It is," she said, "to supply this defect that these conversations have been planned."

notes) notes as contained in Ibid., I, 329--30. Unless otherwise designated, the notes on the Conversations presented in the text are Miss Peabody's.

54 Ibid., I, 330--1.
Women are now taught, at school, all that men are; they run over, superficially, even more studies, without being really taught anything. When they come to the business of life, they find themselves inferior, and all their studies have not given them that practical good sense, and mother wisdom, and wit, which grew up with our grandmothers at the spinning-wheel. But, with this difference; men are called on, from a very early period, to reproduce all that they learn. Their college exercises, their political duties, their professional studies, the first actions of life in any direction, call on them to put to use what they have learned. But women learn without any attempt to reproduce.

Margaret was offering her circle an opportunity to reproduce what they had learned and so to benefit from their educations, such as they were.

She explained that she did not intend to teach them anything. She had had previous experience, however, in conducting such conversations as they were about to begin. Consequently, she hoped that her role among them would call upon her only to suggest subjects, provide some information about those subjects and an outline which might provide unity to the discussion, then provoke the thoughts of the others and help them to express their own views freely.

Margaret's "suggestions" for specific subjects were invariably accepted. She guided the women in making their

55Ibid., I, 328--9.
"choice," by suggesting that concerning the subjects to be selected, "It would be best to take subjects on which we know words, and have vague impressions, and compel ourselves to define those words."56 In the way that Margaret related the specific subject to the general theme, Emerson was impressed by the universality of Margaret's outlook. "Margaret had," he said, "with certain limitations, or, must we say, strictures, these larger lungs, inhaling this universal element, and could speak to Jew and Greek, free and bond, to each in his own tongue."57

Having disposed of the choice of a specific subject at the first meeting, Margaret continued in her introductory talk to explain the origins of the mythological forms.

It originated in the eye of the Greek. He lived out of doors; his climate was genial, his senses were adapted to it. He was vivacious and intellectual, and personified all he beheld. He saw the naiads, nereids. Their forms, as poets and painters give them, are the very lines of nature humanized, as the child's eye sees faces in the embers or in the clouds.

Other forms of the mythology, as Jupiter, Juno, Apollo, are great instincts, or ideas, or facts of the internal constitution, separated and personified.58

Margaret, by her choice of theme, had provided a common ground upon which the members could meet. She then, hav-

57 Ibid., I, 217.
58 Ibid., I, 330.
56 Ibid., I, 329.
ing suggested the best way to approach the subjects at hand, invited criticisms, comments, and questions. All of her thoughts were "much illustrated" as she "told what she intended, the earnest purpose with which she came, and, with great tact, indicated the indiscretions that might spoil the meeting." Ten or twelve members responded to her use of persuasion for the shy and "kindly raillery" for the apathetic.

Her letter to Emerson expressed her own view of the first meeting. She found that her class was "prosperous."

I was so fortunate as to rouse, at once, the tone of simple earnestness, which can scarcely, when once awakened, cease to vibrate. All seem in a glow, and quite as receptive as I wish. They question and examine, yet follow leadings; and thoughts, not opinions, have ruled the hour every time. There are about twenty-five members, and every one, I believe, full of interest. The first time, ten took part in the conversation.

Emerson concluded that "the class was happy" and noted that "the interest increased" as the series progressed.

A comment from one member was: "I never heard, read of, or imagined a conversation at all equal to this we have now heard." Emerson was not surprised. "Margaret al-

59Ibid., I, 330--1;
60Higginson, op. cit., p. 116.
61Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 351.
62Ibid., I, 336.
63Ibid., I, 337--8.
ways appeared to advantage in conversation with a large
circle."

Apparently Margaret's hopes were justified by the
first series of Conversations. The group, at least, was
so well pleased as to implore Margaret to undertake a simi-
lar series during the ensuing winter.

Margaret consented. The second series began in No-

tember of 1840. The theme decided upon was that of the
fine arts. Margaret was gratified to find that the group
assembled was larger than she had anticipated. Among those
present were

several persons from homes out of town, at
considerable inconvenience; and, in one or
two instances, fresh from extreme experi-
ences of joy and grief.

Margaret knew that they had assembled "to learn from each
other and ourselves the highest ends of life, where there
could be no excitement and gratifications of personal
ambition, &c,"

The changes which had taken place in Margaret's
mind during the summer of 1840 portended to be reflected

64See footnote 191, p. 63.
65Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 340.
66Ibid.
in the second series. In her introduction to this series, she said she felt she had undergone changes in her own mind since the last winter, as doubtless we all felt we had done; that she was conscious of looking at all things less objectively, — more from the law with which she identified herself. This, she stated, was the natural progress of our individual being, when we did not hinder its development, to advance from objects to law, from the circumference of being, where we found ourselves at our birth, to the centre.

Such a confession was typical of a pattern of benign martyrdom utilized to make her listeners feel grateful to her. She had consented in the first place to hold the second series; now, by consescending to admit them into her personal life, she indebted them to her still further. In a letter written at this time to Channing, Margaret expressed the belief that after this meeting no lack of understanding would ever again be possible between herself and the others.

It was a noble meeting. I told them the great changes in my mind, and that I could not be sure they would be satisfied with me now, as they were when I was in deliberate possession of myself. I tried to convey the truth, and though I did not arrive at any full expression of it, they all, with glistening eyes, seemed melted into one love. Our relation is now perfectly true, and I do not think they will ever interrupt. me.

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63 [bid.], I, 340--1.
68 [bid.], I, 339.
With her less determined and self-assured attitude she was received enthusiastically by the women. Margaret was delighted by their understanding of her during this particular meeting.

-----sat beside me, all glowing; and the moment I had finished, she began to speak. She told me afterwards, she was all kindled, and none there could be strangers to her more. I was really delighted by the enthusiasm of Mrs. -----, I did not expect it. All her best self seemed called up, and she feels that these meetings will be her highest pleasure. -----, too, was most beautiful. 69

Instinctively, Margaret desired an intimate personal relationship with each member of her audience, and it was only when she was able to attain this relationship that her talents and personality were fully brought forth. She herself said that only in personal contact did she have complete confidence in herself.

The Conversation which followed the introductory note was "pretty much a monologue of her own." 70 The subject of that monologue was that "We should only seek to live as harmoniously with the great laws as our social and other duties permitted," finding solace in the fine arts.

We could not, in our individual lives, amid the disturbing influences of other wills,

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., I, 340--1.
which had as much right to their own ac-
tion as we to ours, enact poetry entirely;
the discordant, the inferior, the prose,
would intrude, but we should always keep
in mind that poetry of life was not some-
thing aside; -- a path that might or might
not be trod, -- it was the only path of the
true soul; and prose you may call the devi-
ation. We might not always be poetic in life,
but we might and should be poetic in our
thought and intention. The fine arts were
one compensation for the necessary prose of
life. The man who could not write his thought
of beauty in his life, -- the materials of
whose life would not work up into poetry, --
wrote it in stone, drew it on canvas, breathed
it in music, or built it in lofty rhyme. In
this statement, however, she (Margaret) guarded
her meaning, and said that to seek beauty was
to miss it often.71

Throughout the remainder of this series of Conversations,
all the various forms of the fine arts -- music, painting,
sculpture, and the dance had their places. Emerson testi-
fied that while "A few fragmentary notes only of these
hours" had been shown him, still "all those who bore any
part in them testify to their entire success."72 Notes
from one of these conversations dealing with the dance as
an art form indicate how the general theme of fine arts
provided a framework for implied meaning, in terms of the
stated purposes of the Conversations. The social mores
on an international scale are reflected in their respec-
tive dance forms.

71 Ibid., I, 341.
72 Ibid., I, 336.
Cavottes, shawl dances, and all of that kind, are intended merely to exhibit the figure in as many attitudes as possible. They have no character, and say nothing, except, Look! How graceful I am!

The minuet is conjugal; but the wedlock is chivalric. Even so would Adam's wind slow, stately, calm, through the mazes of life, with Oriana, when he had made obeisances enough to win her for a partner.

English, German, Swiss, French, and Spanish dances all express the same things, though in very different ways. Love and its life are still the theme.

In the English country dances, the pair who have chosen one another, submit decorously to the restraints of courtship and frequent separations, cross hands, four go round, down outside, in the most earnest, lively, compliment fashion. If they join hands to go down the middle, and exhibit their union to all spectators, they part almost as soon as meet, and disdain not to give hands right and left to the most indifferent persons, like marriage in its daily routine.

In the Swiss, the man pursues, stamping with energy, marking the time by exulting flings, or snapping of the fingers, in delighted confidence of succeeding at last; but the maiden coyly, demurely, feet it round, yet never gets out of the way, intending to be won.

The German asks his madchen if she will, with him, for an hour forget the cares and common-places of life in a tumult of rapturous sympathy, and she smiles with Saxon modesty her ja. He sustains her in his arms; the music begins. At first, in willing mazes they calmly imitate the planetary orbs, but melodies flow quicker, their accordant hearts beat higher, and they whirl at last into giddy raptures, and dizzy evolutions, which steal from life its free-will
and self-collection, till nothing is left but mere sensation.

The French couple are somewhat engaged with one another, but almost equally so with the world around them. They think it well to vary existence with plenty of coquetry and display. First, the graceful reverence to one another, then to their neighbors. Exhibit your grace in the chasse, -- made apparently solely for the purpose of deshabille, -- then civil intimacy between the ladies, in la chaine, then a decorous promenade of partners, then right and left with all the world, and balance, &c. The quadrille also offers opportunity for talk. Looks and sympathetic motions are not enough for our Parisian friends, unless eked out by words.

The impassioned bolero and fandango are the dances for me. They are not merely loving, but living; they express the sweet Southern ecstasy at the mere gift of existence. These persons are together, they live, they are beautiful; how can they say this in sufficiently plain terms? -- I love, I live, I am beautiful! -- I put on my festal dress to do honor to my happiness; I shake my castenets that my hands, too, may be busy; I felice, -- felicissima! 73

By this time, the Conversations had become established as an integral part of Boston's cultural setting. The third series, held in 1841-1842, brought under consideration the general theme of Ethics. Under this theme were discussed such individual subjects as woman's place in the Family, the School, the Church, in Literature, and in Society. It was from this series of Conversations, materials for which seem to have been de-

73Ibid., I, 334--6.
rived largely from the personal experiences of the members, that Margaret's most successful and most influential book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, evolved.

No general theme has been discerned for the series which took place during the next winter of 1842-1843, but it is known that among the specific subjects considered by the group were: "Is the ideal first or last? divination or experience?" "Persons who never awake to life in this world;" "Mistakes," "Faith," "Creeds," "Woman," "Daemonology," "Influence," "Catholicism (Roman)," and "The Ideal." That November Margaret noted in her Journal that "Yesterday we had at my class a conversation on Faith. Deeply true things were said and felt."74

The following year, 1843-1844, the fifth and final series was conducted. This time the general theme was announced as "Education." Subjects discussed under this theme were concerned with Culture, Ignorance, Vanity, Prudence, Patience, and Health. Emerson stated that during this series there were "wide digressions" from the subject and "much autobiographic illustration" and "episodes on War, Bonaparte, Goethe, and Spinoza."75

To the end, Margaret maintained a personal relation—

74 _Ibid._, II, 71.
75 _Ibid._, I, 350+1.
ship with each member of the group. On April 28, 1844, she wrote the following note, describing in glowing terms, the last day of this series.

On bidding me good-bye, they all, and always, show so much good-will and love, that I feel I must really have become a friend to them. 76

Evidence of the great gratitude that the women felt toward her was given by loading her with beautiful gifts, accompanied with those little delicate poetical traits, of which I should delight to tell...Last came a beautiful bouquet, passion-flower, heliotrope, and soberer blooms. 77

She exclaimed enthusiastically, "How noble has been my experience of such relations now for six years, and with so various minds!" and concluded, "Life is worth living, is it not?" 78

Such success cannot be attributed to the evening Conversations which were held for both men and women. These Conversations will be compared with the Conversations for Women in order to point out the possible reasons for the mixed group not succeeding so well as the segregated group for women.

The only apparent precedent for the segregated group

76 Ibid., I, 351.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
of conversationalists was in the Transcendental conversations, where Margaret's presence was both expected and accepted, and where, on rare occasions, a few women visited.

Approximately thirty persons attended these evening Conversations, held at the home of the Rev. George Ripley. They included: Mr. and Mrs. George Ripley, Elizabeth Hoar, Elizabeth Peabody, Frederick Henry Hedge, James Freeman Clarke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mrs. Farrar, Mr. and Mrs. Francis G. Shaw, Mrs. Ann Wilby Clarke, Mrs. Jonathan Russell and her daughter, Ida, William White, William Story, Caroline Sturgis, Mrs. Samuel Ward, Jones Very, Alcott, W. Mack, Sophia Peabody, Marianne Jackson, and Charles Sterns Wheeler. This list is said to have included the names of several brilliant, independent thinkers.

In all of her Conversations, Margaret used the same procedure. In this mixed group, the general theme was the same as that of the first series of Conversations for Women: Grecian mythology as illustrated in art. Mrs. Cheney explained why Margaret was fond of the

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79 Dall, op. cit., pp. 17-22, lists and describes those attending the evening Conversations.

80 See Appendix for the Dall notes on the first two Evenings of Mythology.
mythological theme:

Nature readily yielded to her its spiritual meaning, and it was for that she valued it. Hence, the old mythologies, especially the Greeks, were very dear to her, and she was never weary of interpreting their meaning. It was human life speaking, and without hesitation she recognized its natural piety under any guise. As the Greeks had read the meaning of nature, so nature to her interpreted the Greeks.82

She wanted Grecian mythology illustrated in art because her own interest was in the art forms and because she would thereby be able to give her own subjective interpretation to the classical myths. She hoped that the classical knowledge among the gentlemen would be used to compensate for the lack of formal knowledge among the women.

The first two evening Conversations were entitled, "A General Mythological Statement," in which Margaret gave an overview of the entire field of mythology. She based her statements on the principle that the Grecian genius humanized and idealized the primitive religious concepts, though retaining the fundamental idea.83

Margaret expanded upon this by explaining that

81 Ednah Dow Littlehale, later Mrs. Cheney, was a member of the Conversation circle.


83 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 348, contains Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's note of this statement.
what had been only a seed, a root, in the mind of the
Egyptian had grown into a flower in the mind of the Greek.

Isis, and Osiris, for instance, are reproduced in Jeres and Proserpine, with some
loss of generality, but with great gain of
beauty; Hermes, in Mercury, with only more
grace of form, though with great loss of
grandeur; but the loss of grandeur was also
an advance in philosophy, in this instance,
the brain in the hand being the natural con-
sequence of the application of Idea to prac-
tice, -- the Hermes of the Egyptians. 84

Her interpretations did not always coincide with
commonly accepted interpretations. This upset Mrs. Dall.
Mrs. Dall was also upset over the fact that Roman and
Grecian names were used interchangeably. Art or no art,
the Greek gods were not the Roman gods to her. 85 This
indicates Mrs. Dall's limitations, but it also illus-
trates Margaret's purposes. Margaret was interested in
the universal concepts -- not in the identification of
gods. Nor was Margaret intent upon pleasing only Mrs.
Dall. On the whole, the members (Mrs. Dall among them)
had come to hear Margaret's own interpretation of Greek
mythology through the art forms.

During the succeeding Conversations, the following

84 Ibid., I, 348–9.
85 Dall, op. cit., pp. 11-15.
subjects were discussed in the following order: Novalis and Apollo, Minerva and the Serpent, Venus and Psyche, Cupid and Psyche, Pluto and Tater aeus, Mersury and Orpheus, Hermes and Orpheus, and Bacchus and the Demigods.

Margaret's motives in beginning the mixed Conversa-
tions were, 1) to grant the request from her friends -- male and female, to conduct a mixed class similar to that which was already conducted in the morning for the women, and 2) to help her meet her need for money. Perhaps there was a third, an ulterior motive: to derive from the men knowledge which she lacked.

The first motive was satisfied. With her usual air of condescension, Margaret "consented to gratify many who loved her" 86 by undertaking this series, although she was ill in health. 87 Emerson's contributions to the Memoirs contain numerous statements which indicate that Margaret undertook this series mainly because her friends wanted her to.

Her second motive was also satisfied. She received twenty dollars per person for the series. Since Thirty

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86Ibid., p. 5.

87Emerson stated in the Memoirs that Margaret "was all her lifetime a victim of disease and pain?" (Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 229.)
persons attended, that increased her income considerably.

The third motive was not fulfilled, and this fact contributed largely to the failure of these Conversations.

She wanted to get knowledge. The male constituency consisted primarily of the same men as were in the Transcendental group. Most of them had a Harvard education. She expected their education to lend her support, to supply the material from which she could draw her ideas.

She thought, that, by admitting gentlemen, who had access, by their classical education, to the whole historical part of the mythology, her own comparative deficiency, as she felt it, in this part of learning, would be made up.88

She did not want to draw upon their ideas, but upon their formal knowledge, e.g., such as related to the origins of Greek and Roman names and classical interpretations of myths. They, however, could give no more information than she could, and, to make matters worse, they insisted upon interjecting their own ideas. The result was that they constantly got away from the original idea of each meeting and Margaret had to reproach them with the hope that they would adhere to the point at the next meeting.89

88 Ibid., I, 348.

89 See the Appendix for Mrs. Dall's short-hand notes on some of the Evenings of Mythology in which this is clearly demonstrated.
As she said with regard to the morning classes that if they failed it would not be due to her, so now she did not blame herself for the failure of the mixed evening classes. She was disappointed in them more than they in her. But while it was her disappointment, it was their loss.

It is possible that the women of the group had ulterior motives in wanting these Conversations. They had been greatly impressed by Margaret.

In this company of matrons and maids, many tender spirits had been set in ferment. A new day had dawned for them; new thoughts had opened; the secret of life was shown, or, at least, that life had a secret. They could not forget what they had heard, and what they had been surprised into saying. A true refinement had begun to work in many who had been slaves to trifles. They went home thoughtful and happy, since the steady elevation of Margaret's aim had infused a certain unexpected greatness of tone into the conversation.

These women may have wanted their husbands also to be impressed by the source of their ideas and the laudability of women thinking. When the men were not impressed, the women still upheld Margaret and held the men responsible for the failure of the evening Conversations.

No one knew just what went wrong during the course.

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90 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 337-8.
of these Conversations. At least, no one admitted knowing. Several factors seem to have contributed to their failure.

Elizabeth Peabody said apologetically that she felt the class did not do justice to Margaret, that the members had come merely for entertainment, and admitted that she herself had come with this attitude.91

Miss Peabody felt that one thing which might have alienated the men was Margaret's acceptance of evil. Even so loyal a friend as Miss Peabody felt obliged to admit that she herself had "thought, sometimes, that her [Margaret's] acceptance of evil was too great, -- that her theory of the good to be educated proved too much.92 Margaret possessed an unconventional attitude toward moral evil, generally attributed to her intensive study of Goethe, which disturbed her more Puritan friends. She was rebelling against the Puritanical denial of human nature. She believed that there was nothing wholly evil, leading logically to the inference that there is good to be educated from the greatest evil. To her there was no one totally moral or totally immoral.

She stated, for example, that "We do not but recog-

91Ibid., I, 349.
92Ibid., I, 350.
nize one part of ourselves in the worst actions of others" because, with regard to crime, "we cannot understand what we have not already felt; -- thus, all crimes have formed a part of our minds."93 The vulgarity, she believed, was in the minds of those who, for instance, through false modesty, favored the draping of nude statues. "If the body is the temple of the spirit, why should it be regarded as something evil?"94

Margaret was not the only one whose views during these Conversations Emerson construed as dogmatic. He thought the failure of these Conversations was probably due to the headiness of the man or their incapacity to follow Margaret because they too must assert and dogmatize, implying that they did it, and that she did not like it. He observed that:

Margaret spoke well, -- she could not otherwise, -- but I remember that she seemed encumbered, or interrupted, by the headiness or incapacity of the man, whom she had not had the advantage of training, and who fancied, no doubt, that, on such questions, they, too, must assert and dogmatize.95

93Ibid., I, 110.
94Bell, op. cit., p. 57.
95Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 347--8.
It was not that the men did not want anyone to dogmatize. They merely did not want to submit publicly to Margaret's dogmatizing. Knowing Margaret Fuller's characteristics, one feels that she probably asserted and dogmatized among the Transcendentalists, too, but there she was accepted as an intellectual among intellectuals, while in the Conversations she was dealing with a different sort of group. These men had wives and daughters in this group who were following Margaret Fuller, and undoubtedly aspiring to become like her. Though in private they were quite willing to follow her themselves, and even to confess to her their inner lives, apparently they were not going to show her deference and bow down to her intellectually in the presence of the women-folks.

An unadmitted jealousy or offended pride on the part of the men may have caused them to oppose Margaret in the evening Conversations. Margaret both loved and understood the women: "Margaret Fuller loved music, painting, and women, and understood the last."96 The women responded to her appreciation of them. The men sensed this affinity and resented it.

Margaret, according to most generally accepted the-

cries, was most completely herself among women alone because there she felt no need to defend herself against nineteenth century men with nineteenth century notions about women, but could rely upon the women's affection for, and understanding of, her. 97

It seems possible, if not probable, however, that the truth may be the exact reverse of this theory. Margaret may have felt more at ease among men where the intellect was of sole consideration than she did among women where she was, as she knew, the incarnation of an ideal. Conscious, thus, of every gesture and outward expression in the presence of the women, she was probably more natural among the men alone, than among women alone or in a mixed group. Thus, it may be concluded that the men not only were jealous of an affinity between the women and Margaret, but resented an affinity to an object which they could not admire as it appeared in the mixed group.

In summarizing, it becomes evident that where Margaret succeeded, the Conversations succeeded, and where Margaret "failed," the Conversations failed.

97Anthony states that "Margaret emerged a woman's woman...." (Ibid., p. 57)
When Margaret Fuller began the Conversations for Women in 1839, she had in mind three motives: to surround herself with glamour, to enjoy a lucrative career, and to become a moving force in making women aware of their intellectual potentialities. Margaret accomplished these purposes, but it was because she was able to stimulate the *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* to re-evaluate her vocation, thus changing the destiny of the woman in the twentieth century, that the influence of her Conversations has been lasting.

In 1841 Margaret was prevailed upon to undertake a similar series of Conversations attended by both men and women. The plan she had followed during the course of the Conversations for Women to stimulate intellectual participation she now employed in the mixed group. While this plan had proved superlatively adaptable to the women, it was wholly unsuitable to the men.

Whereas she had been able to melt the women into one glowing whole in the women's group, she had to admonish them to keep to the point in the mixed group. Whereas the women came to hear Margaret talk, the men came to hear themselves talk. Whereas the women looked at Margaret with starry-eyed admiration, the men regarded her with green-eyed jealousy. Whereas the women
followed Margaret, the men are recorded as walking out on her.

Since procedure and theme had been the same for both groups, the success or failure of the Conversations had its basis in the personal relationship of Margaret to the respective groups.
CHAPTER V

CONSEQUENCES

...a very different kind of woman was beginning to take shape, not only in the mind of Margaret Fuller but in the life of the world.

Amy Wellington

Since the success of any venture depends upon the extent to which its original purpose or purposes are fulfilled, any attempt at evaluation of Margaret Fuller's Conversations for Women must be based upon the extent to which they fulfilled her initial expectations.

In the preceding chapter it was proposed that Margaret's motives for undertaking the Conversations were three-fold. Hence, it will be the purpose of this chapter to determine as accurately as possible the extent to which these three motives were realized.

Margaret's subconscious motives have been construed as, 1) a need for deference, and 2) a desire to be always the center of attention in any gathering. During the Conversations, these two motives were realized. Only once was Margaret's position as the avowed leader of the Conversations disputed. That was by the gentlemen dur-
ing the Evenings of Mythology. The women who attended her morning Conversations never questioned her position of leadership. Thus, both her need for deference and her desire to be the center of attention were gratified.

As well as fulfilling her subconscious motives, Margaret also achieved her privately admitted motives, e.g., her need for a lucrative and agreeable career. For six years, at least twenty persons paid twenty dollars apiece to attend each Conversation series. This was at a time when two dollars would have purchased a ticket to any number of lecture series typical of that day. It was pointed out that Margaret deliberately chose the Conversations as the most effective and stimulating means of employing her talent for oral expression. Thus, her career was lucrative and agreeable.

The most significant attainment of the Conversations was accomplished, however, through the fulfillment of Margaret's publicly professed purposes: to provide an opportunity for women to express and exchange their views on topics of significance, in order to determine the destiny and vocation of Woman in contemporary life.

The approach that Margaret gave to the topics discussed in the Conversations succeeded in making Margaret

\[1\text{Wade, op. cit., p. 76.}\]
a feminist leader in the broadest sense of the word. That her name is not today commonly acknowledged as one of the leaders in the feminist movement is not to be regarded as a sign that she did not contribute to this movement. She pointed out in America as had Mary Wollstonecraft in England a way to liberation and education which was to have far-reaching effects upon the destiny and vocation of women, quite apart from any specific reforms.

The consequences of this third purpose particularly will be examined in this chapter in order to determine whether its achievement yielded any lasting significance. Consideration will be given to the numerous statements among Margaret's biographers that she exerted a strong, formative influence not only upon the women who composed the Conversation circle, but upon subsequent generations of American women as well. This will be considered in relation to the feminist movement in the United States from three points of view: 1) the immediate intellectual impetus provided by the Conversations, 2) Margaret's lasting influence upon the individual women who knew her personally and as reflected in their later activities, and 3) her best known and best received book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, the indirect product of the Conver-
sations. The subjects discussed in this book are the same subjects that were discussed in the Conversations, and it may be assumed that the ideas in the book are, therefore, those which stimulated the women of the Conversations as well as the later women of the feminist movement. All three of these considerations -- intellectual impetus, personal influence, and the book product -- having their origin in the Conversations, there will, consequently, be no attempt to treat them in separate categories.

The book product of the Conversations will be dealt with first in this consideration. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* has been called the "Feminist Manifesto."² It painted a very accurate picture of the narrowly bounded woman of the times. The ideas seem to have first been formally expressed during the Conversations for Woman as the group discussed the subject of woman's sphere. These ideas, so expressed, were first published in a Dial article, titled "The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men; Woman versus Woman," and this article, in turn, was later expanded upon and published in book form, entitled *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Friendly advice had persuaded Margaret to drop the original lengthy, legalistic

²Wade, op. cit., p. 20.
title to which she was partial.

As a work of literary art, it has no value. As a demonstration of Margaret's ability to give her own rapid and peculiar development to ideas which were not original so as to make them effective in her own time and place, it was extremely consequential. The fact that these ideas had been previously expressed in another book in another country does not necessarily lessen their significance. Whereas Mary Wollstonecraft had put forth similar ideas in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in the late eighteenth century, it waited for Margaret Fuller to inspire the women of America to their potential roles. *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, published in the early nineteenth century, was the "first mature consideration of feminism by an American."3

The similarity of ideas between that philosophizing serpent, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Margaret Fuller of the serpentine neck, is seen in the modern conception of Woman given by the former:

The simple basic argument appears clearly and completely in English literature for the first time that women, like men, are human beings, with the same economic, political, and social rights.4

Margaret's expressed views differed little from the Wollstonecraft views. She said "very little that was not put more directly and strongly by her greater English predecessor." ^5

Nevertheless, both Mary Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller belong to the feminist tradition in English literature; one as the origin of its most vital thought, the other as a gifted transmitter. ^6

Margaret Fuller did not claim particular economic, political, or social rights for women. She did demand, among other things, that women be allowed to develop their latent powers and be permitted to utilize those powers in following a vocation best suited to their abilities. "Let them be sea-captains, if they will." ^7

There was a definite need, she felt, for expanding the range of occupations available to women and removing the restrictions placed upon them by convention.

I think women need, especially at this juncture, a much greater range of occupation than they have, to rouse their

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^5 Ibid., p. 19. (The considerable attention paid to Mary Wollstonecraft in Woman in the Nineteenth Century indicates that Margaret was aware of the Wollstonecraft views and probably strongly influenced by them. See Wade, The Writings, pp. 149-51.)

^6 Ibid., p. 10.

^7 As cited in Anthony, op. cit., p. 69.
latent powers . . . . In families that I know, some little girls like to saw wood, others to use carpenter's tools. 8

She felt that women would be better satisfied and better adjusted if their natural tastes were indulged.

Where these tastes are indulged, cheerfulness and good humor are promoted. . . . Fourier had observed these wants of women, as no one can fail to do who watches the desires of little girls, or knows the ennui that haunts grown women, except where they make to themselves a serene little world by art of some kind. He, therefore, in proposing a great variety of employments, in manufactures or the care of plants and animals, allows for one-third of women as likely to have a taste for masculine pursuits, one third of men for feminine. 9

It was time that people realized that a certain percentage of women tended to prefer masculine employments and a certain percentage of men tended to prefer feminine employments. (This remarkably advanced attitude for Margaret's day and age is now more generally accepted.) Perhaps in an effort to assure her readers that such freedom would not abolish the family and family life, Margaret told them that:

I have no doubt, however, that a large percentage of women would give themselves to the same employments as now, because there are circumstances that must lead them. Mothers will delight to make the nest soft and

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
warm. Nature will take care of that.\textsuperscript{10}

Margaret had always been interested in the problems of women. Horace Greeley\textsuperscript{11} recalled that "Margaret was always a most earnest, devoted champion of the Emancipation of Women, from their past and present condition of inferiority, to an independence..."

She demanded for them the fullest recognition of Social and Political Equality with the roughest sex, the freest access to all stations, professions, employments, which are open to any.\textsuperscript{12}

These same attitudes, expressed in Margaret's book, are of such nature that only "a first-class rebel would have had the temerity to offer such morsels to wagging tongues."\textsuperscript{13} It was not in conformity with contemporary literary niceties, but was:

a somewhat shocking book to fling at respectable Boston bluestockings -- male as well as female -- for not only did she discuss equality of economic opportunity and political rights for women, but she went further and spoke frankly about sex equality, marriage, prostitution, physical passions -- pretty much everything that was taboo in Boston society.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., pp. 69-70.
\textsuperscript{11}Editor of the New York Tribune.
\textsuperscript{12}Anthony, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{13}Parrington, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 432.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.
In presenting the problems of the times, Margaret did not confine herself to any specific remedy. True to her broad feminism, she merely urged upon women "self-subsistence -- in its two forms of self-reliance and self-impulse,"\(^{15}\) and allowed them to supply whatever specific remedy was appropriate for their energies and capacities. Woman:

> should have not only equal power with men...but a chartered power, too fully recognized to be abused.\(^{16}\)

Man should "prove his own freedom" by trusting her entirely, and giving

> her every privilege already acquired for himself, -- elective franchise, tenure of property, liberty to speak in public assemblies, and so forth."\(^{17}\)

As might well be expected in view of Margaret's advanced theories, not all responses to this book were favorable despite its eventual success both here and abroad. Many felt as did one early critic that is was only "an eloquent expression of her discontent at having been created female."\(^{18}\)

\(^{15}\)Wellington, op. cit., p. 19.

\(^{16}\)As cited in Anthony, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

\(^{17}\)Ibid.

It is difficult...to understand what is its real import, further than to the extent that the author was ill satisfied that there should be difference in the rank and opportunity of the sexes.19

This criticism was unjust. Margaret was never a woman who wished to be a man.20 She merely disclosed that the bounds of womanhood during her generation were too narrowly drawn. The same critic was expressing a typical attitude of the times when he referred to Margaret as one of "that diverting company of women who have contemplated a nullification of certain of the statutes of nature." She "would...have choice of places and vocations" for women.21

What he meant by "a nullification of certain of the statutes of nature," is implied in a Pastoral Letter issued in 1837 by the Massachusetts Conference of Congregational Ministers, against those who encourage females to bear an obstructive and ostentatious part in measures of reform, and countenance any of that sex


20 Emerson in *Emerson et al.*, *op. cit.*, I, 300, quotes a "very intelligent woman" as saying that "in character, Margaret was...the largest woman, and not a woman who wished to be a man."

21 *Griswold, op. cit.*, p. 538.
who so far forget themselves as to itinerate in the character of public lecturers and teachers,
a tendency leading to certain "degeneracy and ruin." 22 Overt action was taken in many instances to divert the
women from trespassing upon male prerogatives. When Abby Kelley made her first speech at a Pennsylvania Hall meet-
ing she was ostracized and mobbed. 23 Sarah and Angelina
Grimke of South Carolina had so detested slavery that they
had freed their own slaves and gone north to preach a-
against slavery. In 1836, when the Massachusetts legis-
lature met to consider anti-slavery petitions, Angelina
was asked to address the members. The stormy response
of the anti-slavery forces to the spectacle of a woman
speaking from the floor of the Boston State House, led
Angelina to record the very astute impression that:

"We have given great offense on account of
our womanhood, which seems to be as objec-
tionable as our abolitionism. The whole
land seems roused to a discussion of the
province of woman and I am glad of it." 24

Two years later, in 1840, the U. S. women delegates to
the London Anti-Slavery Convention were rejected.

22 National American Women Suffrage Association,
Victory, How Women Won It, A Centennial Symposium, 1840-
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
Even one of her most constructive articles.

position or women that has been published, and
that of the many books on the intellectual and social
women in the nineteenth century. Is one of the most
of the debate need with interest in the South. Here, we
witnesses today, one of the great and prolific authors of my

where these ideas had already been entertained by Mary

Her book was widely read, particularly in England.

accept that would be left on the earth. As
suppose I went away now, the measure of it,
and perhaps I might even live in it to do it,
I refer to a delightful young woman, & I am sure

while contributing to the women's century

the materialization of reality that she had made a work-

upon completing her book in 1844, Harriet had

first did to women.

too men so many times and so much freedom as the sex

century of 1840-1940, no century in history oste

It is the period of women's equality in public

the period of the 1850s have been aptly termed.
The Woman in the Nineteenth Century lacked, unfortunately, the immediate impact of Margaret Fuller's personality as demonstrated in the Conversations. This regret was expressed by a member of the Conversations:
"You may say many things of Margaret, but the personal magnetism is incommunicable, and died with her." That "certain quality of genius" that Amy Wellington attributed to Margaret lived on only in the hearts and minds and actions of the women whom she led. There is no testimony of anyone ever having conceived of Margaret Fuller as a weak character. Ednah Dow Cheney, nee Littlehale, testified in 1895, that the impact of Margaret's personality upon her had been truly a formative influence upon her entire life and character.

I had the inestimable privilege of attending her conversations for three successive seasons, and I count it among the greatest felicities of my life that I thus came under her influence at a very early age, an influence which has never failed me in all the years of my life; and yet I recognize how vain is the effort to give you any idea of the 'Vita Nova' which she opened to me.

Mrs. Cheney told the following story of her response to Margaret's personal impact:

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28 As cited in Cheney, op. cit., p. 205.
29 Wellington, op. cit., p. 15.
30 Cheney, op. cit., p. 205.
One day when she was alone with me, and I feel as if I could now (fifty years later) feel her touch and hear her voice, she said, 'Is life rich to you?' and I replied, 'It is since I have known you.' Such was the response of many a youthful heart to her, and herein was her wonderful influence.\textsuperscript{31}

Another member described Margaret's influence, saying:

I found myself in a new world of thought. A flood of light irradiated all that I had seen in nature, observed in life, or read in books. Whatever she spoke of revealed a hidden meaning, and everything seemed to be put into true relation.\textsuperscript{32}

This "intimate influence" had an immediate impact upon women who had known her and its far-reaching effects were felt later by those who knew of her. One is told that in the early years of the woman movement "Margaret was a vivid presence."\textsuperscript{33} Whatever changes may have taken place in the feminist movement there is no doubt but what her "spirit and her breadth of view" were "carried over."\textsuperscript{34} Her book helped pave the "way philosophically for the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848" and the series of woman's rights conventions in the early 1850's.\textsuperscript{35} Through

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{32}Wellington, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{33}Anthony, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{35}Mason Wade, editor, \textit{The Writings of Margaret Fuller} (New York: the Viking Press, 1941), p. 107.
her book and through her impact upon those individual women who took part in the Conversations, "the way was paved for Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Anthony, and Lucy Stone." 36

The real fruit of this endeavor, the really outstanding product of the Conversations for Women, came about through the activities of her pupils after Margaret's death. A half-century after Margaret's death, Mrs. Cheney, in recalling Margaret Fuller to the Congress of American Advancement of Women in New Orleans, stated that "to-day Margaret Fuller's name is more on the lips of her fellow countrywomen, and her influence in their hearts, than that of any other woman of her own time and country." 37

It is not that she stood alone, as one exception to her sex, for it was high tide in the intellectual life of the nation, and there were noble women around her, not a few, worthy to be her peers in the love and esteem of her fellow-citizens... In some point, perhaps, each one surpassed her, but not one of them is remembered as she is. 38

Margaret Fuller was at that date considered "the woman

36 Wade, Margaret Fuller, p. 79.
37 Cheney, op. cit., p. 192.
38 Ibid.
of America who is moulding the lives and characters of
her countrywomen more than any other. Margaret Ful-
ler's posthumous influence helped open a new future, not
only for the women of America, but for women the world
over. It seems a mark of modesty on Margaret Fuller's
part to say she left only a footprint when she might have
said that she helped to change the record of history.

If the ideal woman of her vision suggested
the name 'Glumdalelitch' to a witty contem-
porary, unnatural and absurd as she ap-
peared to many, still the form of a very
different kind of woman was beginning to
take shape, not only in the mind of Mar-
geet Fuller but in the life of the world.40

She had not tried to make her admirers into "her
disciples, her blind followers." Had she done so, her
influence, like her personality, would have died with her,
What she did was to open "the book of life" and help her
women friends to "read it" for themselves.42 She was "an
opener of doors for such as" came after, and did "not try
to make the universe a blind alley."43 In other words,

39Ibid.
41Cheney, op. cit., p. 205.
42Ibid.
43Reginald L. Cook, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selected
Prose and Poetry ("Rinehart Editions"; New York: Rine-
she had taught the women of her Conversation classes to think for themselves.

One characteristic that distinguished Margaret from the rabble-rousing crowd of other social reformers, was that she kept her activities within the bounds of propriety, as indeed did all the members of her circle. Even by the standards of her time, she was constrained by the dictates of good taste.

The real lasting importance of the Conversations was the stimulus they gave to feminine intellectual activity. They did much to make it respectable rather than eccentric in public opinion.44

Others might speak from public platforms in behalf of causes in which they believed. She worked with the chosen few rather than with the multitude. She sought for beauty and truth and tried to inspire others to find it in their own lives as she had found it in hers. Everything she said and anything she wrote had in it a moral tone, a spiritual significance.

That these conversations served as a moral -- even more than a mental -- tonic is the uniform testimony of all who took part in them; and the later career of these participants shows how well the work was done.45

The increasing success of her Conversations, and

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44Wade, Margaret Fuller, p. 78.
45Higginson, op. cit., p. 129.
the support given to them in influential quarters of the Boston world altered the lot of women who ventured to question the inhibitions laid upon them by tradition.46

The belief lately attributed to the founder of one of the more recent women's organizations that "words and acts are as pebbles tossed into a pool of water, setting up waves of action that reach out in ever-widening circles" is an excellent description of Margaret Fuller's activities.

Margaret had provided in addition to an impact upon the feminist movement and a strong personal influence which survived her, "a higher concept of woman" as well.

Her Conversations were to have even more concrete results than have thus far been considered. They also "served as a model for the later women's clubs and helped to assure support for the new colleges."45

By 1895 many women's clubs in the "new West" had been named for her, Ossoli circles having been formed in more than one "Western city." An island near Rock Island had been named after her,46 and near her Jamaica Plain

46 Wade, Margaret Fuller, pp. 78-79.


48 Cheney, op. cit., p. 193 and n.
home was a primary school-house which had been given her name. It is still a name seen above the doors of some American school-houses. Mrs. Cheney said in 1895 that in the East and West "audiences gladly listen to all that can be told of her, and seek eagerly the solution of the question, 'What was it that gave her the mastery over minds and hearts?"".

Numerous attempts have been made over the years to answer this question. One thing these answers have in common, even though each one usually emphasizes one or more aspects of her personality: Margaret's remarkable power of speaking the truth to all under all circumstances. Emerson remarked in speaking of Margaret that there was nothing unique in her possession of a devotion to the truth, although in her this devotion seemed more highly developed than is usual. He knew many persons who preferred to speak the truth. What was unusual about Margaret, he thought, was the fact that she was so capable of expressing the truth. He knew many persons who in trying to do this became more confused than the boldest

\[49\] *ibid.*, p. 205, n.

\[50\] *ibid.*, p. 193.
prevaricator.51

Margaret's close friend, Sarah Freeman Clarke,52 a member of the Conversation circle, stated that she, too, found something in Margaret's "unusual truth-speaking power" when "looking for the causes of the great influence" which Margaret possessed "over her pupils, companions, and friends."

She not only did not speak lies after our foolish social customs, but she met you fairly.53 She broke her lance upon your shield.

None, said Miss Clarke, could resist Margaret's direct approach:

Encountering her glance, something like an electric shock was felt. Her eye pierced through your disguises. Your outworks fell before her first assault, and you were at her mercy. And then began the delight of true intercourse.54

No one could ever detect a taint of meanness in Margaret. In "breaking her lance upon your shield," she pointed out the strong as well as the weak qualities. She made her listener feel that he was worth analyzing.55

Though she spoke rudely searching words, and

51 Emerson et al., op. cit., I, 305--6. "I have known several honest persons who valued truth as much as Peter and John, but, when they tried to speak it, they grew red and black in the face instead of Ananias."

52 Artist sister of James Freeman Clarke and close friend of Margaret Fuller.

53 As cited in Eddington, op. cit., pp. 117--8.
told you startling truths, though she broke down your little shams and defenses, you felt exhilarated by the compliment of being found out.56

It was this particular quality which Miss Clarke thought drew and held Margaret's friends.

I think this was what attracted or bound us to her. We expected good from such a new condition of our relations, and usually good came of it.

Still, regardless of the voluminous testimony -- written and oral -- to the effect of Margaret's words and actions upon both her own and subsequent generations, her name is seldom recognized today. When it is, it is not as the name of an outstanding feminist. The reason for Margaret's name having been by-passed during the hey-day of feminism seems to lie in the nature of her own feminism. Margaret's feminist plea was based upon the broad concepts of a realization of the "destiny and vocation of womankind." This was the sort of "philosophical feminism" which soon became "indigestible for those engaged in the intense and single-minded propaganda for the ballot."58

54Ibid.

55Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 12, contains Channing's statement: "in all that Margaret spoke, wrote, or did, no cynic could detect the taint of meanness."

56Sarah Freeman Clarke as cited in Higginson, op. cit., pp. 117--8.

57Ibid.

58Anthony, op. cit., p. 81.
Margaret had not been one with them in her views. In fact, she had steadfastly refused to advocate or promote any one particular, narrow reform movement. Abolitionism with its narrow dogmatism, for example, repelled her. Upon reading Harriet Martineau's book, *Society in America*, Margaret wrote her a very frank letter expressing her views of the book and alienating her former friend. In this letter Margaret objected to the book because it was saturated with Abolitionism.

I do not like that your book should be an abolition book. You might have borne your testimony as decidedly as you pleased; but why leaven the whole book with it? Margaret wanted it understood that she realized the significance of this issue, but she thought it should have been sublimated to more important, general reforms.

It is a great subject, but your book had other purposes to fulfil (sic).

A letter written to Mrs. Maria Weston Chapman, December 26, 1840, was in response to a request that Margaret contribute her efforts to the Abolition cause.

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59 Margaret Fuller to Harriet Martineau as cited in Emerson et al., *op. cit.*, I, 194.


61 Mason Wade, *The Writings*, p. 556, n.: "Mrs. Maria Weston Chapman, the grandmother of John Jay Chapman, was one of the New England women most active in the abolitionist cause, with which Margaret Fuller was reluctant to associate herself."
As the feminist movement in America gained momentum, it narrowed down to specific reforms. Margaret Fuller's sort of feminism became outmoded. The generations of American women which followed Margaret came to underestimate and undervalue her efforts. After women got the vote, the suggestion was made by one author that, now that suffrage was no longer an issue in the life of the American woman, the time had come for her to re-discover and re-adopt that "broader kind of feminism" which Margaret espoused, for:

Examing Margaret's book [and oral expressions] in the light of present-day feminism, one cannot but be impressed by the comprehensive and enduring character of her views.

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62 Ibid. Mrs. Chapman was a leader in the organization of Anti-Slavery Fairs.

63 This is in spite of the fact that "She probably did more to alter the status of her sex for the better than any other woman of the period." [Nade, Margaret Fuller., p. 79]

64 Anthony, op. cit., p. 70.
As fashions change, so Margaret Fuller once more appears to have a message for the American woman.

Though Margaret died at the comparatively early age of forty, her death may be considered timely. During the last years of her life, the tone of her writings indicated that, had she lived through the period of active feminist agitation, she too would have strongly advocated more and more narrow causes. This change of attitude seems to be indicated even prior to the publication of "Woman in the Nineteenth Century." In the manuscripts for that volume were found the following words:

Might not we women do something in regard to this Texas Annexation project? I have never felt that I had any call to take part in public affairs before; but this is a great moral question, and we have an obvious right to express our convictions. I should like to convene meetings of women everywhere, and take our stand.65

During the period of the Conversations, Margaret had flatly refused to aid the Abolitionist cause. One wonders, since she was in sympathy with their motives, whether she would not have eventually contributed her efforts for the cause.

I could never endure to be with them at home; they were so tedious, often so narrow, always so rabid and exaggerated in their tone. But, after all, they had a high motive, something eternal in their desire and life.66

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65Emerson et al., op. cit., II, 141.
66Ibid., II, 229.
Further cause to surmise that Margaret's views would have narrowed as did those of the other feminists is found in the support given by her activities during the Italian Revolution to Higginson's contention that, throughout her lifetime, Margaret moved toward a life of increased action. Perhaps her death spared Margaret the transition from broad to narrow feminism.

The fact remains, however, that Margaret Fuller died in 1850, and it is her universal outlook which is recalled today. The "one quality which stands out in Margaret Fuller" is, therefore, her belief and trust that human beings were marching on through wider sympathy and tolerance and understanding to a higher and finer destiny.67

It was, as Eleanor Roosevelt has expressed it, "not what she [Margaret] wrote which makes her life for us a vivid influence today, but what she was."68 Margaret was one of those women whose existence better proved the need of some new interpretation of Woman's Rights than anything she wrote.69

Horace Greeley said that Margaret Fuller was the

67 Eleanor Roosevelt in Bell, op. cit., 14.
68 Ibid.
69 Margaret Fuller's evaluation of Mary Wollstonecraft, "Woman in the Nineteenth Century," Wade, The Writings, p. 150.
men or whom America will be proud.

"There are a few men who are the representatives of the nation. Each and every man may be an individual to the people he represents, the son of the nation, of the nation. The men of the country (America's) men; the men of her generation, men of the nation of her generation."

That:

deed woman in truth to the statement.

Men's courage, the courage of the men who have stood up and said—

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One of Margaret's women friends, looking back over the improvements in woman's position in America during the years immediately following Margaret's death, recorded her belief that, had she lived longer, Margaret "would have rejoiced in the wonderful progress they have made in these things since her time." She admonished the newly liberated women of America: "Let our sex never forget Margaret Fuller." 75

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75 As cited in Anthony, op. cit., pp. 82-3.
CONCLUSION

Margaret Fuller was the herald of a new freedom for the American woman.

Margaret Fuller was a woman of vibrant personality, who, due to the broad concepts upon which she operated in her own time, has helped to provide today's American woman with the advances attributed to the later feminist movement in America. Because of the intangible nature of oral expression, Margaret's contributions are not today remembered, though in her time their impact was well recognized.

What is remembered about Margaret today is her reputation based upon superficial first impressions. Upon comparison with reports by her most intimate cohorts, however, these first impressions were found to be erroneous.

Contemporary reputation designated Margaret as a woman who wanted to be a man. She was, rather, too much a woman to be confined to the narrowly restricted sphere of the nineteenth century woman. She was reputed to be arrogant and superficial, but was neither. She was, rather, truthful to an unusual extent and had
deliberately developed a dramatic air to compensate for her lack of the usual womanly wiles. She was reputed to be vain of her speaking abilities. She was, rather, conscious of her literary limitations.

It was in her Conversations for Women that the true Margaret was best revealed; there that her personal, intimate relationship had its strongest formative influence upon the women; there that her powers of leadership were best manifested. This capacity for leadership, present from childhood, had been developed both by early training and by events in later life, but its success derived from the intrinsic worth and sacrificial nature of her character.

The source materials available for a study of Margaret Fuller, and, especially, of her Conversations, are admittedly unsatisfactory. What is available is, moreover, admittedly questionable in nature. Yet, in the available material there was found to exist such consistency as to warrant the conclusions concerning these aspects of Margaret's character, personality, and activities.

Born over a century before her time, Margaret Fuller was the herald of a new freedom for the American woman. Her vision of woman's destiny too advanced for her
day, she was truly "a modern woman who died in 1850."¹

¹Ibid., p. v.
The only available notes on the Conversations held by Margaret Fuller during the years 1839-1844 are the Elizabeth Palmer Peabody notes and the Caroline W. Healey Dall notes. Miss Peabody's notes, included by Emerson in his contributions to the Memoirs, have been used in the body of this research except where otherwise indicated. The following Appendix includes selections from Mrs. Dall's notes as included in her book, Margaret and Her Friends, or Ten Conversations with Margaret Fuller upon the Mythology of the Greeks and Its Expression in Art, Held at the House of the Rev. George Ripley, Bedford Place, Boston, Beginning March 1, 1841.

It is noteworthy that neither set of notes constitutes a satisfactory source of information. The Peabody notes, which are helpful in that they concern Margaret Fuller's Conversations for Women as well as the Evenings of Mythology, were considered too subjective by Mrs. Dall. The Dall notes pertain only to the Evenings of Mythology, but are more inclusive than the Peabody notes. They are, however, even more obviously subjective in content. It is also noteworthy that the only Conversations of which anything like a verbatim report is available, the Evenings of Mythology, were the least successful of Margaret Fuller's Conversations.

The Dall notes, as here included, are of interest primarily in two ways: 1) as indicative of the nature of the ill-fated evening Conversations, and 2) because of the fact that the theme used during the evening Conversations was the same as that followed during the first series of Conversations for Women, in connection with the 1839-1840 Conversations for Women. These notes refer to the first two evening meetings.
APPENDIX A

General Mythological Statement

Monday Evening, March 1, 1841

Margaret opened the conversation by a beauti-
ful sketch of the origin of Mythology, The Greeks she
thought borrowed their Gods from the Hindus and Egyp-
tians, but they idealized their personifications to a
far greater extent. The Hindus dwelt in the All, the
Infinite, which the Greeks analyzed and to some degree
humanized. All things sprang from Coelus and Terra,
-- that is, from Heaven and Earth, or spirit and matter.
Rhea, or the Productive Energy, and Saturn, or Time,
were the children of Coelus and Terra. The progress
of any people is marked by its mythi. Mythology is
only the history of the development of the Infinite
in the Finite. Saturn devoured his own children until
the disappointed Rhea put a stone (or obstacle) in his
way, and she succeeded in raising Jupiter. The develop-
ment of human faculties was slow, therefore Time seemed
to absorb all that Productive Energy brought forth, un-
til Energy itself created obstacles; and of these was
born the Indomitable Will, and usurped the rule of Time,
fighting with low and sensual passions, represented by
the Titans and the Giants, until he seated himself se-
curely on the Olympian Throne, the Father of the Gods.
This Will was not in itself the highest development of
either Beauty, Genius, Wisdom, or Thought; but such
developments were subject to it, were its children.

Juno is the only feminine form of this Indom-
itable Will. By herself she is inferior to it, and
whenever she opposes it, loses the game. Vulcan, her
child, is Mechanic Art, great in itself to be sure,
but not comparable to the Perfect Wisdom, or Minerva,
which sprang ready armed from the masculine Will. She
was greater than her Father, but still his child.

Neptune, who raises always a 'placid head a-
bove the waves,' represents the flow of thought, --
all-embracing, girdling in the world, Diana and Apollo,
or Purity and Genius.

Mercury is Genius in the extrinsic, of eloquence, human understanding, and expression. All were the embodiments of Absolute Ideas, of ideas that had no origin, — that were eternal. Love brooded over Chaos; and the perfect Beauty and Love, represented among the Greeks by Venus and her son, rose from the turbid elements. It is singular that even the ancients should have maintained the pre-existence of Love. It was before Order, Men, or the Gods men worshipped. The fable suggests the truth, — Infinite Love and Beauty always was. It is only with their development in finite beings that History has to do.

Here MARGARET recapitulated. The Indomitable Will had dethroned Time, and, acting with Productive Energy, — variously represented at different times by Isis, Rhea, Ceres, Persephone, and so on, — had driven back the sensual passions to the bowels of the earth, while it produced Perfect Wisdom, Genius, Beauty, and Love, results which were more excellent if not more powerful than their Cause.

To understand this Mythology, we must denominalize ourselves, and throw the mind back to the consideration of Greek Art, Literature, and Poesy. It is only scanty justice that my pen can render to Margaret's eloquent talk.

FRANK SHAW asked her how she imagined these personifications to have suggested themselves in that barbarous age.

MARGARET objected to the word barbarous. She believed that in the age of Plato the human Intellect reached a point as elevated in some respects as any it had ever touched.

But the Gods were not the product of that age, but of another far more remote, FRANK objected. Was
not the infinity of Hindu conception impaired, when
the Greeks attributed to the Gods the duties, pas-
sions, and criminal indulgences of men?

MRS. RIPLEY said that the virtue of the
Hindu lay in contemplation. If a man had seen God,
he was exempt from the ordinary obligations of
life, and allowed to pass his life in quiet adoration.

MARGARET added that the Greek knew better
than that. He felt the necessity of developing the
Infinite through action, and embodied this necessity
in his art and poesy as well as in his myths.

FRANK seemed still to think that in losing
the adoring contemplation of the Hindu, and bringing
their deities to the human level, the Greeks had ta-
ten one step down.

E. F. P. [Elizabeth Palmer Peabody] had al-
ways thought it had been a step up, and ANN CLARKE
thought that the Greeks forgot themselves, merging
all remembrance of the Finite, in realizing the in-
dividual forces of the Infinite.

WILLIAM WHITE, who had not waded very far in-
to the stream, thought the North American Indian's
worship of the Manitou purer than the Greek worship,
for the very reason that the Indian ascribed to his
Manitou no passion that had degraded humanity.

MARGARET said that the Indian propitiated
his God by vile deeds, by ignoble treacheries and
revenge. So the Hindu throws her child into the
Ganges, and an ecstatic crowd falls before the car
of Juggernaut.

I thought a good deal, but did not speak,
Did not William's question grow out of the simple Unity of the Indian worship? But the Indian does not worship the Manitou because he recognizes a single First Cause, comprehending in itself all beauty, wisdom, purity, and truth, but because his heart is naturally lifted toward an unknown something, which he has hardly yet considered as a Cause. The Greek recognized the abstract forces of the Universe, but did not perceive their Unity, and so personified them separately.

E. F. P. suggested that the Indian had no literature, and had left no record of his Olympus.

MARGARET added that, if we compare the Indian Elysium with the Greek, the difference in spirituality is perceived at once.

HENRY HEDGE said that Frank Shaw talked about Greek mythology, but nobody could show a purely Greek mythology.

FRANK replied that he only meant that when the Greek mind had acted on a myth, it had not refined it.

MARGARET added that it was a vulgar notion that the Poets of Greece created her Gods; that the Poets were objective, and could give only humanized representatives of them.

HENRY HEDGE thought that there was a point to which philosophy aided and prompted the creative power, but, that point passed, rather checked its action. Analysis took the place of the objective tendency.

Well! said WILLIAM WHITE, would not the human mind, aided only by culture, be incapable of any better idea than Frank Shaw suggested? Must not revelation complete the work?
MARGARET said that the answer to his question would be determined by his understanding of the word 'revelation.' She could not believe in a God who had ever left himself without a witness in the world. As soon as the human mind and will were ready, there was always some great Truth waiting to be submitted to their united action, until it was worn out. The beautiful Greek era had been succeeded by a period of inaction; the Roman era by another, and so on. She was sorry we had wandered from our subject so far as to doubt her very premises!

FRANK said, everything rests on those premises; so he thought that the ideals of beauty, love, justice, and truth should be referred to the Infinite Mind, and not to the Greek.

I wonder where he was when Margaret told about the Love which 'was' before Order!

HENRY HEDGE said that Culture was the Mediator between the Finite and the Infinite.

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE, alluding to Mr. Hedge's previous remark upon the growth of philosophy, and the loss of the creative power, said that if that were a fact, it greatly diminished the probability of the birth of pure Genius into the world. Plato wrote when philosophy was at the turning point.

MARGARET said that there were many proofs in Plato that the philosophers understood the personifications of the mythi. She thought that the gods, the demigods, and the heroes of mythology represented distinct classes, and that this was not sufficiently remembered. She referred to the story of the burning of Hercules in Ovid, where Jupiter calls June to see how well his son endures!

WILLIAM WHITE said that he thought the idea of Deity was degraded when the Greeks changed a hero
into a god; but if Culture be a Mediator, would not Plato have been greater had he been born into the nineteenth century?

JAMES F. CLARKE said Plato's were impossible now.

MARGARET agreed, and said that the pride of knowledge which he would find in the world, should he appear, would be a greater obstacle than superstition once was.

Did somebody say a little while ago that will indomitable was born of obstacles?

MARGARET told William White that Coleridge had once said that he could neither measure nor understand Plato's ignorance! His mind had not reached that altitude!

HENRY HEDGE, not willing to forgo the possible birth of Genius, asked if all the experience and discovery with which the world had been enriched since Plato's time would not furnish enough for the new-comer to act upon?

MARGARET replied that the mind could not receive unless excited. She must go through all the intellectual experience of a Plato, to be as great as he, but she might stand upon the general or even her own intuitive recognition of the truths he had advanced, and go forward to greater results, -- but still that would not be to make herself greater.

But, said MRS. RIPLEY, in the first case you would be nothing but Plato.
MARGARET acceded, but begged not to be understood as doubting that the future would be capable of finer things than the past.

The ideal significance of the Mythology was further dwelt upon, and much was said of the contrast between the thought of the priest and the worship of the people. It was acknowledged as a matter of course, that only a few preserved any consciousness of the original significance of the Mythology.

HENRY HEDGE thought that this was the true key to the purpose of the Eleusian mysteries, whether in Egypt where they originated, or in Greece where they were introduced. Through them, all who chose became initiated into the interior meaning of the Mythology.

CHARLES WHEELER added, that in the flourishing times of the Athenian Republic every citizen was compelled to initiate himself.

MARGARET closed our talk with a gentle reproof to our wandering wits. To prevent such desultory prattling, she desired that a subject should be proposed for the next evening. The story of Ceres or Rhea, in fact the Productive Energy however manifested, carried general favor, and Margaret said archly that she had thought the presence of gentlemen (who had never until now attended one of her talks) would prevent the wandering and keep us free from prejudice.

I thought she was rightly disappointed.

I cannot recall the words, but at some time this evening Margaret distinguished three mythological dynasties. The first was the reign of the Natural Powers. The second, represented by Jupiter,
Pluto, and Neptune, stood for the height, the depth, and the surface or flow of things, the first manifestations of human consciousness. The third was the Bacchic, Bacchus not being yet, in her estimation, the vulgar God of the wine-vat and the festival, but the inspired Genius, -- being to Apollo, as she said, what the nectar is to the grape. ¹

A general statement

Appendix A
aroused, the need thought has, having once felt the influence of the Seasons, to retire into itself.

CHARLES WHEELER reminded Margaret that she had said that the predominant goddesses, without reference to Greece, enfolded only one idea, that of the female Will or Genius, -- the beneficent giver. He had asked her if she could sustain herself by etymological facts, and she replied that her knowledge of the Greek was not critical enough. Since then he had inquired into the origin of the proper names of the Greek deities, and found that it confirmed her impression. The names of Rhea, Tellus, Isis, and Diana were resolvable into one, and the difference in their etymology was only a common and permissible change in the position of the letters of which they are composed, or a mere provincial dialectic change. Diana is the same as Dione, also one of the names of Juno.

E. P. P. asked if Homer ever confounded the last two? MARGARET thought not. Homer was purely objective. He knew little and cared less about the primitive creation of the myths.

R. W. EMERSON thought it would be very difficult to detect this secret. Jupiter, for instance, might have been a man who was the exponent of Will to his race,

MARGARET said, 'no; they could have deduced him just as easily from Nature herself, or from a single exhibition of will power.'

R. W. EMERSON said that a man like Napoleon would easily have suggested it.
'What a God-send is a Napoleon!' exclaimed CHARLES WHEELER; 'let us pray for scores of such, that a new and superior mythos may arise for us!' Is it malicious to suspect a subtle irony turned against the sacred person of R. W. E. in this speech?

MARGARET retorted indignantly that if they came, we should do nothing better than write memoirs of their hats, coats, and swords, as we have done already, without thinking of any lesson they might teach. She could not see why we were not content to take the beautiful Greek myth as they were, without troubling ourselves about those which might arise for us!

R. W. E. acknowledged that the Greeks had a quicker perception of the beautiful than we. Their genius lay in the material expression of it. If we knew the real meaning of the names of their Deities, the story would take to flight. We should have only the working of abstract ideas as we might adjust them for ourselves.

MARGARET said that a fable was more than a mere word. It was a word of the purest kind rather, the passing of thought into form. R. W. E. had made no allowance for time or space or climate, and there was a want of truth in that. The age of the Greeks was the age of Poetry; ours was the age of Analysis. We could not create a Mythology.

EMERSON asked, 'Why not? We had still better material!'

MARGARET said, irrelevantly as it seemed to me, that Carlyle had attempted to deduce new principles from present history, and that was the reason he did not respect the respectable.
EMERSON said Carlyle was unfortunate in his figures, but we might have mythology as beautiful as the Greek.

MARGARET thought each age of the world had its own work to do. The transition of thought into form marked the Greek period. It was most easily done through fable, on account of their intense perception of beauty.

EMERSON pursued his own train of thought. He seemed to forget that we had come together to pursue Margaret's. He said it was impossible that men or events should stand out in a population of a single million, to which the whole population of the ancient world could hardly have amounted. As Hercules stood to Greece, no modern man could ever stand in relation to his own world.

MARGARET thought Hercules and Jupiter quite different creations. The first might have been a deified life. The second could not.

CHARLES WHEELER said that R. W. E.'s view carried no historical obligation of belief with it. We could not deny the heroic origin of the Greek demigods, but the highest dynasty was the exponent of translated thought.

SOPHIA RIFLEY asked if the life of an individual fitly interwoven with her experience was not as fine a poem as the story of Ceres, her wanderings and her tears? Did not Margaret know such lives?

R. W. E. thought every man had probably met his Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Venus, or Ceres in society!

MARGARET was sure she never had!
R. W. E. explained: 'Not in the world, but each on his own platform.'

WILLIAM STORY objected. The life of an individual was not universal. (1)

SOPHIA RIPLEY repeated, 'The inner life.'

WILLIAM STORY claimed to be an individual, and did not think individual experience could ever meet all minds, -- like the story of Ceres, for example.

SOPHIA said all experience was universal.

I said nothing, but held this colloquy with myself. Thought is the best of human nature; its fulness urges expression; its need of being met, not only by one other but by every other, craves it. This craving is the acknowledgement of the universal experience. What is purely individual is perishable. Identity is to be separated from individuality for this cause.

MARGARET said the element of beauty would be wanting to our creations. A fine emotion glowed through features which seem to fall like a soft veil over the soul, while it could scarce to more than animate those that were obtuse and coarse in every outline. (1)

'Then,' said WILLIAM STORY, and my heart thanked the preux chevalier, -- 'then something is wanting in the emotion itself.'

WILLIAM WHITE said, stupidly, that sunlight could not fall with equal charm on rocks and the green grass. (1)
I asked if the rock could not give what it did not receive? Flung back by rugged points and relieved by dark shadows, was not the sunlight itself transfigured?

STORY said every face had its own beauty. No act that was natural could be ungraceful.

EMERSON said that we all did sundry graceful acts, in our caps and tunics, which we never could do again, which we never wanted to do again.

MARGARET said, at last we had touched the point. We could not restore the childhood of the world, but could we not admire this simple plastic period, and gather from it some notion of the Greek genius?

R. W. E. thought this legitimate. He would have it that we could not determine the origin of a mythos, but we might fulfill Miss Fuller's intention.

MARGARET said history reconciled us to life, by showing that man had redeemed himself. Genius needed that encouragement.

Not Genius, SOPHIA RIPLEY thought; common natures needed it, but Genius was self-supported.

MARGARET said it might be the consolation of Genius.

MRS. RUSSELL asked why Miss Fuller found so much fault with the present.

MARGARET had no fault to find with it. Every age did something toward fulfilling the cycle
of mind. The work of the Greeks was not ours.

SOPHIA RIPLEY asked if the mythology had been a prophecy of the Greek mind to itself, or if the nation had experienced life in any wide or deep sense.

MARGARET seemed a little out of patience, and no wonder! She said it did not matter which. The question was, what could we find in the myth, and what did the Greeks mean that we should find there. Coleridge once said that certain people were continually saying of Shakespeare, that he did not mean to impart certain spiritual meanings to some of his sketches of life and character; but if Shakespeare did not mean it his Genius did; so if the Greeks meant not this or that, the Greek genius meant it.

In relation to the progress of the ages, JAMES F. CLARKE said that the story of Persephone concealed in the bowels of the earth for half the year seemed to him to indicate something of their comparative states. Persephone was the seed which must return to earth before it could fructify. Thought must retire into itself before it can regenerate.

MARGARET was pleased with this, more especially as in the story of the Goddess it is eating the pomegranate, whose seed is longest in germinating, which dooms her to the realm of Pluto.

GEORGE RIPLEY remarked that we saw this need of withdrawl in the slothful ages when mind seemed to be imbibing energy for future action. The world sometimes forsook a quest and returned to it. We had forsaken Beauty, but we might return to it.

Certainly, MARGARET assented. A perfect
mind would detect all beauty in the hearth-rug at her feet; the meanest part of creation contained the whole; but the labor we were now at to appreciate the Greek proved conclusively that we were not Greek. A simple plastic nature would take it all in with delight, without doubt or question.

Or rather, amended EMERSON, would take it up and go forward with it.

It makes no difference, said MARGARET, for we live in a circle.

I did not think it pleasant to track and retrack the same arc, and preferred to go forward with R., W. E., so I asked if there was to be no higher poetry.

MARGARET acknowledged that there was something beyond the aspiration of the Egyptian or the poetry of the Greek.

GEORGE RIPLEY thought we had not lost all reverence for these abstract forces. The Eleusian mysteries might be forgotten, but not Gares. We did not worship in ignorance. The mysteries led back to the Infinite. The processes of vegetation were actually heart-rending!

Here, I thought, was a basis for my higher poetry.

GEORGE RIPLEY acknowledged that it was so. He seemed to be more conscious of the movement of the world than any of our party. He said we must not measure creation by Boston and Washington, as we were too apt to do. There was still France, Germany, and Prussia, — perhaps Russia! The work
of this generation was not religious or poetic; still, there was a tendency to go back to both. There were to be ultraisms, but also, he hoped, consistent development.

CHARLES WHEELER then related the story of Isis, of her hovering in the form of a swallow round the tree in which the sarcophagus of Osiris had been closed by Typhon; of her being allowed to fell the tree; of the odor emitted by the royal maidens whom she touched, which revealed her Divinity to the Queen; of the second loss of the body, as she returned home, and its final dismemberment.

There was little success in spiritualizing more of this story than the pilgrimage, and R. W. E. seemed to feel this; for when MARGARET had remarked that even a divine force must become as the birds of the air to compass its ends, and that it was in the carelessness of conscious success that the second loss occurred, he said that it was impossible to detect an inner sense in all these stories.

MARGARET replied, that she had not attempted that, but she could see it in all the prominent points.

CHARLES WHEELER said that the varieties of anecdote proved that the stories were not all authentic. It was an ancient custom to strike off medals in honor of certain acts of the gods. To these graven pictures the common people gave their vulgar interpretations, as they did also to the bas-reliefs on their temples and monuments.

E. P. P. said this accounted for many of the stories transmitted by Homer. When sculpture and architecture had lost their meaning, his inventive genius was only the more stimulated to find one.
CHARLES WHEELER asked what Margaret would make of the story that the tears of Isis frightened the children to death?

There was a general laugh, but MARGARET said coolly, that children always shrank from a baffled hope.

Someone contrasted Persephone with her mother.

MARGARET assented to whatever was said, and added that she had been particularly struck with it in an engraving she had recently seen, in which Ceres stood with lifted eyes, full-eyed, matronly, bounteous, ready to give all to all, while Persephone, dejected and thoughtful, sat meditating; and the idea was strengthened by her discovering that Persephone was the same as Ariadne the deserted. I could only guess at the remark by Margaret's comment. It seemed to imply baffled hope for Persephone.

The Eleusian mysteries were now alluded to. Although it has been said that only moral precepts were inculcated through these, WHEELER urged that a whole school of Continental authors now acknowledged that the higher doctrines of philosophy were taught.

R. W. E. added, that as initiation became more easy such instruction must have degenerated into a mere matter of form, and many of the uninitiated surpass the initiated in wisdom.

MARGARET admitted this. Socrates was one of the uninitiated. The crowd seldom felt the force of beauty in Art or Literature. To prove it, it was only necessary to walk once through the Hall of Sculpture at the Athenæum, and catch the remarks of any half-dozen on Michael Angelo's 'Day
and Night.' He would be fortunate who heard a single observer comment on its power.

MRS. RUSSELL asked why the images of the sun and moon were introduced into these mysterious celebrations.

MARGARET asked impatiently, why they had always been invoked by every child who could string two rhymes together.

I said that if Ceres was the simple agricultural productive energy, of course the sun was her first minister, its genial influence being as manifest as the energy itself.

In regard to the etymology of the proper names, it seemed reasonable to me that this energy should have gained attributes as it did names. Any nation devoted to the chase would learn to call the lunar deity Diana; any devoted to the cultivation of grain would project her as Ceres. The reproductive powers of flocks and herds would suggest Rhea or Juno, and philosophy or art would invoke Persephone.

When we were talking about beauty, J. F. C. quoted Goethe, and said that the spirit sometimes made a mistake and clothed itself in the wrong garment.

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