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Woman in the Nineteenth Century

Margaret Fuller Ossoli (1810 – 1850)

Read by: Multiple readers Language: English
 Length: 10 hours and 9 minutes Style: Collaborative
 Genre(s): Non-Fiction, Social Sciences, Women's Studies

Product Formats and Options				
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Published in 1845, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is considered the first major feminist work in the United States. The basis of the essay is the notion that while mankind has the potential to become an elevated species, understanding divine love, chronic inequality, selfishness and hypocrisy serve as barriers to this end that Americans inherited from the depravity of Europe. She describes the status of women as clearly inferior, equal to children and parallel to that of slavery, in contrast to historical evidence of equality between the sexes and to the example of Christianity, with male and female saints. She outlines four types of marriages: mutual dependence, mutual idolatry, intellectual companionship, and a religious union that contains all three. She asserts that the souls of men and women are equal, despite gender, and that individuals each possess

a unique mix of masculine and feminine energies. She urges an end to domination by men and calls for women to assert themselves so all can be self-dependent and autonomous individuals. A shorter version was first published in 1843 as “The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men. Woman versus Women” in *The Dial Magazine*, the journal of the transcendental group edited by Margaret Fuller. Noted publisher Horace Greeley was impressed and encouraged her to rewrite it as a book. He helped in the publication by releasing it as part of his “Cheerful Books for the People” series. Readers were seldom indifferent to its radical notions and unsparing insights. Opinions ranged from Thoreau’s high regard to the discomfort of those who thought that it “speaks of many things that should not be spoken of”.

Margaret Fuller (May 23, 1810 – July 19, 1850) was an American writer, editor and intellectual associated with the Transcendentalist movement and with the emerging feminist movement. She was born in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, and educated rigorously by her father, Timothy, a Congressman, before attending schools for young ladies. She was an avid reader and by her 30’s had earned a reputation as the best-read person in New England. She was a gifted child and did not fit in, realizing early on that she was “not born to the common womanly lot.” She became a teacher and in 1839 organized a series of gatherings of local women to discuss the “great questions” facing women known as “Conversations”. In 1840 Ralph Waldo Emerson hired her as the first editor of his transcendentalist journal *The Dial*. In 1844 she joined the staff of the *New York Tribune* as the first full-time literary critic and first female editor. That same year she became the first woman allowed to use the library at Harvard College while researching her book *Summer on the Lakes*. In 1846 she journeyed to Europe as the first foreign correspondent for the *Tribune*. She became involved with the revolutions in Italy and allied herself with Giuseppe Mazzini. She also a relationship with Giovanni Ossoli, a marquis, with whom she had a child. Amid political turmoil in 1850, the family left Italy for the United States and perished when they sailed into a fierce hurricane and were shipwrecked off Fire Island, New York. Her body was never found.