

Margaret Fuller's Reception in Russia in the 1850s

Marina P. Kizima

The reception of Margaret Fuller and her work in Russia can be compared to a swinging pendulum. In the 1850s, Fuller attracted great attention; she was then a figure of a truly popular interest, and publications intended for the general reader discussed her life and work. Her untimely death added urgency to this discussion, arousing grief and compassion. But her popularity was followed by almost a hundred years of oblivion. A resurgence of interest – scholarly interest, this time – could be seen only in 1947, when the Academy of Sciences published the first volume of its “History of American Literature”; a couple of pages in its section on Transcendentalism written by the distinguished Russian scholar A.I. Startsev were devoted to Margaret Fuller. A more detailed and thorough research and analysis of Fuller’s work started in the 1980s, with the publication of articles in scholarly journals and the defense of the first PhD dissertation. The new “History of American Literature” prepared by the Academy of Sciences (Volume 2, Moscow, 1999) had a full chapter on Fuller (it was written by a prominent Russian scholar, A.M. Zverev). Gradually, justice is being done to Fuller’s multifaceted legacy, which is recognized as an important strand in the fabric of the intercultural dialogue between the two nations. The present essay offers a closer look at some of the first steps made by the Russian reviewers of the 1850s.

In 1851, a French cultural presence, significant at the time in Russia, indirectly helped to introduce Margaret Fuller to Russian readers. Fuller was mentioned by Émile Montégut, a young and promising reviewer of the *Révue des Deux Mondes*, in his “Women Poets of North America.” His

article was translated in part and published in Russia. Montégut wrote about Fuller's recent tragic death, but more importantly he drew attention to Fuller's work: her sonnets, devoted to the great composers "Beethoven" and "Mozart," he thought represented the "true character" of their music (МОНТЕГЮ [Montégut] 132).

A year later, in 1852, when Fuller's friends, R.W. Emerson, W.H. Channing, and J.F. Clarke, published *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, the book received a remarkably prompt response in Russia: three reviews appeared almost immediately – in 1852 – one after another, in three leading Russian literary magazines: the *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, the *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia*, and the *Pantheon*. Such quick and massive coverage shows that there was a public demand in Russia for more information about Fuller, and that she was the focus of public attention.

These reviews¹ formed the basis for the present article: they were the first (and for a long time the only) publications on Fuller in Russia. The analysis of the reviews proves that Fuller's Russian contemporaries made a serious attempt to understand her. Their effort was not always successful, and they were limited by their own prejudice and by official censorship; nevertheless, some of their observations show a keen insight into her work and her contribution to the development of American culture. The young American republic aroused great interest, and Fuller was seen as a representative figure, a key to a better understanding of her native country.

The three reviews do not quite fit the standard requirements for this type of publication: their authors, who remained anonymous, were eager to share with readers their own thoughts and impressions of Fuller's life and work. *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* provided them with an occasion and served as a source of information; the book as such was not treated at all. The reviews lack structure, are loose, even amorphous, often repetitive. Their authors sometimes misquote, sometimes contradict themselves. Thus, in the *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia* we can read that the *Memoirs* show Fuller's "observant and deep mind" and "a style full of true poetry and eloquence" (192), then – a couple of pages later – that "the style of her writing is hectic, unclear and untidy" (194). Similar contradictions

mar the other reviews as well. Apparently, their authors were pressed for time, and the reviews appeared in the section called "Mixed Bag," reserved for various topical issues of cultural life.

Nevertheless, the reviews were quite ambitious in their purpose; besides introducing Margaret Fuller to the general reader they made an attempt to introduce into discussion broad cultural matters: the traits of American national character and America's relationship with the Old, European World. Indirectly, a close reading of the reviews helps to make observations about the state of Russian society in the middle of the nineteenth century – a crucial time in the history of Russia, for the attitudes of the Russian reviewers and their approaches and judgments reflected the opinions of a wide reading public they addressed. Hence the points of emphasis in the three reviews are quite similar.

The reviews paid principal attention to Fuller's life. Her family, her youth, her education received ample coverage; all kinds of biographical personal details – even of minor significance, e.g. her penchant for the esoteric, the peculiarities of her dress, etc. – were spotlighted with at least as much prominence as her views and ideas. The reviewer of the *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia* wrote: "Her memoirs as a study of human character have been such a pleasure for us that we are eager to share it with our readers" (192). This kind of attraction and excitement reminds one of a modern celebrity; in fact, it proves the importance of Margaret Fuller as a symbolic figure in the European cultural consciousness of the time.

Yet it was Fuller's person that proved to be a major stumbling block for reviewers. Her image fitted neither the traditional notions of femininity nor the already existing notions of the "new," "emancipated" woman. For the traditional woman, supposedly, devoted herself entirely to the domestic sphere of life; her role was that of mother, wife, daughter. Gentry girls in Russia, as Richard Stites points out, were "trained for modest wifehood, motherhood, and domestic concerns," and this idea of "vocational training" for women, proved to be "one of the sturdiest principles of social conservatism"(3). The emancipated woman of the popular stereotype was either a "blue-stockings" or a woman of easy

manners and morals, living by her passions and appetites. Fuller was a riddle; she upset the binary opposition, broke down the clear-cut schemes and definitions of the system of cultural norms, and demonstrated the falseness of the stereotypes and the complexity of real life. She was a loving, dutiful daughter, sister, wife, and mother, a woman who loved passionately and suffered for her love, who knew both grief and glory, who cut a heroic and tragic figure, and was a free-thinking, highly educated person, active in social and political life; moreover, she was a professional journalist, the first correspondent for an American newspaper (the *New-York Tribune*) in Europe. Her personality was so foreign to the dominant sensibility that it undermined the habitual worldview and inevitably caused anxiety, as do all things incompatible with the existing system of cultural values. For Russian reviewers Margaret Fuller was definitely a “new” woman, but much different from what was expected. She was admired yet remained enigmatic; many sides of her personality and life-style puzzled and left the reviewers at a loss.

It is no accident that they all described Fuller as a “strange” woman, whose “strangeness” is a strong motif in the reviews. The authors vary in their wording, but the idea crops up in different contexts repeatedly. In the *Pantheon* Fuller was described as a “woman with a broad but strangely directed mind” (1); the *Otechestvennye Zapiski* characterized her as “a very intelligent and at the same time very strange woman” (103); the reviewer of the *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia* found her very nature “exceptional” and “strange” (195).

Yet, despite much perplexity (e.g., the reviewer of the *Pantheon* stuck to the word “strange” as a key to Fuller’s description at the end of the review, as well as at the beginning [1, 14]), the reviewers offered an analysis of Fuller’s character. They noted some of her contradictory features: inconstancy, pride, and love of power,² her “claim to superiority, recognized by her contemporaries,” her irritable and proud self-esteem,³ “desire for preeminence.”⁴ At the same time they stressed her admirable human qualities, emphasizing, besides her intellectual power and extraordinary knowledge, such features as fortitude, candor, sincerity,⁵

desire for self-improvement, "great achievements in self-knowledge,"⁶ her ability for self-sacrifice⁷ and high moral principles: "Despite the originality of her imagination it rarely misled her. After her father's death she became the support and refuge of the entire family."⁸ One of the authors commented on an important major quality of Fuller as a person and teacher: she "ardently dedicates herself to the most philosophical, most secret sciences putting her new knowledge to use at the very moment she acquires it as if for her to learn and to teach were one and the same thing."⁹

Making an attempt to draw an accurate portrait of Margaret Fuller and understand her, the author of the review in the *Pantheon* compared her with other eminent women. He said that Fuller "combined [...] the rarest qualities and shortcomings of the famous women of our epoch" yet she "had more fortitude and character than any of the others." Interestingly, from the very first lines he introduced her to the readers as "Margaret Fuller, marchioness d'Ossoli," thus anticipating and firmly setting aside all possible gossip about her extramarital liaison. Further, he pointed out her "irreproachable behavior," which in his interpretation distinguished Fuller favorably from, say, George Sand (1). We observe here an obvious desire to place Fuller within the accepted framework of religious norms: Orthodox Russia was then no less rigorous than Margaret's native ground, Puritan New England; both found unacceptable the very thought of a child born out of wedlock in the case of a respectable woman.

Fuller's papers were lost at her tragic death in the shipwreck on her way back to the United States; nevertheless, there is evidence that her marriage was officially registered, but she herself had kept it secret for a time, even from those who were very close to her, partly perhaps out of concern for her husband's relations with his family (see Capper, *Margaret Fuller*, 365-67). The Russian reviewer tried to "rehabilitate" Fuller in public esteem from the start, showing thus the extent of his own prejudice and the state of the public mind.

Other reviewers also underlined, in passing, Fuller's religious thoughts and feelings, paying their tribute to the established system of

values. The reviewer in the *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia* drew the reader's attention to the lines in Fuller's memoirs that stated that, when her father died, she felt the burden of life and prayed to God to give her strength and good reason to reconcile her obligations to her kin with the obligations to herself (194).

Nevertheless, despite a certain narrow-mindedness in their treatment of the religious aspect of Fuller's life and ideas, the Russian reviewers made an important point in their emphasis on Fuller's Puritan heritage and moral upbringing as sources of her fortitude, strength of character and moral principles. The Puritan tradition, demanding and strict in its norms of human life, was indeed very important for Fuller, both in her personal life and in her work. True, Fuller was deeply aware of the limitations of the Puritan mind, but she never rejected its intellectual and moral wealth completely. She rebelled against its stifling monopoly, speaking ardently for a free development of the human being.¹⁰ Among the great teachers of her sensibility were Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Goethe; her perspective as a thinker and literary critic had been formed by the heritage of Classical and European literature and art; she always kept her mind open to the multitude of life forms. Nowadays, Fuller stands out as "a master of most of Europe's literary canon and as its most sophisticated interpreter to Americans," a figure "firmly rooted in the American soil," and "one of America's first truly cosmopolitan intellectuals" (Capper, "Preface" xi, xiii).

All Russian reviewers analyzed Margaret's childhood in detail, trying to find in it the roots of her future character. She was the eldest child in the family, her father became her teacher, he personally supervised her education, and its cornerstone was her intellectual development. The reviewers praised Margaret's extraordinary achievements, exceptional by all standards: by the age of ten she had mastered Latin, had excellent knowledge of Classical authors, and in her youth learned French, Italian, German, and knew well modern European literature and the works of outstanding European thinkers. The magnitude of Fuller's knowledge impressed the reviewers, but they pointed out the less advantageous side

of her exclusive education: the fact that in her childhood she had no friends, no pets, no toys. Her company was her books; the girl was deprived of an opportunity to develop emotionally and physically. These observations are accurate; we can find ample proof in the *Memoirs*. Indeed, Fuller herself saw that one-sidedness as a drawback that had spoilt her childhood. Her father was an austere man who underestimated the value of free play and leisure for the development of the child; work was his motto. The nervous and mental strain undermined Margaret's health, and she suffered from insomnia and nightmares. Her mother was a different kind of person from her father; Margaret remembered her as a truly sensitive woman, but she played a minor part in the education of her daughter.

These facts about Fuller's childhood gave Russian reviewers ground for far-reaching conclusions that served as a key to explaining her "strangeness": "This wrong direction of the mind, this early study of the Classical authors had developed an extraordinary pride that is the principal feature of her character [...]. Margaret's abilities are extraordinary, but they are abstract; her life is pure but fruitless. She speaks and writes beautifully, but her style is dry and not clear. Everything in her is original and strange" (*Pantheon* 4). "Had Margaret been left to Nature, perhaps her life would have run peacefully, and instead of the restless activity, nervous agitation, and morbid aimless fussiness there would have been meekness, tenderness, and peace. Instead of an auguress we would have seen a woman [...]," concluded the *Pantheon* reviewer (3).

In their estimate of Fuller, Russian reviewers were not much different from most of the Europeans and Americans of the time; their ideal of womanhood was meekness, tenderness, and peacefulness, and the role of the woman seemed incompatible with active life. Every word in the passage quoted above betrays the author's prejudice, all the more so that the biographical facts were well known to him and were mentioned in the review. What "morbid aimless fussiness" could he have had in mind, when after her father's death in 1835, Margaret had to earn her own living and support the family? The fact was mentioned and interpreted favorably as

Fuller's great ability for self-sacrifice and her moral strength, but it did not stop the reviewer from describing her activity as "aimless." This young woman became a professional educator and journalist, through her *Boston Conversations* she ran a kind of an "open university" for women, learned German, and translated Goethe and Eckermann's "Conversations with Goethe" (1839), making the great German a more essential part of American cultural discourse. Fuller's role in this transatlantic dialogue with the German mind was of major importance; her keen appreciation prompted Emerson to pay more attention to the figure of Goethe and include him in his *Representative Men* (1850). As Bell Gale Chevigny has pointed out, Fuller "forced Emerson to examine and largely overcome his prejudices against Goethe," and "her commitment to Goethe was the basis for her largest single contribution to Transcendental intellectual life" (Chevigny 147). Knowledge was for Margaret not an abstraction, but a living entity; she generously gave it back to the world multiplied by her own intellect and spirit. Prejudice blinded the reviewer to the true significance of Fuller's work.

Fuller's great knowledge, her keen mind, lofty aims and plans impressed the Russian reviewers but made them ill at ease, and they spoke at length, with a certain zest, about features that showed to them her "female" weakness: Fuller's interest in the esoteric, her faith in talismans, omens, and the influence of lucky numbers and mysterious qualities of precious stones. Apparently, Margaret's interest in the occult agreed with their notion of female intellect and was like a saving straw, to which they clung with a peculiar relief.

In general, one may say that Fuller's combination of a powerful mind and female nature seemed to her Russian male contemporaries amazing, almost unbelievable. The reviewer of the *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia* made the following comment: "It is remarkable, as a rare phenomenon among women of genius, that Margaret Fuller never shunned the manners and customs of her sex [...]. Margaret always dressed well and chose her dresses carefully, and though she solemnly proclaimed that she was more emancipated than any other woman in the world, she never showed any wish to reject the gallant

attentions that men pay women as their due" (193). The reviewer of the *Otechestvennye Zapiski* also found it "remarkable" that Fuller "never shunned the society of women" and "took great care over her dresses and appearance" (103). For Fuller's contemporaries a natural expression of the emancipatedness of a woman would have been, it seems, a kind of sexlessness, dowdiness, and neglect of appearance. Margaret Fuller as a "blue-stocking" would have been in accordance with the established views. The real Margaret Fuller, however, was too complex a person; she puzzled and perplexed.

The Russian reviewers read into Margaret's life "secret" intentions: "To be a wife and a mother – this is her ardent aim that she tries to hide, but which is so easy to guess" (*Pantheon* 10). One must say that Fuller never opposed marriage as such and never made her views a secret. An emphasis on the fullness of human life was important for all Transcendentalists, and in Fuller's work this attitude found a most prominent expression. Since her youth, Fuller stood for the development and self-improvement of human personality through a fullness of human experience: love, marriage, children were, in her view, natural components of the fullness of life – the quality she valued so much and underlined especially in the work of Goethe and Shakespeare. Following Goethe, she affirmed the importance of both thought and action, and her human ideal was an active individual expressing through his/her own life the true fullness of being.

Fuller was one of the best American journalists and literary critics of her time; she travelled a lot and worked as a foreign correspondent of an American newspaper in Europe. Nevertheless, in the opinion of her Russian reviewer, "there were few remarkable events" (*Pantheon* 5) in Margaret's life. As these words were followed by the remark that Margaret was "not good looking," the reader might have concluded that "events" in a woman's life meant only love stories, and Margaret's "dull life cooled [...] passions: early in her life she smothered all feelings and sought friendship, not love" (*Pantheon* 5-6). "There is no room for love in this woman's life. She was interested only in friendship brought to the degree

of art and science. She loved only once, and that was not long before her tragic death, when her pride was humiliated by years, illness and suffering” (*Pantheon* 7), sums up the reviewer. As we know now, the reviewer was gravely mistaken, and Margaret’s love for the marquis Ossoli was not her only love. A cool, rational and passionless Margaret Fuller was much easier to conceive and comprehend; the reviewer could not cope with the real complexity of her character and life story.

The attitude now best described as male chauvinism can be seen in all three reviews. The way in which the authors lightly made sweeping offensive generalizations testifies that they relied firmly on public opinion; the generalizations were expressed as a given of life causing no second thoughts on the part of the writers. Thus, the author of the review in the *Pantheon*, when he proceeded to a brief consideration of Fuller’s work, wrote disparagingly: “Margaret Fuller’s character is far more remarkable than her writings. She is captivating in conversations, but her letters, notes, and criticism are full of exaggerated comparisons, tangled in involved phrases, and in general are not clear.” The reason for this he saw in the fact that Margaret lacked patience, that her “restless, nervous nature could not get used to regular work” – this about Fuller who worked constantly all her life! These observations are followed by a characteristic conclusion: “Her critical opinions [...] are sometimes remarkable, but more often they express her feelings and not her judgments. But then, such is the general character of all women writers: women mistake expressions of pleasure for thoughts, and their feelings for critical judgments” (7). His prejudice can be seen clearly in the disdain with which he evaluated Fuller’s *Boston Conversations*: “A woman’s nature always shows itself, even amidst scholarly pursuits [...]. Weak, tender, gentle, capricious, the nature of the woman will clearly express itself in some naivety” (8). The three reviews are full of such comments and remarks, demonstrating how narrow were the conceptions of woman and her role in the Russian society in the middle of the nineteenth century, and how limited were the accepted norms of behavior.

Of course, Russian society was not an exception. Both in her native land and in Europe Fuller had to face misunderstanding, ridicule and

caustic, sneering remarks. She was a contradictory person; she had to overcome obstacles that would have taxed anyone's human resources. The Transcendentalists protested against the spiritual slumber of American society; they recognized the need for social reform and worked for it; they all had to confront opposition. The opposition to Margaret Fuller – a Transcendentalist and a woman speaking for the equality of women – was even more furious and venomous. V.L. Parrington in his *Main Currents of American Thought* recognized this special difficulty when he described her life as "an epitome of the great revolt of the New England mind against Puritan asceticism and Yankee materialism," for in her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) Fuller discussed openly "pretty much everything that was taboo in Boston society": "It was a bold thing to do, needing more courage even than to engage in a Fourieristic onslaught upon the conventions of private property. Only a first-class rebel would have had the temerity to offer such morsels to wagging tongues" (433, 432). As Bell Gale Chevigny has observed, Fuller was in fact "challenging the assumptions on which the nation was built" (7-8).

We can fully appreciate the significance of Fuller's work if we remember how entrenched was then the belief in the separation of male (public) and female (domestic) spheres of life, how strong was the "wall of separation." Russia and the United States were profoundly different in their social and political structures, yet the positions of women in society in the two countries were similar. Women were deprived of civil rights, the nature of woman was regarded as inferior in many ways, and – with little ability for abstract thinking, intellectual pursuits, and responsible public work – woman was believed to be in need of guidance, like a child.¹¹ Fuller overthrew this old edifice of beliefs and offered a reasoned defense of women's equality in all spheres of life. Her essays and her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* showed the unity of human nature. All her intellectual achievements, her philosophical inquiries into the heritage of German thought, her love and understanding of great literature – all her knowledge was molded and put to use in her great apology for womanhood. Indeed, it was an apology for humanity as such. The great

principle of personal freedom, Fuller affirmed, was equally applicable to both sexes; man could not be free without recognizing the equal freedom of woman. No wonder that Fuller, who declared that “we would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man” (Fuller, *Woman* 37), who believed that woman can be in this life anything she wants – a sea captain, – seemed “strange” to many of her contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic.

Significantly, the Russian reviewers did not discuss Fuller’s works on the woman question: they did not even mention them. It is difficult to say with certainty whether the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* was available at that time in Russia, but the reviewers definitely had an opportunity to learn about it indirectly, through European and American sources. The review in the *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, for instance, the first one to appear, in March 1852, was written, as its author acknowledged, on the basis of the reviews of British critics and passages from *Memoirs* published in the British magazine *Athenaeum* (103). Nevertheless, this most important part of Fuller’s work was disregarded in the Russian reviews; together with the disparaging remarks considered above, the omission is quite telling.

The reviewer in the *Pantheon* is the only one who touched upon the matter, but he did it in most general terms, and in his effort made a mistake which shows how deeply he misunderstood Fuller’s ideas. He wrote: “Her ideas about the place of woman are exaggerated but have some truth. For instance, she says that the education of modern women in America is quite wrong, that it even spoils morality. In our time women are taught the same things as men, she says, and when time comes for them to appear in public, they turn out to be no better educated than their grandmothers who learned only to spin” (9). Thus, in the interpretation of the reviewer, women of the nineteenth century were unable to absorb new knowledge and could cope only with the same type of things that was their grandmothers’ lot – the old domestic sphere of life. Fuller, on the other hand, said exactly the opposite: she was worried that the education women received in the nineteenth century was quite different from that of men, that they were

taught the way their grandmothers had been taught, and thus were not prepared for modern life. The author distorted the point Fuller had made and in the process deprived his own statement of logic. That was the beginning and the end of his comments on Fuller's views concerning the woman question. The other two reviewers did not consider this side of Fuller's work at all; they simply ignored it.

This silence is pregnant with meaning. In the United States before the Civil War the movement for women's rights was closely connected with the movement against slavery. Fuller, on her part, clearly and forcefully united these two questions; it was a matter of principle for her. She declared: "As the friend of the negro assumes that one man cannot by right hold another in bondage, so should the friend of Woman assume that Man cannot by right lay even well-meant restrictions on Woman. If the negro be a soul, if the woman be a soul, appareled in flesh, to one Master only are they accountable. There is but one law for souls, and, if there is to be an interpreter of it, he must come not as man, or son of man, but as son of God" (Fuller, *Woman* 37). In Russia, in the middle of the nineteenth century, serfdom was the key social issue, and abolition of serfdom was the rallying cry for various groups of opposition to the absolutist régime. Serfdom was abolished in Russia in 1861; that same year the Civil War broke out in the United States leading finally to the abolition of slavery. Thus, Fuller's words and her attitude were in both countries in the 1840s and 1850s doubly explosive, all the more so that Fuller used in her argument basic religious concepts and invoked fundamental Christian feelings. Moreover, Russian writers and publishers, unlike their American counterparts, had to bear in mind the long arm of the ubiquitous and vigilant censorship which made open discussion of controversial matters impossible. The authors of the three reviews under our consideration all remained anonymous. On the other hand, the censors of the three magazines had their names published in full in the first pages of each issue; they were personally responsible for every printed word.

This leads us to another meaningful silence, another omission of the most relevant things surprising to the modern reader. As a foreign

correspondent for Horace Greeley's *New-York Tribune*, Fuller covered the revolutionary events in Europe. Indeed, in Italy she herself took an active part in the Roman Revolution and was in charge of one of the hospitals. What she wrote then about the situation in Europe she herself regarded as her best and most important work; the manuscript perished in the shipwreck with her other belongings.¹² But her dispatches were published regularly and "Fuller supplied her American readers not only with the news they so eagerly sought, but also with informed analyses supporting the republican cause."¹³ Understandably, for reasons of censorship, this side of Fuller's life and work did not receive adequate coverage. The reviewers tackled the delicate matter in different ways showing feats of cleverness.

The reviewer of the *Otechestvennye Zapiski* did not say a word about Fuller's participation in political events. He described her travels in Europe as a private trip with a family of her friends (the usual form of travel for women in the nineteenth century). He did not mention Fuller's professional mission – her work as a foreign correspondent – and of all her Italian impressions, noted in passing only her meeting with the writer Manzoni. The reviewer did not hint that Fuller's husband was a republican; on the contrary, the wording might have created an impression that he was part of the establishment, for the reviewer wrote only that "some of the relatives of the marquis Ossoli held prominent posts in the government and the papal court" (105).

The *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia* with its more extensive review was equally reticent about the European pages of Fuller's life, focusing mainly on her meeting Thomas Carlyle. The reviewer made a mysterious hint that "some invisible force drove her to Italy" where, she was convinced, "she was destined to meet her fate." But in the review this fateful period was allotted only a few lines; the events of the last years of Fuller's life were all heaped together in the concluding four lines where Italy was barely mentioned in passing: "The history of her stay there, her strange and mysterious marriage, her actions during the Roman Triumvirate, her return to her native country and the awful accident that ended her voyage, all

these facts excite a most lively interest" (199). The interest remained unsatisfied, but it is worth pointing out that the author mentioned at least "actions during the Roman Triumvirate"; Fuller's Russian contemporaries could only hint at her revolutionary political activity, putting their trust in the reader's ability to guess and read between the lines.

The review in the *Pantheon* was the lengthiest of the three, and its author gave the most extensive description of Fuller's revolutionary experience, but this "description" was a kind of extended euphemism; the reviewer did his best to find round-about ways, never daring a straightforward statement of facts. "If she had lived not among German teachings, not in the world of metaphysicians and poets, but in the active political world, she would have become head of a political party," the reviewer admitted, but was in a hurry to assure the reader that circumstances did not allow her "to set out on this dangerous course," that her "strength and firmness" "did not find an aim and, remaining inside her, as they could not find an outlet, upset her moral life and turned it into a continuous struggle" (2). The American poets and metaphysicians the Russian reviewer had in mind were also, as is well known, social reformers who lived and worked "in the active political world" and through their writings and art, through their practical life and social experiments, tried to transform it (Brook Farm is one example of this endeavor to wed thought and life). Fuller participated directly in the political life of her time.

Fuller's trip to Europe was described in the review as her personal desire for amusement and diversion; in her travelling notes the reviewer did not discover anything of interest except successful portraits of some men of letters (Wordsworth and Carlyle). Speaking about Italy, he mentioned in passing that during the siege of Rome by the French army Fuller was in charge of a hospital, and immediately after these words exclaimed, "By that time Margaret was already married!" (*Pantheon* 12). The reviewer treated the Italian pages of her life solely through her marriage to the marquis Ossoli, and in the most melodramatic terms: "This marriage is very strange and even incomprehensible; everything about it is obscure and mysterious." The reviewer did not mention her husband's part in the revolutionary events and described him as a man "entirely

unremarkable,” almost a nonentity. Margaret’s choice of husband puzzled the reviewer, but he had a ready answer: “They married because eternal human feelings are stronger than anything else and the heart always defeats self-esteem” (12). There is no denying these sentimental reasons, yet one must say that Ossoli was hardly quite unremarkable, and his republican views played their part in bringing him and Margaret together (see Capper, *Margaret Fuller*, 332, 348-49). One must also draw attention to a peculiar emphasis in the reviewer’s description of Margaret’s emotions in those days: “Only one strong feeling can be seen in Margaret’s life in that epoch: her maternal love. ‘What is my son doing? Is he alive? Will the soldiers spare him? Is his wet-nurse with him?’ – these are her worries during the siege of Rome, and the fate of the country preoccupies her less than the fate of the young Angelino.” When they fled to Florence, the reviewer wrote, Margaret devoted herself entirely to her son, “forgetting metaphysics, listening to his cries and laughter” (12). “Where is now her Transcendentalism, where are Margaret’s former triumphs? She forgot about everything, and one can forgive her for many things, because for one time in her life she was a woman” (13), concluded the reviewer, proceeding then to a detailed description of Margaret’s last voyage and death in the shipwreck. Thus the last, most important years in Fuller’s life, when through the European experience her political and personal horizons broadened immensely, for reasons of censorship did not receive adequate coverage; important information was suppressed, disguised, described solely in terms of sentimental romance.

What could have complicated the situation for the reviewers and their vigilant censors, putting an added pressure upon them and making plain speaking impossible, was the fact that the great Russian revolutionary Alexander Herzen (1812-1870), who was living in exile in Europe at the time, was in correspondence with Giuseppe Mazzini, the leader of the revolutionary forces in Italy. Moreover, some of his letters were published. One of these is especially relevant for us. It was written in November 1849 as a follow-up to Herzen’s essay “Russia,” translated and published by *L’Italia del Popolo*, the newspaper founded by Mazzini. In the essay and

the letter Herzen analyzed the situation in Europe; he felt disappointed, and he focused his hopes for the future on America and Russia. Indeed, these ideas were so important to Herzen, so central to his vision of world history, that seven years later, in 1857, he would write another letter to Mazzini elaborating and developing them, and later repeatedly returned to the subject in his essays (e.g., "America and Siberia"). Herzen saw the United States and Russia as two young, emerging nations, the only two countries showing life and activity amidst European stagnation. He compared the United States and Russia pointing out important divergences in their development, as well as significant features they had in common: both nations had their pioneers, their frontiers, and were moving steadily to the Pacific, but the United States fulfilled the great idea of self-government, while in Russia the strong state had completely suppressed the individual. Herzen praised "the healthy attitude of the American mind to questions of state and economics" as "perfectly corresponding to the concept of a democratic republic" and expressed his hope and belief that Russia would soon "come of age" and liberate itself from "the all-embracing dictatorship" of the absolutist regime (Herzen 401, 402). Thus, Herzen closely linked America, revolutionary events in Italy, and the revolutionary transformation of Russia.

In 1852 – and for years to come – the Russian press had to be very evasive writing about Margaret Fuller, an American, involved in the Roman Revolution, maintaining a correspondence with Mazzini, and blessing him in his endeavor: "Heaven bless dear Mazzini, cheer his heart and give him worthy helpers to carry out its holy purposes!"¹⁴ In such a complicated case all sorts of quibbles were doubly imperative. This might also account for the fact that the three reviews under our consideration were followed by years of silence.

In view of the limitations and prejudices discussed above, it is all the more surprising and significant that Fuller's Russian reviewers could understand and appreciate the importance of her contribution to the development of American culture. Thus, they showed perspicacity and penetration when they underlined Fuller's leading role in the Transcendental

Club: “Margaret was the soul of this school, and one may say that before she joined it, it did not exist [...]. To put it in another way, they had been dispersed members of a new school, and Margaret gathered them around herself, and soon the well-known figures were around her [...]. Undoubtedly she influenced them [...]. Besides exercising an intellectual influence, she acted in a material way: she helped the school with her pen... Margaret was the chief editor and contributor [of the *Dial*]; she dedicated her life to the magazine, though to support her family she had to give lessons and work in different periodicals” (*Pantheon* 9). Russian reviewers mention also the differences between Fuller and other members of the group: “But despite her close relations with the Transcendentalists, Margaret did not share all their ideas, and her sympathies did not make her forget herself” (*Pantheon* 9).

One may say that in their appreciation of Margaret Fuller, Russian reviewers were ahead of their time: more than a hundred years later, in the second half of the twentieth century, researchers of her work had reason to complain that Fuller was viewed principally as someone who was friends with Emerson and other well-known Transcendentalists, as if “her only importance was in the company she kept” (Slater 3). This situation has been corrected in the last forty years, with a revival of interest in Margaret Fuller on both sides of the Atlantic. New research and new editions of her works reestablished Fuller’s importance in her own right and rediscovered her work for the general public. Russian reviewers of the middle of the nineteenth century saw her as a significant figure of Transcendentalism and American Romanticism in general and emphasized Fuller’s independent contribution. This effort on their part, though limited in scope and marked with prejudice, is an important step in the development of transatlantic cultural dialogue, as it introduced a new major American figure into Russian cultural discourse.

Significantly, the Russian reviewers saw Fuller as a representative figure of the young American culture. They spoke of “the inquisitive mind of this American woman” (*Otechestvennye Zapiski* 104) and pointed to the “mores of her native country” (*Pantheon* 2) as one of the factors that predetermined her life. The reviewers showed a keen interest in the United

States of America and a desire to acquaint a broad circle of Russian readers with the American nation.

Of course, many of the facts of American culture remained alien and incomprehensible to the Russian reviewers. Thus, the author of the review in the *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia* wrote: "However, the pride that marks the words and actions of our heroine seems to be the dominant feature of American society" (196). Surprisingly, to illustrate his thesis he gave as an example Fuller's Boston Conversations. This undertaking, deeply rooted in American culture, was at the same time truly innovative, for Fuller's seminar-style Conversations opened new perspectives, giving women an opportunity for public intellectual life such as discussion of ideas, including the distinctive properties of different arts, ancient Greek mythology, and other matters. In the process she broadened the sphere of public life for women. Bell Gale Chevigny has described "conducting the Conversations and writing *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*" as Fuller's "most concentrated feminist activity" (4). The meaning and significance of her Boston Conversations remained unclear to the Russian reviewer. He admitted he had read about them with "great pleasure," but his estimate was more negative than positive and was not confined to Fuller alone but embraced American society at large. He thought that such Conversations did not deserve high commendation. The public nature of the Conversations seemed to him a violation of human privacy; he believed the Conversations only helped to develop "an unaccountable, forced and feverish enthusiasm," their aim was "to measure, so to speak, the feelings which everyone must live through himself, find in himself, and which produce a whole world of observations" (196-97). He saw the Conversations as a characteristic expression of the features typical of American society: "Americans would like to acquire in one minute the knowledge that has taken ages of work to possess, and experience that is given only by time" (197).

The historic differences between the two cultures account, in part, for the attitude of the reviewer. The Russian reviewer justly pointed to a tendency of the American society of that time toward a quick and easy,

often superficial, absorption of the experience of the Old World, which, it must be noted, was an object of criticism for many writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including such Americans as Henry James, Edith Wharton, George Santayana, T.S. Eliot, and many others. Fuller herself was one of them.¹⁵ On the other hand, in the passage above we can see the strong mistrust of new social forms on the part of the Russian reviewer, and his unwillingness to recognize and accept the creative work of an individual in the sphere of civil society. This passive, contemplative social attitude represented a big part of public opinion in Russia during the 1850s.

The attempts of the Russian reviewers to reach an understanding of American culture through the life and work of Margaret Fuller are contradictory. Thus, the author of the review in the *Pantheon* justly spoke about the influence of German philosophy and literature, as well as American Transcendentalist thought, on the shaping of Fuller's mind. But estimating American Transcendentalism from the point of view of a European, he showed a lack of penetration:

The basis of her learning is completely German, and owing to German philosophy she became a passionate enthusiast. But then, this quality is common to all her compatriots. Indeed, enthusiasm is spreading ever more in the United States. All philosophical fantasies, all cloudy misty dreams that we are accustomed to regard as a property of the inhabitants of Germany, have taken strong root in the New World and are coming to us from there, only with a new, naïve and clumsy aspect. Margaret Fuller has largely contributed to the dissemination of these ideas. Her influence was indubitable and had its use, because she tried to introduce into the American intellectual atmosphere ideas of mysteriousness and mysticism. (7-8)

The Russian reviewer, as we can see, noted some important connections in the transatlantic cultural dialogue but was far from understanding the

essence of American Transcendentalism. His feeling of European superiority in the realm of thought prevented him from appreciating American Transcendentalism; he underestimated British, French, and American sources of Transcendentalism, confining his view to the German mind. Transcendentalism became for him a naïve and clumsy copy of German romanticism; he equated it with "mystery and mysticism."

Accordingly, he underestimated Fuller's work: the reviewer deplored "the one-sidedness of its character" – the letters and notes "have only one object: the inner state of her soul, her desires, hopes, enchantments, and disappointments" (7). American Transcendentalism, with its constant interest in the internal life of the individual, with its belief that the inner world is the truest expression of the Spirit, made a personal statement a cornerstone of creative work. Emerson's thesis of self-reliance expressed the thought common to all Transcendentalists; making one's self through self-reliance became an important philosophical guide for practical life and a source of imaginative work. Thoreau's life in the woods gave a classical example of American romantic prose; Fuller's notes and essays are a similar example. This major philosophical premise is present in the work of many Romantics on both sides of the Atlantic; Russian reviewers did not take it into account in their criticism of Fuller.

Yet, considering the facts that the three reviewers were Fuller's immediate contemporaries and that Fuller died when she was only forty, before her reputation as a thinker and public figure was firmly established either in the United States or in Europe, we can say that on the whole the Russian reviewers gave a good appraisal of her contribution as a woman of letters.

Indeed, American national literary tradition was then only taking shape; the Transcendentalists, Fuller included, as well as the other Romantics, stood at its beginnings. Fuller devoted special attention to the great endeavor in her criticism: the making of American national literature. In her essay "American Literature: Its Position in the Present Time and Prospects for the Future," she said she was "not anxious to prove that there is as yet much American literature": "For it does not

follow because many books are written by persons born in America that there exists an American literature. Books that imitate or represent the thoughts and life of Europe do not constitute an American literature. Before such can exist, an original idea must animate this nation and fresh currents of life must call into life fresh thoughts along its shores." Fuller spoke of the American nation as "our people in a transition state; which lasts rather longer than is occupied in passing bodily the ocean which separates the New from the Old World" (*Writings* 358), but she believed that "the future is glorious with certainties for those who do their duty in the present" (*Writings* 374).

These thoughts were echoed by the Russian reviewers. The author of the review in the *Pantheon* (the most detailed of the three) wrote in conclusion that Fuller "occupies a place of honor in the literary history of her fatherland, because such a character appeared in the United States for the first time," and "Margaret is the clearest proof of the desire of the North Americans for change in manners, life, and convictions." The author, being a European, found it interesting, "because we can judge what influence European ideas have had on the development of learning in the United States." He believed that "Americans do not have ideas of their own and probably are not going to have them for a long time," but he did not see any provincialism in the United States: "They live the life of a cosmopolitan and submit themselves in all things to the European influence." At the same time, he put a special emphasis on the American desire for change and the greatness of the transformation going on in the New World: "America is a vast field for all kinds of experiments." The Russian author stressed the speed with which America was learning; moreover, he emphasized the creative practical dimension European ideas acquired on American soil: "What Europe thinks, America fulfills – be it industrial invention or philosophical system." In this context of the fast-developing United States, his final estimate of Fuller's work gains new weight and sounds all the more to the point: "The influence of Margaret Fuller did not die with her death; it is alive and will continue living for a long time in North America" (14).

These words of the anonymous Russian reviewer have come true. The last decades have witnessed a powerful new revival of academic and popular interest in Margaret Fuller; indeed, in her native land Fuller "has had three afterlives" (Bailey 1). In fact, one may say that Fuller's influence is "alive and will continue living" on both sides of the Atlantic. The Russian reviewers of the 1850s made Margaret Fuller a figure of Russian cultural discourse, promoting the cultural dialogue between Russia and the United States of America. In 1855, an important comprehensive analytical survey of America, published by the *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia*, drew to a certain extent on the work of these reviewers and developed their ideas a step further. In the section on literature, it pointed out that Fuller had "an enormous influence on the American literary world" and "intellectual atmosphere" ("American Literature" 202); stressed the "essentially American" qualities of the Transcendentalists along with "their cosmopolitan aspirations" (199); mentioned for the first time – though in passing – Fuller's work in the *New-York Tribune* (202), – a symptomatic detail, considering that a special section of the survey was devoted to journalism in the U.S. – and emphasized that "American literature was destined to begin in journalism" (191). The Russian reviewers and critics of the 1850s were earnest in their effort, and their achievements and enthusiasm make up for some of the shortcomings of their work.

Moscow State Institute of International Relations

Notes

¹ «Записки Маргариты Фуллер Оссоли», *Отечественные записки* ["Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli," The *Otechestvennye Zapiski*]; «Записки Маргариты Фуллер Оссоли», *Библиотека для чтения* ["Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli,"; The *Biblioteka dlia Chtenia*]; «Маргарита Фуллер», *Пантеон* ["Margaret Fuller," The *Pantheon*]. All quotations from Russian works appear here in translations by M.P. Kizima.

² *Пантеон* 1, 2.

³ *Библиотека для чтения* 192.

⁴ *Отечественные записки* 103.

⁵ *Пантеон* 1.

⁶ *Библиотека для чтения* 198.

⁷ *Пантеон* 10.

⁸ *Библиотека для чтения* 194.

⁹ *Библиотека для чтения* 192 – 193.

¹⁰ For a discussion of Fuller's relationship with the Puritan tradition see, for example, Allen (45-65). Allen points out that Fuller "struggled against the bondage of her Puritan heritage, but she also shared its strengths" (51).

¹¹ For a good account of the position of women in Russia in the nineteenth century see Stites (the book was translated and published in Russia in 2004.)

¹² See Reynolds and Belasco Smith's "Introduction" to Fuller, "*These Sad but Glorious Days*," 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ Margaret Fuller to Giuseppe Mazzini, Rome, 3 March 1849. In Fuller, *Writings*, 582.

¹⁵ In her cultural criticism Fuller wrote with sarcasm of this American tendency and "the conceited American" as a type: "He does not see, not he, that the History of Humanity for many centuries is likely to have produced results it requires some training, some devotion, to appreciate and profit by. With his great clumsy hands only fitted to work on a steam-engine, he seizes the old Cremona violin, makes it shriek with anguish in his grasp, and then declares he thought it was all humbug before he came, and now he knows it; that there is not really any music in these old things; that the frogs in one of our swamps make much finer, for *they* are young and alive." But Fuller was hopeful: "Yet in his folly there is meaning; add thought and culture to his independence, and he will be a man of might [...]" ("*These Sad but Glorious Days*," 162, 163). Fuller did everything she could to educate the public; Edith Wharton, moved by the same impulse, published in 1919, after the U.S. entry into World War I, a series of articles, *French Ways and Their Meaning*, "with the idea of making

France and things French more intelligible to the American soldier" (Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 357).

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