

33 QUOTATIONS



Margaret Fuller

(1810-1850)

Margaret Fuller is the first prominent feminist in American literature, the author of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and a cultural leader of the Transcendentalist movement in New England, with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Her education and intellect intimidated most men, who were conditioned to relate to all women in accord with Victorian gender roles. Fuller is a Transcendental feminist—truly egalitarian in contrast to the radical Feminists of the late 20th century. Most of her writing is journalism and discursive criticism. There are fewer spiritual quotations here than might be expected because for the most part her Transcendentalism was expressed orally in her group meetings called “Conversations.” Her charismatic performances in these meetings were never transcribed, merely paraphrased, and her speeches could not be repeated because they were spontaneous effusions of Spirit.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, autobiographical, art, literary criticism, honesty, God, masculine and feminine, man, woman, love, home life, evolution, Transcendental Feminism, liberation of women, equal opportunity, one third of each gender, moderation, independence, marriage, woman as queen:

YOUTH

Very early, I knew that the only object in life was to grow.

For precocity some great price is always demanded sooner or later in life.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

Today a reader, tomorrow a leader.

I am suffocated and lost when I have not the bright feeling of progression.

Drudgery is as necessary to call out the treasures of the mind, as harrowing and planting those of the earth.

I now know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable to my own.

If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.

Beware of over-great pleasure in being popular or even beloved.

ART

Art can only be truly art by presenting an adequate outward symbol of some fact in the interior life.

LITERARY CRITICISM

The use of criticism, in periodical writing, is to sift, not to stamp a work.

HONESTY

Would that the simple maxim, that honesty is the best policy, might be laid to heart; that a sense of the true aim of life might elevate the tone of politics and trade till public and private honor become identical.

GOD

I accept the Universe!

Man is a being of two-fold relations, to nature beneath, and intelligences above him. The earth is his school, if not his birth-place; God his object; life and thought his means of interpreting nature, and aspiring to God.

MASCULINE AND FEMININE

The growth of Man is two-fold, masculine and feminine.

Those two sides are supposed to be expressed in Man and Woman, that is, as the more and the less, for the faculties have not been given pure to either, but only in preponderance. There are also exceptions in great number, such as men of far more beauty than power, and the reverse. But, as a general rule, it seems to have been the intention to give a preponderance on the one side, that is called masculine, and on the other, one that is called feminine. There cannot be any doubt that, if these two developments were in perfect harmony, they would correspond to and fulfil one another, like hemispheres, or the tenor and bass in music. But there is no perfect harmony in human nature; and the two parts answer one another only now and then; or, if there be a persistent consonance, it can only be traced at long intervals, instead of discoursing an obvious melody.

MAN

To address Man wisely, you must not forget that his life is partly animal, subject to the same laws with Nature.

We need to hear the excuses men make to themselves for their worthlessness.

Man can never be perfectly happy or virtuous, till all men are so.

WOMAN

The especial genius of women I believe to be electrical in movement, intuitive in function, spiritual in tendency. [consistent with Victorianism]

LOVE

Two persons love in one another the future good which they aid one another to unfold.

HOME LIFE

A house is no home unless it contain food and fire for the mind as well as for the body.

EVOLUTION

Man, in the order of time, was developed first; as energy comes before harmony; power before beauty. Woman was therefore under his care as an elder. He might have been her guardian and teacher. But, as human nature goes not straight forward, but by excessive action and then reaction in an undulated course, he misunderstood and abused his advantages, and became her temporal master instead of her spiritual sire. He educated Woman more as a servant than a daughter, and found himself a king without a queen.

TRANSCENDENTAL FEMINISM

At last men became a little wise... So Man did her more and more justice, and grew more and more kind. But yet—his habits and his will corrupted by the past—he did not clearly see that Woman was half himself; that her interests were identical with his; and that, by the law of their *common being* [Transcendental or humanistic feminism], he could never reach his true proportions while she remained in any wise shorn of hers...women had not the less power for their want of light and noble freedom. But it was power which hurt alike them and those against whom they made use of the arms of the servile—cunning, blandishment, and unreasonable emotion. [opposes Victorian feminist paradigm of gender roles]

LIBERATION OF WOMEN

We ask of men to remove arbitrary barriers. Some would like to do more. But I believe it needs that Woman show herself in her native dignity, to teach them how to aid her; their minds are so encumbered by tradition.

But, were this freedom to come suddenly, I have no fear of the consequences. Individuals might commit excesses, but there is not only in the sex a reverence for decorums and limits inherited and enhanced from generation to generation, which many years of other life could not efface, but a native love, in Woman as Woman, of proportion, of “the simple art of not too much”—a Greek moderation, which would create immediately a restraining party, the natural legislators and instructors of the rest, and would gradually establish such rules as are needed to guard, without impeding, life.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

But if you ask me what offices they may fill, I reply—any. I do not care what case you put; let them be sea-captains, if you will. I do not doubt there are women well fitted for such an office... I think women need, especially at this juncture, a much greater range of occupation than they have, to rouse their latent powers. In families that I know, some little girls like to saw wood, others to use carpenters’ tools. Where these tastes are indulged, cheerfulness and good-humor are promoted. Where they are forbidden, because “such things are not proper for girls,” they grow sullen and mischievous.

ONE THIRD OF EACH GENDER

Fourier had observed these wants of women, as not 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.

MODERATION

I have no doubt, however, that a large proportion 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 warm. Nature would take care of that... The difference would be that *all* need not be constrained to employments for which *some* are unfit.

INDEPENDENCE

I have urged on Women independence of Man, not that I do not think the sexes mutually needed by one another, but because in Woman this fact has led to an excessive devotion, which has cooled love, degraded marriage, and prevented either sex from being what it should be to itself or the other. I wish Woman to live, *first* for God's sake. Then she will not make an imperfect man her god, and thus sink to idolatry. Then she will not take what is not fit for her from a sense of weakness and poverty. Then, if she finds what she needs in Man embodied, she will know how to love, and be worthy of being loved.

MARRIAGE

By being more a soul, she will not be less Woman, for nature is perfected through spirit.... Now there is no woman, only an overgrown child. That her hand may be given with dignity, she must be able to stand alone...that is the very fault of marriage, and of the present relation between the sexes, that the woman *does* belong to the man, instead of forming a whole with him.

WOMAN AS QUEEN

Woman, self-centered, would never be absorbed by any relation; it would be only an experience to her as to man. It is a vulgar error that love, a love, to Woman is her whole existence; she also is born for Truth and Love in their universal energy. And will she soon appear—the woman who shall vindicate their birthright for all women; who shall teach them what to claim, and how to use what they obtain? Shall not her name be for her era Victoria...? [hence Victorianism]

...Ask for the castle's King and Queen;
Though rabble rout may rush between.
Beat thee senseless to the ground,
In the dark beset thee round;
Persist to ask, and it will come;
Seek not for rest in humbler home;
So shalt thou see, what few have seen,
The palace home of King and Queen.

[Queen Victoria (1819-1901) reigned over the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from 1837 until she died. She also claimed to be Empress of India.]

