

The Adventures of Allegra Fullerton

Robert J. Begiebing

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After traveling into the seventeenth century with his first novel *The Strange Death of Mistress Coffin* (1991), Begiebing continues his historical explorations—this time into the middle of the nineteenth century—with the aid of his fictional title character, Allegra Fullerton. While writing of Allegra's experiences as she earns her living as an itinerant painter, Begiebing intertwines historical events of the time period into her life, capturing the very essence of history and lifestyles of nineteenth century New England and Europe.

It is clear from the beginning that Allegra is narrating through her memoirs. The thoroughly engrossing writing style and the social decorum presented throughout the story is representative of a proper nineteenth century woman, albeit one who has struggled to transcend the limits society has imposed upon all women of her day. She immediately piques one's interest by immersing the reader in her most dire of circumstances: that of being held captive in the seedy West Side of Boston, known as Satan's Throne. Descriptions of captivity ensue, along with reminiscences of how her choice of becoming an itinerant painter—with the help of her brother Tom—had led up to her unfortunate introduction to her captor. While reminiscing, Allegra also shares the various experiences her journeys through the country, villages and larger towns of New England have brought and describes the people she encountered who have deeply affected her life.

Upon finally gaining her liberty, she meets Margaret Fuller, a reformer who would expand her beliefs in women's rights and the emancipation for all slaves, and who would impress Allegra deepest of all, becoming Allegra's role model in how to "remain constant to the true path of [one's] singular life." As Allegra moves on—from the taste of living communally at Newspirit and then to a return to her painting studies with an influential painter both in Boston and Florence, Italy—her stories continue to unfold, surrounded by everyday events, including the rising revolt and war in Italy that eventually compels her to return to America.

It is quite obvious to those readers with historical backgrounds that Begiebing has spent a significant amount of time in careful research on the nineteenth century, including studies in the artistic, social, economic, geographical, philosophical and political realms. All of which has imbued this work with such detailed descriptions as to bring Allegra Fullerton's fictional story—along with her beliefs and passions—to life.

NELLY HEITMAN (November / December 1999)

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