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A further delight is found in the final chapter, "Exploring the America of Abigail and Louisa May Alcott," in which LaPlante lays out a kind of tour map of Alcott territory – showing where members of the family lived in Boston or Concord at various times, where family members worked, and where the real-life events that Alcott fictionalizes took place. LaPlante's presentation is precise enough that those of us who enjoy touching base with the places and people we admire can retrace their steps and try to imagine the scenes of two hundred years ago. Those scenes include not only the familiar places such as Boston and Orchard House but also Washington, New Hampshire, and Syracuse, New York. We also can enjoy refreshing our memories of Louisa May Alcott's classics.

LaPlante is also the author of *American Jezebel*, a portrait of Anne Hutchinson, and *Salem Witch Judge*, about her ancestor Samuel Sewell, the only judge (of three) who publicly repented the condemnation and hanging of the Salem "witches." I look forward to reading both. First, though, I need to reread Louisa's *Little Women*, *Little Men*, *Eight Cousins*, and *Rose in Bloom*. I enjoyed them as a child; I want now to experience them as an adult. Then I'll go on to *Moods* and *A Long Fatal Love Chase*. I am sure they will read differently now that I have read LaPlante.

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**Margaret Fuller: A New American Life.** Megan Marshall.  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013. xxi + 474 pp. \$30.00  
(cloth).

In the past several decades, readers of nineteenth-century American intellectual and social history have enjoyed an outpouring of publications about Margaret Fuller, a pioneer of American women's education and autonomy. No less than eight books on Fuller grace my own bookshelf. Fuller was all but forgotten for many decades after her death, but interest resumed in the late twentieth century with Robert Hudspeth's work on Fuller's letters. Then the 2010 bicentennial of her birth generated a number of publications and projects, especially from the Unitarian



Universalist Association, through lectures at General Assembly, worship and religious education materials, hymn and sermon contests, traveling exhibits, and more, adding considerably to the Fuller revival.

So why has yet another biography of Fuller appeared so soon after the bicentennial and on the heels of John Matteson's award-winning work, *The Lives of Margaret Fuller* (2012)? The answer is that we needed Megan Marshall to add her "fresh and true" view of Fuller's "New American Life" to our understanding of this important nineteenth-century figure. Marshall presents Margaret Fuller as no previous biographers have. Granted, her unique perspective on Fuller offers minimal new information. What Marshall offers instead is an engaging new perspective on this complicated author and critic, who theorized a new definition of American womanhood in the mid-nineteenth-century, yet could manage to live only sporadically according to her own ideals.

Readers familiar with Marshall may recall her award-winning book, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (2005). Her coverage of Fuller enjoys the same careful research and eloquent writing style found in that work. While investigating the Peabody sisters, Marshall came upon many revealing sources pertaining to Fuller, in particular letters between Fuller and her immediate acquaintances, which helped shape the new perspective she offers now. Her close reading of these and hundreds of other letters, interpreted in the context of her thorough knowledge of mid-century New England intellectual and progressive women's thought, led Marshall to view the subject of her biography as an unconventional woman who knew no distinction between public and private life. Fuller's personal activities were always political and her writing and editing were filled with her own values and emotional habits acquired early in her life, beginning with her father's strict regimen of home schooling for his first-born daughter. Through this intimate and contextualized interpretation of the details of Fuller's life, Marshall describes the triumphs and the tragedies, the public and the private, with equal attention and affection.

Readers of this journal undoubtedly know Fuller's important contributions to American intellectual life. Exceptionally well-educated for a girl in early nineteenth-century Cambridge, Massachusetts, Fuller was the only woman involved as an adult in the early phase of Transcendentalism, serving as editor of the *Transcendentalist*

journal, *The Dial*, from 1840 to 1842. She also enjoyed close, sometimes tumultuous relationships with Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Freeman Clark, both of whom, along with William Henry Channing, arranged the prompt publication of her *Memoirs* after her untimely death in 1850. Fuller also cultivated new modes of intellectual community, especially for women, in her several seasons of *Conversations* in Boston starting in 1839. In her own piece in *The Dial*, "The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men and Woman versus Women," she presented her controversial gendered critique of personal relationships between men and women. Revised as *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), the work assured Fuller's place in the vanguard of nineteenth-century American advocates for woman's rights.

As a reporter for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, she identified abuses of women in asylums and prisons in New York City. Endorsed by Greeley, she sailed in 1846 for Europe, where she eventually became the first female war correspondent. Visiting first England, then France, she traveled in the circles of even more radical thinkers than she had known in the United States, expanding all the more her intent to lead a new liberated life. In 1847 she moved to Rome, where the Italian revolt against Austrian rule was taking hold. There she had the first sexual affair of her life with a minor Italian nobleman, Giovanni Ossoli, eleven years her junior and described by Marshall as an "obscure young man" (293). Bearing Ossoli's child, Nino, in 1848 may have been her most daringly liberated act, a liberation that she could discover only in the more relaxed moral atmosphere that Europe offered. Writing her history of the Italian Revolution may have resulted in her most daringly liberated political text, made possible by her engagement in that tumultuous circumstance. The calamitous shipwreck of the *Elizabeth*, which tragically claimed the lives of Fuller and her new family as they neared the shore of her homeland, irretrievably claimed her account of the revolution as well.

Marshall pays homage to the Emerson/Clarke/Channing *Memoir* by organizing her chapters with the same titles: Youth, Cambridge, Groton and Providence, Concord, New York, Europe, and Homeward. Still, this is not a rehashing of Fuller's already well-told story. Instead, Marshall highlights lesser known events—Fuller's circles of friends including her close connections with Emerson, new details of her 1839 *Conversations* in the shelter of Elizabeth Peabody's foreign language book



store, Fuller's experiences as a mother leaving her infant son Nino in the care of wet nurses removed from the fighting front – and brings her own refreshing perspective to the core of information she must repeat in order to present a coherent life story of Fuller. Marshall's personal, intimate portrayal of Fuller emerges in part through her technique of weaving words and phrases from Fuller's letters into her own elegant writing style. Marshall's meticulous research is evident in that she cites every use of Fuller's words in easily readable footnotes. Through her skilled biographer's voice, Marshall accomplishes what Fuller had only hoped for in her exchanges with Emerson when she wished that one day their letters could "pass into literature."

Marshall also respects the complicated, creative, sometimes confused personality that Fuller was, avoiding what some others have presented as a sentimental rendering of a life doomed to destruction by the forces of nature. We come away with a new understanding of Fuller's complexity as she struggled with having a "man's ambition and a woman's heart." Marshall does not shy away from presenting the woman who was both gifted and flawed, a mix of the ideal and the practical – loving and negligent, brilliant and naïve – all at the same time. Marshall never sugarcoats: we gain a vivid sense of Fuller's periodic loneliness and we feel perhaps a bit critical of her for leaving Nino in the hands of caregivers whose poor feeding of him caused him to become malnourished while she attended to her reporting.

Practical and down-to-earth, as when she worked to support her family during financial hardship after her father's death, Fuller also articulated theories of liberation for women which were so ideal for the 1840s that even she could not realize them in her own life, especially in the United States. Fuller's tangled relationships with virtually all the men in her life – her father, Emerson, Clarke, and James Nathan, whom she naively followed to Europe, mistaking friendship for romance – demonstrate the degree to which her theories of nurturing relationships between men and women were mostly "fore-sayers" (xvii) of actual life, more applicable to twentieth-century reality than nineteenth-century possibility. The closest Fuller came to living the life of freedom she advocated for all women was in her scandalous affair and likely marriage with Ossoli: only by losing her virginity with this man who logically was an unsuited match for her did she find the freedom she advocated for all women.

Marshall's interior view of Margaret Fuller offers the most persuasive account to date of just how radical, influential, and complex were Fuller's forty short years of life. Even so, questions about Fuller's influence remain. Why was there such a gap between her radical theory of how women can liberate themselves and her own difficulty in living a liberated life, especially with the men she knew? To what extent did her own life demonstrate just how complicated complete freedom for women really was at that time? Had she survived the shipwreck, would Fuller's contribution to the nineteenth-century movement for woman's rights in America have extended beyond her writing that inspired so many? Would she have found compatibility alongside Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Antoinette Brown, and others doing the hard work in the trenches – itinerant lecturing, legislative petitioning, persistent writing and publishing – required of the reformers for decades to come? Perhaps not, as Marshall states, "Margaret Fuller was never a joiner."

Like Fuller's manuscript history of the Italian Revolution, answers to these questions were lost to the waters of Long Island Sound when the *Elizabeth* went down. We can only speculate on what might have been, had this not occurred. Still, we have Megan Marshall's excellent biography to provide many new dimensions for evaluating Fuller, described by Lydia Jenkins in an 1861 review as a "great genius, noble woman, splendid mind, and generous soul" (*Ladies Repository*). Marshall's intimate perspective on this creative woman invites us to share in and identify with Fuller's own imperfect experience of living the new American life that she envisioned for women and men of all time.

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**The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism.** Edited by Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petruionis, and Laura Dassow Walls. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 755 pp. \$116.67 (cloth), \$85.49 (Kindle).

For the past two spring semesters I have taught a course called "The Literature of Transcendence" for creative writing MFA students at Emerson College. (No, that's not Ralph Waldo, but his distant cousin