

in literary text and visual art. Structurally, this text resembles Mary Ann Caws's *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington* (1990). She too weaves together stories that cross disciplinary boundaries of the work and life of Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Leonora Carrington. Caws uses psychoanalytical theory to tease out the relations between what she knows of their lives and their representations of self, just as Reid does. However, Reid also draws from her vast background as a visual arts writer (and more recently, a painter) known for her well-written and highly accessible essays, reviews, and interviews with/about Canadian women artists and writers. In *Women Between*, she makes good use of Meigs's life-long painting practice in relation to her autobiographical text *Lily Briscoe: A Self-Portrait* (1981) and Pratt's in connection with *A Personal Calligraphy* (2000). Characteristically, Reid's discussions begin with the art or literary work itself and then explore direct connections and associations within and between works. Next her attention shifts to gathering the threads connecting differences between the lives of her subjects in relation to what she reads/sees and the work each produces inside or outside discipline or genre.

In the process of reading "between the lines" the reader finds Reid's own life story, a story of survival, between as she phrases it "modernism and post modernism." Reid sees Pratt, Meigs, Dyck and Butala as "freeing agents" and the inter-connections between their lives are vital to her text. What they share as a community of survivors connects them in spite of geographical distance; differences of sexual orientation, spirituality, class and ethnicity; and different strategies of their practice as artists, material- and technology-wise. In deciphering Reid's textual strategies of weaving together performative, autobiographical, material, and inter-textual connections, her reader weaves herself into the text.

Janice Andrae is a Toronto visual artist and writer whose interests are contemporary literary and visual art textual practices, informed by feminist and queer theoretical perspectives. Her reviews, essays, bookworks appear in Parachute, Canadian Art, Fuse, Mix, C magazine, Tessera, Resources for Feminist Research, and Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme.

EDEN'S OUTCASTS: THE STORY OF LOUISA MAY ALCOTT AND HER FATHER

John Matteson
New York: W. W. Norton, 2007

MARGARET FULLER: AN AMERICAN ROMANTIC LIFE

Charles Capper
Vol. 1, *The Private Years*; vol. 2, *The Public Years*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 2007

REVIEWED BY GISELA ARGYLE

The two main subjects of these exhaustive biographies, Louisa May Alcott (1833-88) and Sarah Margaret Fuller (1810-50), were the principal female members of the Concord Transcendentalists. They have recently appeared in this role in Susan Cheever's *American Bloomsbury* (2006), reviewed here in an earlier issue. I shall refer to Alcott by her first name to distinguish her from her father, who shares the focus of Matteson's book. Both women were educated by their fathers and raised to "heroic" ambitions, which neither achieved in her abridged life. Both regretfully came to see themselves excluded from motherhood and marriage (this condition changed for Fuller) and quested for a significant public voice. Matteson's biography has won the Pulitzer Prize, Capper's

first volume won the Bancroft Prize. Both biographers work from rich published and archival sources, including the conscientious journals and improving correspondence of their subjects' circles, highly personal essays, and autobiographical fiction. This wealth of life writing, liberally quoted, occasionally reduces the biographer's role to the adding of mere, in Matteson's case even superfluous, explication. Matteson writes primarily a family biography, of a detailed thoroughness that sometimes lapses into a daily chronicle. Capper constructs a "social biography [of] Fuller thinking and acting with others" as well as with intellectual and political movements (preface to vol. 1). He dismisses all previous biographies of Fuller as unreliable and intellectually uninteresting.

Matteson's subtitle acknowledges the fact that Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888) was mostly known as the "Father of Little Women, while the title extends to Louisa the spiritual interpretation that her father gave to his own life. However, the arcs of their lives were dissimilar: the father suffered repeated failures but late in life enjoyed a long period of public respect, good health, and satisfaction, whereas the daughter's life was cut short just when she felt freed from uncongenial duties to pursue the great work she aspired to. Louisa died a few days after her father. Matteson recounts "Louisa's two dominating *raison d'être* had been to earn her father's approval and to assure her mother's comfort." She obeyed the latter impulse by generally siding with her mother in marital conflicts and by continuously working as "the angel of the house" as well as through her commercial writings for the house. Louisa burnt most of her mother's writings, but she memorialized her in her fictions, notably in Marmee of *Little Women*. Strong-willed and tempestuous but loyal wife of an acknowledged "saint," Abba was a social activist in her own right. While sharing Louisa's judgment of Abba's merits and marital circumstances,

Matteson principally focuses on Bronson, spending the first half of the book on his “persistent but failed quest for perfection,” patterned on Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Setting the tone, Matteson starts with the “disgrace” (the title of chapter one) of the auction in 1837 of Bronson’s library consequent on the scandal and failure of his Temple School in Boston. He subsequently chronicles the development of Bronson’s radically unorthodox educational, social, and religious ideas under the influence mainly of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, the German Romantics, and Carlyle. As a man of ideas, Matteson explains, Bronson, master of the spoken word, remained “invisible,” other men appropriating his ideas in their published writings, for instance Emerson in his essay *Nature*. Matteson frequently employs Emerson’s skepticism to judge the practical application of Bronson’s ideas in his family, various experimental schools, and most disastrously for his family and his own physical and mental health, the utopian “consociate” farm Fruitlands: Emerson admired “men like Thoreau and Alcott who carried [transcendentalism] into the field. [But] he already sensed that transcendentalism was a naturally introspective, solipsistic idea. One could practice it well enough as an individual,” but not convert it into a social philosophy. Of the late turn in Bronson’s fortunes Matteson gives sympathetic and laudatory accounts. Restored in health and resigned to more modest aspirations, Bronson from his sixties on was gratified by the success of his tours of public “Conversations” and of essays on various topics, including especially the Concord Transcendentalists, as whose last surviving member he finally became a tourist attraction.

Under her father’s regimen Louisa’s life for more than twenty years was “an almost impossibly dissonant combination of superior intellectual opportunities and frightful worldly deprivation.” She escaped the latter through her own unremitting

and finally spectacularly successful dedication to earning money for her family’s and others’ needs. The former were guaranteed by Bronson’s education of his three daughters and by the intellectual milieu of Boston and Concord, “one of the dullest little towns in Massachusetts,” in Louisa’s words. Matteson says that it “deserved its reputation as the literary epicenter of pre-Civil War America.” He also corrects Louisa’s personal heroic narrative of her success, in which she posed as Cinderella but without a fairy godmother, by invoking her Concord mentors: Emerson, whom she called her “master” and to whose library she had free access, and Thoreau, who taught her how to observe nature and whom she honoured after his death in her best-remembered poem, “Thoreau’s Flute.”

By 1859, two Boston cases of fugitive slaves being returned by law had turned the pacifist, self-absorbed Concord Transcendentalists into fervent supporters of anti-slavery violence, not only helping with the Underground Railway but also celebrating Captain John Brown, the Alcotts taking in his daughters as boarders and Louisa giving a reception for the widow of “St. John the Just,” in Louisa’s words. The Civil War offered Louisa an escape into heroic collective action from the tedious mixture of domestic work and sewing, teaching, and commercial writing. Joining as a nurse, she arrived just in time to receive the wounded soldiers from the disastrous battle at Fredericksburg. *Hospital Sketches* (1863), her “virtually true account,” first published serially, in its combination of humour and pathos became a publishing success. However, she contracted typhoid pneumonia and was compelled to cut her three-month term of duty short. As so common at the time, the treatment, with the panacea calomel (mercurous chloride), resulted in permanent, slowly fatal neurological poisoning. More even than her new fame did what Bronson saw as her patriotic service on behalf of

the whole family effect his approval of Louisa, until then his problem daughter, moody, passionate, and rebellious. Louisa’s fullest experience of heterosexual love occurred during her European trip when she met a young Polish student in her pension in Switzerland. Musical and ill with tuberculosis, he was in her imaginings Chopin to her George Sand. Like several earlier close companions, he was much younger than she (twenty-one to her thirty-three), a pattern for which Matteson rejects a Freudian explanation as “both too clever and too clumsy.”

While Louisa’s magazine pot boilers—children’s stories, romances, and “female revenge” thrillers—came easily to her, the writing of her more ambitious novels engulfed her in obsessive “vortices” of writing (her word), lasting days or weeks, followed by periods of dejection. Matteson speculates that she inherited from her father and her uncle a manic-depressive disposition, which she also portrayed in the heroine of her first novel, *Moods* (1863). These novels are all strongly autobiographical and, after her experience of writing about her nursing, realistic. In her best selling contribution to the American and the feminine literary canon, *Little Women* (1868-69), her father, although near-absent in the shape of the March girls’ father, is “spiritually omnipresent” through her recasting of Bunyan’s moral drama. Her heroines’ dreams, in *Moods*, *Little Women*, and *Work* end up “at best compromised and at worst thwarted.” To the question whether Louisa was a feminist author, Matteson replies affirmatively that she stipulated altruism for both women and men. Despite the influential role that she has continued to play for her readers, Louisa was dissatisfied with her literary achievements and fame.

Margaret Fuller makes few appearances in Matteson’s book, importantly as one of Bronson’s “most loyal defenders” during the fatal scandal caused by his unorthodox teaching methods at Temple School,

where she had assisted for a short term. Capper makes the case that despite the small body of published writings, she must be recovered as “nothing less than the first woman in America to establish herself as a dominant figure in highbrow culture at large [able to] shed light on the early American connection among gender, intellectual culture, and the avant-garde” (preface to vol. 1). Capper’s first volume constitutes Fuller’s “Lehrjahre” (apprenticeship, as in Goethe’s *Bildungsroman*). Born into the Cambridge Renaissance, encouraged by her father’s “grandiose yet domestic republican intellectual-ity” (preface to vol. 1), close friends with the Concord Transcendentalists, and inspired by British and German Romantics as an antidote to American utilitarianism, she chose the famous English Unitarian reformer Harriet Martineau, whom she met during an American visit, for her patron. For a model of an engaged American intellectual she looked to Thomas Jefferson. Although the role of the artist was her ideal, she felt that it would make her “palsy.” Instead, as editor of the transcendentalist magazine *The Dial*, she introduced a new cosmopolitan literary criticism with “bold” inclusive rankings; for her translation of Eckermann’s *Conversations with Goethe* unfortunately only the English plagiarist reaped the reward (London, 1849). As an alternative to school teaching, for women limited to young children, she conducted “Conversations” for groups of women, which Capper argues contributed to the growth of American feminism and initiated an American counter-cultural tradition.

The second volume brings Fuller’s career from that of the angel in the house, after she became the head of her family on her father’s death, and the angel out of the house, paradigmatic of a new development for many educated middle-class women, to the radically new role of America’s female cultural arbiter and intellectual prophet, who moreover affected as a

journalist a much wider public than her models Emerson and Carlyle. Capper defends his *ante-litteram* use of “intellectual” as best fitting what Fuller herself called “thinker” (preface to vol. 2). By Capper’s account, Fuller’s journalism pursued two main subjects: gender as the intersection of transcendentalist self-culture and women’s rights, “a rights-minded androgyny,” and America as the intersection of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Both subjects were informed by her Romantic liberalism, namely individual self-development, social reform, and transcendence in both the personal and the social sphere. Her main forum was the liberal *New York Tribune*, which she joined as the first American woman on the editorial staff of a major metropolitan newspaper. In the six-month period from 1845 to ‘46, she contributed 250 articles on literature, art, and music, which exhibited an uncommonly wide field of allusions. Her book *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), revised from a series of articles, achieved big sales as well as being pirated in England.

The subject of America’s identity was continued explicitly in her letters from Europe to the *New York Tribune*. Like the journalism of her famous colleague Heinrich Heine (whom she met in Paris), hers was a new mixture of personal, cultural, and political topics. Capper introduces an increasing cast of famous liberal and radical figures, such as Giuseppe Mazzini and Adam Mickiewicz, with whom Fuller became friends during her visits to London, Paris, and finally Rome. He singles her out as the only American Italophile who was interested in Italy as a modern state. She reciprocally “merged revolutionary Italy and her ideal America.” During the Roman revolution and siege she became America’s first war correspondent, and excerpts of her dispatches were widely published around America. Finding Italy in need of a good American ambassador, she believed that she could fill the post if it were not for her gender, then.

More in keeping with gender roles was her directorship of one of the field hospitals in Rome. And she had now married (Capper insists on this much-disputed fact) and had a son with Count Giuseppe Ossoli, a member of the Radical-dominated Civic Guard. He was considerably younger, Catholic, and not an intellectual. Capper is throughout sympathetic to Fuller’s erotic adventures, seeing them as experimental phases in her Goethean self-culture. Dependent on Fuller’s ability to earn money, the young family sailed to America in 1850 and drowned in a shipwreck off its coast. The manuscript of her history of the Italian revolutions is presumed lost in the shipwreck. *Women in the Nineteenth Century* compares the condition of women with slavery. Contrary to others’ skepticism about Fuller’s future in America, Capper believes that her experience of Italy’s nationalist struggle, added to her early protests against the annexation of Texas and the Mexican Wars as pro-slavery and racist, would have led to a role in abolitionist activism. Nearly forgotten after her death, Margaret Fuller has found a new public through second-wave feminism. In *The Bostonians* Henry James said of the protagonist Olive Chancellor, based on Fuller: “It was the usual things of life that filled her with silent rage; which was natural enough, in as much as, to her vision, almost everything that was usual was iniquitous.” Capper establishes Fuller’s vision as just, her attitude as optimistic, and her voice as public and influential.

Gisela Argyle, Senior Scholar of Humanities at York University in Toronto, has published Germany as Model and Monster: Allusions in English Fiction, 1830s-1930s (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), another monograph and articles on Victorian literature and comparative literature, as well as literary translations from German into English and the converse.