

AN UNFINISHED WOMAN

The desires of Margaret Fuller.

BY JUDITH THURMAN



In May of 1850, after four years abroad, Margaret Fuller set sail from Livorno to New York, bound for her native Massachusetts. She was just about to turn forty, and her stature in America was unique. In the space of a decade, she had invented a new vocation: the female public intellectual. Fuller's intelligence had dazzled Ralph Waldo Emerson, who invited her to join the Transcendental Club and to edit its literary review, *The Dial*. She was considered a "sibyl" by the women who subscribed to her "Conversations," a series of talks on learned subjects (Greek mythology, German Romanticism) whose real theme was female empowerment. In 1844, Horace Greeley,

the publisher of the *New-York Tribune*, had recruited Fuller to write a front-page column on culture and politics (the former, mandarin; the latter, radical). A year later, she published "Woman in the Nineteenth Century," a foundational work of feminist history. When Fuller left for Europe, in 1846, to write for Greeley from abroad, she became the first American foreign correspondent of her sex and, three years later, the first combat reporter. She embedded herself in the Italian independence movement, led by her friend Giuseppe Mazzini, and she filed her dispatches from the siege of Rome while running a hospital for wounded partisans.

Fuller circa 1850. She had invented a new vocation: the female public intellectual.

Despite her fame, however, Fuller had always just eked out a living. So, after the fall of the short-lived Roman Republic, she had to borrow the money for a cheap ticket home on the *Elizabeth*, an American merchantman. The route was perilous—vessels were lost every year—but Fuller's passage was a gamble for other reasons, too. After a lifetime of tenacious celibacy, this "strange, lilting, lean old maid," as Thomas Carlyle described her, had taken a lover.

One of Rome's eternal stories is that of the bookish spinster from a cold clime, whose life has its late spring in Italy, and who loses her inhibitions, amid the ruins, with a man like Giovanni Ossoli. Fuller's paramour was a Roman patrician, ten years her junior. Her friends described him as dark, slender, and boyish-looking, with a melancholy air and fine manners, but he also struck them as a nonentity. He and Fuller had met by chance, in St. Peter's Square, and embarked on a romance that even she considered "so every way unfit." Ossoli had a "great native refinement," as Fuller advertised it to her mother, but he was virtually penniless and barely literate. He spoke no English, and had no profession. It seems unlikely that their love would have endured; Fuller doubted it herself. But early in their affair she found herself pregnant, and they were now sailing home as a couple—"the Marchese and Marchesa Ossoli" (no marriage certificate has ever been found)—with their twenty-month-old son, Nino.

After two months at sea, on July 19th, with land in sight, the *Elizabeth* was caught in a violent hurricane that devastated the Atlantic seaboard. It ran aground on a sandbar off Fire Island, only a few hundred yards from the beach. Several crew members made it to shore, and, as the hull foundered, the captain saved himself, abandoning his passengers. Fuller was last seen on the deck, her hair lashed by the gale. Then she was felled by the mast, and disappeared in a swell, shrouded by her white nightdress. Her husband had refused to leave her; neither body was ever recovered. Nino drowned in the arms of a steward.

Margaret Fuller was once the best-read woman in America, and millions knew her name. Her writing and her correspondence have been readily available for almost forty years, and she is a



"Freshly ground pepper?"

rock star of women's-studies programs. Yet a wider public hungry for transgressive heroines (especially those who die tragically) has failed to embrace her.

Few writers, however, have been luckier in their biographers, beginning, in 1884, with Thomas Higginson, best known as the friend in need of Emily Dickinson, who helped to revive interest in Fuller after decades of neglect. She was resurrected for a second time by Bell Gale Chevigny, who published *The Woman and the Myth: Margaret Fuller's Life & Writings* in 1976, just as the second wave of feminism was cresting. This monument of research and commentary, revised in 1994, is the bedrock of modern Fuller scholarship. In 2007, Charles Capper completed the two-volume *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life*, which has never been surpassed as a social history of the period. The Fuller canon was enriched last year with another superb biography, by John Matteson, *The Lives of Margaret Fuller*. (Matteson won a Pulitzer Prize in 2008 for his biography

of Louisa May Alcott and her father, Bronson.) And this month Megan Marshall joins the cohort of distinguished Fullerites with *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

Marshall is a gifted storyteller steeped in the parochial society of nineteenth-century Boston and Concord—a world of souls at “a white heat.” (The expression was Fuller’s before it was Dickinson’s; the poet is said to have loved Fuller’s work.) Her previous book was an enthralling group portrait, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism*. “Ignited” is perhaps going too far, but the Peabodys helped to fan the inflammatory changes in attitudes and thought that produced transcendentalism, Brook Farm, Thoreau’s *Walden*, Fuller’s *Conversations* (most of which were hosted by the eldest sister, Elizabeth), and the novels of Sophia Peabody’s husband, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

There is not much that is materially “new” in Marshall’s life, beyond a letter

from Emerson and some engravings that belonged to Fuller, which survived the shipwreck, and which the author discovered in the course of her research. But there are many ways of doing justice to Fuller, and Marshall makes an eloquent case for her as a new paradigm: the single career woman, at home in a world of men, who admire her intelligence, though it turns them off; and the seeker of experience, who doesn’t want to miss out on motherhood, yet is terrified that it will compromise her work life. In Marshall’s biography, the focus is on the drama of identity that Fuller improvised on the world stage, and on the modern anatomy of her desires—a mind and body ever at odds. Capper’s book bests Marshall’s in thoroughness, Matteson’s in elegance and dispassion, and Chevigny’s in tough-mindedness, but Marshall excels at creating a sense of intimacy—with both her subject and her reader.

As is often the case, the most popular life of Fuller, *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, is also the most sentimental. In 1852, it was the favorite book in America, until *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* usurped its place as the No. 1 best-seller, and it continued to outsell all other biographies for the next four years. *The Memoirs* is a posthumous Festschrift—an anthology of texts and reminiscences—cobbed together by three grief-stricken friends of Fuller’s: Emerson, William Henry Channing, and James Freeman Clarke (the latter two were liberal clergymen). Their provisional title, *Margaret and Her Friends*, tells you something about an impulse that Fuller often aroused, particularly in her male contemporaries: to normalize her. Men, Emerson observed, felt that Margaret “carried too many guns.” Edgar Allan Poe succinctly defined that anxiety when he divided humankind into three categories: men, women, and Margaret Fuller. Her friends intended to praise her, though, in effect, they buried her—morally prettified and embalmed, hands folded piously over her bosom. They took it upon themselves to censor or sanitize the searing emotions of her journals and letters, and to rewrite quotes that might, they feared, tarnish her respectability—especially in the light of her dubious marriage. Emerson had, in fact, urged Fuller to stay abroad with

Ossoli and the baby, while a disheartening number of her familiars were of the opinion that a tragedy was preferable to an embarrassment. "Providence," according to Nathaniel Hawthorne, "was, after all, kind in putting her, and her clownish husband, and their child, on board that fated ship."

"Mary Wollstonecraft," Fuller wrote, "like Madame Dudevant (commonly known as George Sand) in our day, was a woman whose existence better proved the need of some new interpretation of woman's rights than anything she wrote." The same could be said of Fuller. She was born in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, in 1810, the eldest of her parents' eight children. Her mother, Margaret, was a docile, sweet-natured beauty who embodied the feminine ideal. She was a decade younger than her husband, Timothy, a lawyer, educated at Harvard, who later had a career in politics. Higginson describes him and his four brothers as "men of great energy, pushing, successful," and without "a particle of tact" among them. Margaret was her father's daughter.

Mrs. Fuller lost her next child, Julia, when Margaret was three. Both parents were disconsolate and, at around this time, Timothy began to homeschool the precocious little girl who seemed to share his drive. "He hoped," Fuller wrote, "to make me the heir of all he knew." She was reading at four, and writing charmingly at six, when Timothy started her on Latin. "To excel in all things should be your constant aim," Timothy exhorted her. This regime continued, with escalating demands and standards and an increasingly advanced curriculum, until Margaret was nine, when she was sent to school.

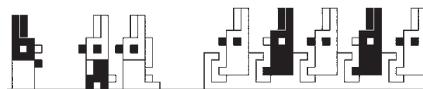
Fuller later attributed her "nervous affections"—she was subject to nightmares and sleepwalking in her youth, migraines and depressions in her maturity—to the despotism of her father's tutelage, and some of her more zealous partisans have accused him of child abuse. Timothy was a patriarch of his time, miserly with his approval, which Margaret desperately sought. Yet his ambitions for her—ambitions he never had for his sons—incubated her singularity. So did the romance of an intense shared pursuit that excluded her mother.

In her own mythology, Fuller figures as Minerva, the goddess of wisdom who sprang from her father's head. And in "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" she calls her idealized alter ego Miranda:

Her father was a man who cherished no sentimental reverence for woman, but a firm belief in the equality of the sexes. . . . He addressed her not as a plaything but as a living mind.

Shakespeare's Miranda beguiles a prince at first sight. Fuller's Miranda, she writes, "was fortunate in a total absence of those charms which might have drawn to her bewildering flatteries, and in a strong electric nature, which repelled those who did not belong to her, and attracted those who did." A great deal of heartache is thus subsumed.

Margaret was a strapping girl who preferred boys' strenuous activities to girls' decorous ones. But she stopped growing at puberty—her height was average—and her appetite caught up with her. She was described as "very corpulent," and some kind of skin condition, probably acne, spoiled her complexion. Severe myopia gave her a squint that was aggravated by her voracious reading. She compensated for a curved spine by walking with her head thrust forward, "like a bird of prey." Her nasal voice was easy to mock, and, from her school days on, Fuller was the kind of obnoxious know-it-all—brusque, sarcastic, and self-important—who invites mockery. A good deal of her showing off was the bravado of a misfit. She was humiliated when only nine guests came to a party for which she had sent out ninety invitations. She made up her mind, she wrote, to be "bright and ugly." Her journals are



full of insecurity and, at times, anguish. George Eliot found one passage in particular "inexpressibly touching": "I shall always reign through the intellect, but the life! the life! O my God! shall that never be sweet?"

Timothy's prodigious daughter would have excelled at Harvard, but no college in America accepted women. In Margaret's case, however, the obstacles that she faced seem only to have whetted her appetite for overturning

them. "I have felt a gladiatorial disposition lately," she wrote as a young woman to a schoolmistress. In 1830, she embarked on a course of independent study with a childhood friend, James Freeman Clarke, her future biographer. She set out to learn German, the language of Goethe, and was able to translate him within three months. Once Goethe became her master, Emerson wrote, "the place was filled, nor was there room for any other."

Clarke was not the only platonic friend, man or woman, toward whom Fuller had romantic feelings. These infatuations followed a pattern. A desirable person would be drawn to Fuller's "ebullient sense of power," as Emerson described her charisma. She would fantasize about a mystical union that was, in principle, chaste. In the case of a man, a utopian marriage of equals was usually part of the scenario. In the case of a woman, the two of them might, as was the custom of the time, share a bed. These amorous friendships informed Fuller's prescient notion of gender as a bell curve—the idea that there are manly women, womanly men, and same-sex attractions, all of which would be considered perfectly natural in an enlightened society. But sooner or later her needy ardor would cause the relationship to cool, and the fickle "soul mate" would jilt her for a more suitable partner. It was an "accursed lot," Fuller concluded, to be burdened with "a man's ambition" and "a woman's heart," though the ambition, she wrote elsewhere, was "absolutely needed to keep the heart from breaking."

It was Clarke who suggested, in 1832, that Fuller consider authorship as an outlet for her "secret riches within." But she resented him for thinking her "fit for nothing but to write books." In another century, she later wrote, she would have asked for an ambassadorship. Fuller did begin writing for publication in her mid-twenties, though she was, in a way, right about her inaptitude for a writer's life. Patience and humility were alien to her. She loved flaunting her erudition in gratuitous digressions. Reading her was like spelunking, Clarke said. Lydia Maria Child likened Fuller's style to having "too much furniture in your rooms." Elizabeth Barrett Browning was one of many contemporaries

who found Fuller's prose "curiously inferior to the impressions her conversation gave you." But the fairest critique of Fuller's literary efforts may be her own of George Sand's:

Her best works are unequal; in many parts hastily written, or carelessly. . . . They all promise far more than they perform; the work is not done masterly. . . . Sometimes she plies the oar, sometimes she drifts. But what greatness she has is genuine.

The year 1835 was a turning point in Fuller's life: she made Emerson's acquaintance, and her father died, leaving the family in financial straits. It fell to Margaret to help support her widowed mother and her siblings, so she abandoned plans to write a Goethe biography and to travel abroad, and accepted a teaching job at Bronson Alcott's experimental school, in Boston. The otherworldly Alcott neglected to pay her, however, so in 1837 Fuller became a schoolmistress in Providence. Her wages, thanks to rich patrons, were the annual salary of a Harvard professor, a thousand dollars. But striving to elevate the children of philistines was intolerable, and whenever she could she stayed with Waldo, as Emerson was called, and his put-upon wife, Lidian, at their manor in Concord. Her first visit lasted

two weeks, and Waldo initially found his house guest conceited and intrusive. Two more discordant personalities—Waldo's cool, cerebral, and ironic; Margaret's noisy, histrionic, and sincere—would be hard to imagine. But, as the days wore on, her caustic wit made him laugh, and her conversation, he decided, was "the most entertaining" in America. By the time they parted, Matteson writes, Emerson was "rhapsodic." Fuller's presence, he gushed, atypically, "is like being set in a large place. You stretch your limbs & dilate to your utmost size."

Fuller was a passionate pedagogue—just not in the classroom. Alcott, who had also failed at teaching, reinvented himself profitably as a "conversationalist." A "conversation" was an informal paid talk, in an intimate venue—a parlor rather than a hall—whose *raison d'être*, Matteson writes, was to unite the participants in "sympathetic communion around a shared idea." Inspired by Alcott's model, Fuller decided that she would offer a series of such talks, by subscription, to an all-woman audience, with the goals of challenging her "conversers" intellectually and also of giving them "a place

where they could state their doubts and difficulties with hope of gaining aid from the experience or aspirations of others." Many women, Marshall notes, "signed on just to hear Margaret Fuller talk," and were too intimidated to join the discussion, but the "Conversations" that Fuller hosted in Boston between 1839 and 1844 have been called, collectively, the first consciousness-raising group.

By this time, Emerson had formed the intellectual society that came to be known as the Transcendental Club. The transcendence he espoused was a rejection of established religion in favor of a Romantic creed in which faith was "one thing with Science, with Beauty, and with Joy." A soul liberated from blind obedience to Christian dogma would be free to follow its own dictates, and to seek a direct experience of divinity in art and nature. The transcendental "gospel" suffused Fuller's "Conversations," but in a more heretical form. She was encouraging women to become free agents not only in relation to a deity but in their relations with men.

The Dial was conceived at club meetings in 1839, and, when Margaret volunteered for the job of editor, Emerson gave it to her gladly. The editorship made, and still does, an impressive entry on Fuller's résumé, especially if you have never read the actual publication. Emerson was dismayed by the cloying piety of the first issue. (Apart from Thoreau, Alcott, and Emerson, the contributors are obscure today.) "I hope our *Dial* will get to be a little bad," he told her.

After five years in the Concord hot-house—"this playground of boys, happy and proud in their balls and marbles," as Fuller put it—she was ready for a worldlier adventure. In 1844, she moved to New York, to work for Greeley, and to live with him and his wife, Mary (an alumna of the "Conversations"), in Castle Doleful, their ramshackle mansion in Turtle Bay, near the East River. The Greeleys were teetotalers and health nuts, but liberal-minded about their house guest's unchaperoned life. Fuller became a regular at the literary salon of Anne Charlotte Lynch, on Waverly Place, where she met Poe, and she patronized a mesmeric healer who



"Find a patch of sunlight, my boy. Find a patch of sunlight and bask in it."

supposedly cured her scoliosis. In the chapel at Sing Sing, on Christmas Day, she told an audience of convicted prostitutes that their “better selves” would guide them when they were released. The mistreatment of mental patients mobilized her vehemence, and she compared the humanity shown to the inmates of the Bloomingdale Insane Asylum (a dance was held on the evening she visited) to the wretched conditions of the lunatics on Blackwell’s (now Roosevelt) Island. Chevigny writes, “Her job as a reporter gave her access to worlds hitherto closed to a woman of her class.” But, she remarks, “liberal as her reportage was for the time, it was still eminently genteel muckraking: the Jew is subjected to age-old stereotyping, the poor to kindly pity.”

Fuller’s distaste for the Chosen People made an exception for James Nathan, a German-Jewish banker with taurine looks and literary ambitions whom she had met at Anne Lynch’s New Year’s party. Nathan, who was Fuller’s contemporary, was, in his way, as unlikely a match for her as Ossoli, and, Matteson writes, there was no logic to their relations. Love does not obey logic, however—particularly, perhaps, the love of a cerebral woman for a sensual man. Nathan had arrived in New York from Hamburg as a teenager, and had worked his way up from the rag trade to Wall Street. They shared a love for German; Nathan sang lieder to her; they went to galleries, concerts, and lectures.

This artful courtship, which patrician Boston might have considered miscegenation, made Fuller feel “at home on the earth,” and she couldn’t believe it would suffer from an “untimely blight.” But the fact that she imagined the blight suggests that she was braced for its inevitability. Depending on whose story you believe (Matteson’s is the fairest to Nathan), the banker was simply caddish. He was using Fuller to befriend Greeley, and it came out that he was living with a working-class mistress. Yet, had Margaret’s relations with men not been so naïve, you would have to conclude that she led him on. Her letters dropped hints about an impure past. Their language was overheated. She frankly admitted her “strong attraction” to Nathan, and was coy about joining him on

“the path of intrigue.” That path led to the banks of the East River, where, one evening, Nathan apparently made an advance from which Fuller recoiled in horror.

Her inchoate feelings for Nathan were not merely virginal. As she herself acknowledged, in forgiving him, they were “childish.” But perhaps they suggest why her writing was never as great as her ambitions for it. She could love and desire intensely, but rarely at the same moment, and she could think and feel deeply, but not often in the same sentence.

In August of 1846, Fuller sailed for England. She had dreamed of a trip abroad since adolescence, and a philanthropic Quaker couple, Marcus and Rebecca Spring, agreed to pay her expenses in exchange for her tutoring of their son. They tarried in the North for two months, visiting Wordsworth in the Lake District, and also one of his neighbors, a young poet just setting out on his career: Matthew Arnold. They continued to Scotland, where Fuller got lost while hiking on Ben Lomond, in the Highlands, and spent a night marooned, with nothing but the mist for a blanket. She transformed this ordeal, for her *Tribune* readers, into an experience of sublimity.

That October, the companions arrived in London, where Fuller’s reputation had preceded her. The English edition of “Woman in the Nineteenth Century” had just been published. In New York, Poe had written that Fuller “judges woman by the heart and intellect of Miss Fuller, but there are not more than one or two dozen Miss Fullers on the whole face of the earth.” George Eliot, after noting “a vague spiritualism and grandiloquence which belong to all but the very best American writers,” continued:

Some of the best things [Miss Fuller] says are on the folly of absolute definitions of woman’s nature and absolute demarcations of woman’s mission. “Nature,” she says, “seems to delight in varying the arrangements, as if to show that she will be fettered by no rule; and we must admit the same varieties that she admits.”

Even before Fuller left New York, her columns had become more concerned with political engagement than

with transcendence, and Europe pushed her further toward militance. Thomas Carlyle and his wife, Jane, had introduced her to Mazzini. She began to describe herself as a socialist. In Paris (where her principles did not forbid the acquisition of some elegant clothes, or a presentation at court), she met some of the radicals—Lamennais, Béranger, Considérant among them—who, as Chevigny puts it, were “preparing the explosion that in the next year would blast Louis Philippe off the throne.” She had a thrilling encounter with George Sand after knocking on her door, unannounced. Unlike the “vulgar caricatures” of the libertine cross-dresser which even Fuller, to some degree, had accepted, Sand emerged from her library wearing a gown of sombre elegance, instead of her infamous trousers. She greeted Fuller with “lady-like dignity,” and they spent the day in rapt discussion. A year earlier, Fuller had praised Sand for having “dared to probe” the “festering wounds” of her society, but she deplored the “surgeon’s dirty hands.” A woman of Sand’s genius, she wrote, untainted by debauchery, “might have filled an apostolic station among her people.” Now, she declared, Sand needed no defense, “for she has bravely acted out her nature.”

The same could not yet be said of Margaret Fuller. A woman could be a sea captain, she had asserted; she could happily do the manual labor of a carpenter; there was no differential of capacity between the female brain and the male. But, ironically, Fuller herself needed a man’s blessing to follow the example of Sand’s sexual bravery.

That man, whom she met toward the end of her stay in Paris, was the great Polish poet and nationalist Adam Mickiewicz, a forty-eight-year-old exile with heroic features. Expelled from Poland for his political activities, he had lived for a while in Weimar, where he had met Goethe. His marriage was disastrous, and he had taken up with his children’s governess. In Paris, Mickiewicz was gathering the forces for a revolution that would free Poland from Prussia, and he was a partisan of freedom in all its guises, including women’s liberation. Keen to meet him on every count, Fuller had sent him a volume of

BRIEFLY NOTED

Emerson's poems, "guessing correctly," Marshall writes, "that the gift would draw him swiftly" to her hotel. Mickiewicz had been dismissed from the Collège de France, in 1844, for lectures, influenced by transcendentalism, which preached a volatile mixture of mysticism and insurrection.

Fuller inevitably fell in love with Mickiewicz, and it seems, for once, to have been mutual. "He affected me like music," she told Rebecca Spring. But it also appears, from their letters, that he had recognized what vital element—not only sex but honesty about desire—was missing from Margaret's life. "The first step in your deliverance," he told her, "is to know if it is permitted to you to remain virgin."

Several days later, Fuller and the Springs left Paris for Rome. She felt bereft, not only of Mickiewicz but of all the time that she had "wasted" on unworthy others. He had told her, however, that he wasn't yet free to give her what she deserved, which was "all of me." On Holy Thursday, she and her friends went to hear vespers in St. Peter's Square, and became separated. She was approached by a gallant young Italian who asked her if she was lost.

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," Simone de Beauvoir wrote in "The Second Sex," a hundred years after "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" was published. Although her assertion may not be true scientifically, Beauvoir was right in the sense that women are not born inferior but, rather, become inferior, by the process of objectification that she so exhaustively describes. Yet Beauvoir also knew that a woman "needs to expend a greater moral effort than the male" to resist the temptations of dependence.

Few women have fought more valiantly than Margaret Fuller to achieve autonomy. But her struggle required her to create and to endure a profound state of singleness. She had to become, she wrote, "my own priest, pupil, parent, child, husband, and wife." That austere self-isolation, perhaps, is why each new biography excites interest in her, which then subsides. Her example gives you much to admire but not enough to envy. ♦

The Blue Book, by A. L. Kennedy (*New Harvest*). Kennedy's sixth novel has the makings of a farce. Through some complicated mismanagement, Elizabeth Barber finds herself on a weeklong cruise with both Derek, her "soon-to-be-ex-almost-future-husband," and Arthur, her on-off lover. She and Arthur used to work together as a psychic double act, and they communicate in a secret language of stage cues. When Derek gets seasick, Elizabeth starts cabin-hopping. The narrative is carried along less by its humor than by the uncomfortable sense of closeness that Kennedy creates: the characters continually intrude on one another's thoughts, and in long sections of the novel the reader is addressed directly. Occasionally, the lovers' attachment to their old tricks verges on twee, and Kennedy is best when she exposes them, showing how "any word can work a spell if you know how to use it."

Flimsy Little Plastic Miracles, by Ron Currie, Jr. (*Viking*). This novel-as-memoir quotes the last line of the author's first novel ("the one nobody read"): "Anything, anything, anything is possible." Anything does seem possible in Currie's fantastical fiction: a man knows exactly how and when the world will end; God visits earth in the body of a refugee in Darfur and is gunned down. The new novel is Currie's most grounded work yet and perhaps his darkest. It is a series of vignettes told after the fictionalized Ron sequesters himself on a Caribbean island and, in the tradition of Tom Sawyer, is wrongly presumed dead. The story grapples with losses past, present, and future: the death of Ron's father; a fraught romance with a high-school sweetheart; and the prospects for love in a world of artificial intelligence. Though the book's themes sometimes seem rep-

etitious, Currie's gorgeously questioning prose explores the deeper meaning things gain after they're gone.

The Org, by Ray Fisman and Tim Sullivan (*Twelve*). Office life is notoriously spotted with inefficiency and indignity, yet, as the authors of this appealing study in popular economics argue, corporations and the people who work for them have many incentives to put up with it. The most obvious reason, as demonstrated by examples from such familiar innovators as Google, Hewlett-Packard, and McDonald's, is money, and the challenge for organizations "is to convert group identity into higher profits." In exploring that end, Fisman and Sullivan take on the seemingly thankless task of defending ballooning C.E.O. compensation, office meetings, management consultants, and "bean counters and compliance personnel." The book also considers non-profit organizations—including the U.S. Army and the United Methodist Church—and reaches a sensible, if uninspiring, conclusion: that institutional success emerges from a compromise between bureaucracy and individual freedom.

Walking Home, by Simon Armitage (*Liveright*). In the summer of 2010, Armitage, a British poet, set out to walk the Pennine Way, a mountainous trail, some two hundred and sixty miles long, that runs from the Scottish Borders to the English Midlands, passing through the author's home town, in Yorkshire. Part pilgrimage and part stunt, Armitage's three-week trek was funded exclusively by the nightly poetry readings he gave along the route. He writes with self-effacing humor and mixes a few of his own poems with memoir, natural history, and literary reflections—on Wordsworth, Ted Hughes, the Brontës, and others. Though Armitage complains at times that the Pennine Way is an "unglamorous slog among soggy, lonely moors," and his walk "a pointless exercise, leading from nowhere in particular to nowhere in particular," his account is never a slog for the reader.

