



Editorial

EACH essay in the December 2008 issue of *NEQ* speaks, in its own way, to the act of seeing. In “The Other Hawthorne,” Robert Milder argues that critics have failed to account for the two distinct writers who inhabit Nathaniel Hawthorne’s private writings (his notebooks) and his public texts (his tales and novels). The private Hawthorne of the American Notebooks, Milder asserts, is “comfortably voyeuristic,” “observant, broadly inquisitive, ready to take people as he finds them.” In his early tales and the novels, on the other hand, the public Hawthorne is “preoccupied” with “obscure guilts” and “with their quasi-theological contextualization of human frailty.” “The difference of manner and theme is,” Milder goes on to demonstrate, “a difference of vision, even of implied metaphysics.” It is an existential battle the two Hawthornes would wage to the death.

A concern with metaphysics emerges in two other essays in this issue, but in David Naumec’s essay on Indian Civil War veterans, seeing has a more social and political cast. After the Revolutionary War, as Native peoples “increasingly adopted European lifeways, resided among [and intermarried with] their non-Native neighbors, and became enmeshed in the New England economy, Indian communities and individual Indians became less visible to outside observers.” Even so perceptive an observer as Crèvecoeur declared that the Indians had “disappeared,” leaving “no vestiges . . . whatever.” But in fact, “white record keepers routinely labeled people of Indian ancestry as ‘Negro,’ ‘black,’ ‘mulatto,’ or ‘colored’ or used uncertain and seemingly arbitrary terms such as ‘copper,’ ‘yellow,’ ‘dark,’ or ‘light.’” After sharing the fruits of his research into the service of records of Native Americans—in essence, of “seeing” what had been hidden from view—Naumec concludes by challenging us to bring a fresh perspective to our appreciation of Boston’s most famous Civil War monument.

In a memorable vignette from Michael DeGruccio’s essay on Charles Francis Adams Jr.’s Civil War service, Adams catches a

glimpse of himself in a mirror at the Parker House. "What he saw 'amazed' him." Having just completed a stint of garrison duty, he possessed, Adams wrote of himself, "the aspect of a prize-fighter." He had, he thought, "a brawny reckless bearing . . . and had never looked so rollicking and strong." Entering the war, Adams believed, would be a path to success, to manliness; it was not. At the war's conclusion, the erstwhile soldier returned home with the "cosmological equivalent of empty pockets," and over the next several decades, he reset his sights as he recalibrated his concept of who properly qualified for participation in a "republic of 'self-made men.'" In an existential dilemma as compelling as Hawthorne's, Adams struggled in later life to discriminate the delusions he could hardly banish from those he could not bear to surrender.

In her exploration of *The Minister's Wooing*, Marianne Noble demonstrates that Harriet Beecher Stowe understood that ethical action must be preceded by direct "seeing," that is, by honest engagement. Stowe has been faulted for seeking to inspire sympathy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by attempting to collapse the differences between the life experiences of free whites and those of enslaved blacks. In her later novel, however, Noble argues, Stowe rectified her error by setting out the terms for what she called "'one immortal soul to another.'" "In such an ideal connection, two interlocutors both sense that the other is authentically present and that each has seen or felt something true in the other." Such mutual recognition, what Noble refers to as "genuine human contact," involves the hard work of "reaching across the gap that divides people both physically and mentally" as well as a willingness to endure "the startling jolt of difference and the arduous task of overcoming alienation" as two selves collide, assess, repair, and relate. In her strivings to replicate the heart of human experience, Stowe therefore understands what Rousseau would discover only after a telling experiment: that the "true self" is not self-contained and self-sufficient but depends upon the regard of others.

Vanessa Steinroetter's memorandum, too, deals with the concept of "seeing" in the Civil War era as she analyzes a German translation of Louisa May Alcott's short story "My Contraband," thereby unmasking the "unique perspectives that multilingual Americans brought to major political questions of the time."

I've now exceeded my word count: Enjoy and be enlightened.

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS