



Editorial

THE five essays in the June issue of the QUARTERLY demonstrate the vitality of cultural studies of nineteenth-century New England. The first three essays concern giants of the mid-nineteenth-century literary canon, while the last two relate stories from the theater and the university which shed light on the complex history of race in the region.

In the lead essay, Lydia Fash traces the birth of the nineteenth-century novel out of the shorter genres that dominated the American literary market until the 1840s: the sketch and the tale. Noting that the genre of the tale has already received ample critical attention, Fash extends the same courtesy to the less-studied genre of the sketch, noting its interest in space rather than time, its utility as a source of visual analogies rather than as a vehicle for storytelling. Fash persuasively links the sketch to broader transformations in society and culture, such as emergent concepts of privacy (through the sketch's intimacy between narrator and reader) and authenticity (through its documentary function). She then demonstrates how that classic triptych of mid-nineteenth century novels—*The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (all published within a span of three years)—use the genre of the sketch and then (as though the novel were the generic equivalent to Herman Melville's *Whale*) swallow it up.

John Hay's essay sets Melville's *Israel Potter* in its New England context. What does it mean, Hay asks, for Melville to have dedicated his historical novel "To His Highness the Bunker-Hill Monument"? Hay reconstructs the droll history of the monument: an object of infamy in its time, it remained uncompleted for eighteen years, this "trapezoidal travesty" seemed, to some

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observers, a symbol of the nation's failing efforts to live up to its revolutionary past. Yet Hay shows that Melville, like Daniel Webster, imagined the monument not from the standpoint of past revolutionaries or contemporary observers, for whom the monument might represent the nation's incomplete pursuit of its ideals, but instead from the standpoint of a postapocalyptic observer, for whom the no-longer-extant United States would be itself a ruin. With a fine eye for detail, Hay traces the shadow which the monument cast over the novel, explaining Melville's shifts between past, present, and future. Through his protagonist, Melville evokes thematic concerns about the nation's aging process and about the posthumous recognition of American authors.

The making of Henry David Thoreau's posthumous reputation is the subject of Kathy Fedorko's essay. As her brother's literary executor, Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau was, as Fedorko demonstrates, a pivotal figure in the making of his legacy. Henry David Thoreau's close relationship with his sister qualifies his reputation as a misogynist. As fellow naturalists, the two cultivated an intimacy strikingly reminiscent of the relationship between Dorothy and William Wordsworth; but unlike Dorothy, Sophia has been neglected by literary historians—when they were not censoring her for imaginary faults. Fedorko redeems her from the charge of being a fussy and censorious editor unwilling to grapple with the irreligious implications of her brother's writings. As a matter of fact, Sophia Thoreau was, as Fedorko's exhaustive research demonstrates, the sole editor of her brother's posthumous publications.

Paul E. Johnson tells the story of the African American stage entertainer Richard Potter (fl. 1811–1839). In his gripping narrative, Johnson follows Potter from his birthplace in Massachusetts to London, where he assisted the legendary Scottish entertainer John Rannie; back to Boston, where he became a member of the city's small black bourgeoisie; to Andover, New Hampshire, where he began to shroud his origins in mystery, even presenting himself as the son of Benjamin Franklin; and finally to rural New Hampshire. While race imposed some limitations on Potter's performances on the Anglo-Atlantic stage, it

was not until the development of a self-consciously nationalist theatrical tradition in the United States during the 1820s that racial barriers would decisively harden, to the point that Potter was driven off the stage in some states, and his status as the first American-born ventriloquist and stage magician would be forgotten.

Though it concerns events in the late 1960s, the final essay, by Kabria Baumgartner, demonstrates the lasting power of a discourse of self-culture that originated in the nineteenth century: the notion that the liberal arts develop the individual into “the whole man.” Such was the stated pedagogical aim of the education offered at the male-only Amherst College, yet the absence of any courses on black literature or African languages as late as the 1960s belied this institutional mission. Baumgartner traces the steps by which a group of black men from the Five Colleges took political action to change Amherst College’s curriculum. Unlike their more radical counterparts at universities like San Francisco State, these men were political moderates who shared the institution’s mission even as they sought to expand its course offerings and diversify its faculty. Their tactics involved civil disobedience rather than takeovers or sit-ins. As Baumgartner demonstrates, these men initiated a struggle for institutional change at liberal arts colleges which remains relevant today.

This issue of *THE NEW ENGLAND QUARTERLY* completes the journal’s first year in its new home at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Though the other editors and I knew at the outset that we, like Sophia Thoreau, had the temperament for editorial work, our job has nonetheless involved a steep learning curve, and our supporters have been patient with us as we adjusted to our new responsibilities. We are grateful to the many outstanding scholars who have entrusted us over the past year with responding to their work, and to the scores of readers on whom we have called for assistance in the reviewing process. Our many book reviewers have been timely in completing a labor which, though it may sometimes seem thankless, keeps the rest of us current with the latest in New England studies. We would also like to thank Kristof Nelson and Gabrielle Garneau,

our diligent graduate-student assistants, who have kept us on track and made our work lighter. To everyone who has wished us well and helped us along, we express our humble thanks for your generosity at the start of this project.

—LEONARD VON MORZÉ