

The Norton Anthology of American Literature

THIRD EDITION

VOLUME 1
Part 2



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Part 2

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VOLUME 1

Early American Literature 1620–1820 • MURPHY American Literature 1820–1865 • PARKER

VOLUME 2

American Literature 1865–1914 • GOTTESMAN
American Literature between the Wars 1914–1945
HOLLAND • BAYM
American Prose Since 1945 • PRITCHARD
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Contents

American Literature 1820–18	365	791
WASHINGTON IRVING (1783–1859) The Author's Account of Himself 808 Rip Van Winkle 810 The Legend of Sleepy Hollow 822		805
JAMES FENIMORE COOPER (1789–1851) The Pioneers 844 [The Slaughter of the Pigeons] 844		842
Notions of the Americans 851 [The Literature and the Arts of the United States]	851	

AUGUSTUS BALDWIN LONGSTREET (1790–1870)	862
The Horse Swap 864	
A Sage Conversation 869	
The Shooting Match 877	
The Shooting Water 6//	
	000
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT (1794–1878)	888
Thanatopsis 890	
The Yellow Violet 891	
To a Waterfowl 892	
Sonnet—to an American Painter Departing for Europe 893	
The Prairies 894	
The Poet 896	
Abraham Lincoln 898	
	. 9
RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803–1882)	898
Nature 903	
The American Scholar 931	
The Divinity School Address 944	
Self-Reliance 956	
The Over-Soul 973	
The Poet 984	
77	
Thoreau 1033	
Hymn Sung at the Completion of the Concord Monument,	
April 19, 1836 1045	
Each and All 1046	
The Problem 1047	
Uriel 1049	
Hamatreya 1050	
The Rhodora 1052	
The Snow-Storm 1052	
Ode, Inscribed to W. H. Channing 1053	
Merlin 1055	
Days 1058	
Journals and Letters 1059	
[Sunday, April 18, 1824, Canterbury (Roxbury), Massachusetts]	
Myself 1059	
[July 8, 1831, Boston] [Always a Right Word] 1062	
[July 13, 1833, Paris] [In the Garden of Plants] 1062	
[January 1, 1834, Boston] [My Savings Bank] 1064	
[February 19, 1834, Boston] [A White Whale] 1064	Ŧ
To Lydia Jackson, Concord, February 1, 1835 [A Modulated New	/ Love:
I Am Born a Poet] 1064	
[August 1, 1835, Concord] [Sadness after Thirty] 1065	
[April 26, 1838, Concord] [Philanthropic Meetings & Holy	
Hurrahs] 1065	
To Thomas Carlyle (Concord, May 10, 1838) [I Am a Rich	
Man] 1066	

[June 18, 1838, Concord] [Protect; Writing; America] 1067
[June 23, 1838, Concord] [Goodies] 1068
[August 22, 1838, Concord] [I Decline Invitations] 1068
[August 31, 1838, Concord] [Aftermath of the Divinity School
Address] 1068
To Thomas Carlyle (Concord, October 17, 1838) [Delayed Reactions to
the Divinity School Address] 1069
[November 10, 1838, Concord] [Challenging Thoreau to Write His
Opinions into Good Poetry] 1069
[September 14, 1839, Concord] [The Business of Education] 1070
[June 24, 1840, Concord] [The Screaming of the Mad
Neighborwoman 1071
October 17, 1840, Concord] [Skepticism about the Brook Farm
Utopia 1072
October 25, 1840, Concord] [Swearing as the Best Rhetoric] 1072
[November–December, 1841, Concord] [Dead Sentences vs. Man-
Making Words] 1072
[January 30, 1842, Concord] [Young Waldo's Physical World] 1073
[January 30(?), 1842, Concord] [Young Waldo's Human
World 1073
To William Emerson, Concord, May 6, 1843 [What to Expect from
Thoreau] 1073
[August 25, 1843, Concord] [Thoreau's Fault of Unlimited
Contradiction] 1074
To William Emerson (Concord, October 4, 1844) [A Craze for
Acquiring Property] 1074
To W. J. Rotch (Concord, November 17, 1845) [The Lyceum Should
Exclude Nobody] 1075
[April 25, 1848, London] [The London Literati on Male
Chastity] 1075
[May 6(?), 1848, London] [Tennyson as a Talkative
Hawthorne] 1076
[August 1848, Concord] [Thoreau the Woodgod] 1076
[April 1851, Concord] [The Hypocrisy of Daniel Webster] 1076
[April 13, 1852, Concord] [The Purist Who Refuses to Vote] 1077
[August 1, 1852, Concord] [Negro Slavery vs. Quite Other Slaves to
Free 1077
To Walter Whitman (July 21, 1855, Concord) [The Wonderful Gift of
Leaves of Grass 1077
[February 29, 1856, Concord] [The Frustration of Trying to Talk to
Thoreau] 1078
To Thomas Carlyle (May 6, 1856, Concord) [Second Thoughts on the
Nondescript Monster, Leaves of Grass] 1078
[February 1862, Concord] [Thoreau: Why He Farcied
Whitman 1078
[June 1863, Concord] [Seeing Himself Furthered in Thoreau's
Journals] 1079
[1863, Concord] [Taking Lincoln with His Faults] 1079
[May 24, 1864, Concord] [The Burial of Hawthorne—After Waiting
Too Long to Get to Know Him 1070

xvi Contents

[July 2, 1867, Concord] [A Mystery about Reading] 1080 [June 1871, Concord] [The Scientific Splendors of This Age]	1080
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE (1804–1864)	1081
My Kinsman, Major Molineux 1085	1501
Roger Malvin's Burial 1098	
Young Goodman Brown 1111	
The May-Pole of Merry Mount 1120	
Wakefield 1127	
The Minister's Black Veil	×
Rappaccini's Daughter 1142	
The Scarlet Letter 1162	
The Custoin-House 1162	
The Scarlet Letter 1187	
Preface to The House of the Seven Cables 1302	
["Something of the Hawk-eye": A Gallery of Hawthorne's Word-	
Portraits] 1304	
[Jonathan Cilley] 1304	
[Remarkable Characters at North Adams] 1305	
[Henry D. Thoreau] 1308	
[Edmund Hosmer—Emerson's Ideal Farmer] 1310	
[Walden Pond] 1311	
[Herman Melville] 1313	
[Hiram Powers] 1314	
[Abraham Lincoln] 1316	
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807–1882) A Psalm of Life 1319 Excelsior 1320 Mezzo Cammin 1321 The Slave's Dream 1322 The Fire of Drift-wood 1323 The Building of the Ship 1324 [Conclusion] 1324 My Lost Youth 1326 Aftermath 1328	1318
JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER (1807–1892) Ichabod! 1330 Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl 1331 Prelude to Among the Hills 1349	1329
EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809–1849) The Lake 1357 Preface 1358 Introduction 1358 Sonnet—To Science 1360 Fairyland 1361	1353

To Helen 1362	* (*
Israfel 1362	
The City in the Sea 1364	
The Sleeper 1365	
The Valley of Unrest 1366	
Alone 1367	
Dream-land 1368	
The Raven 1369	*
The Raven 1369 To —— —— . Ulalume: A Ballad	1372
Annabel Lee 1375	
Ligeia 1376	
The Fall of the House of Usher 13	86
William Wilson. A Tale 1399	
The Man of the Crowd 1412	
The Black Cat 1418	
The Purloined Letter 1425	•
The Imp of the Perverse 1438	
The Cask of Amontillado 1442	
The Cask of Amontillado 1442 Letter to Mr. ———————————————————————————————————	
[Reviews of Hawthorne's Twice-Told To	Hes] 1452
[April] 1452	40.
[May] 1454	
The Philosophy of Composition 14	159
The Poetic Principle 1467	
Letters 1485	
To John Allan (Richmond, March 1	9, 1827) My Determination Is at
Length Taken] 1485	4
To John Allan (Richmond, March 2	o, 1827) [In the Greatest
Necessity] 1486	
To John P. Kennedy (Baltimore, Ma	rch 15, 1835) [I Cannot
Come] 1486	
To Thomas W. White (Baltimore, A	pril 30, 1835) [Berenice
Justified] 1486	
To Maria Clemm (Richmond, Augu	st 29, 1835) ["My Own Sweetest
Sissy"] 1487	
To Philip P. Cooke (Philadelphia, Se	eptember 21, 1839) [Such Wild
Matters as Ligeia 1489	
To Joseph Evens Snodgrass (Philadel	phia, April 1, 1841) [My Sole
Drink Is Water] 1490	
To Maria Clemm (New-York, April	7, 1844) [No Fear of Starving
Here] 1490	
To Annie L. Richmond (Fordham, 1	November 16, 1848) [My Darling,
My Annie] 1492	
BRAHAM LINCOLN (1809–1865)	140
[The Presidential Question:] Speech in	the United States House of

Representatives, July 27, 1848 1496
A House Divided: Speech Delivered at Springfield, Illinois, at the Close of the Republican State Convention, June 16, 1858 1498

Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg, November 19, 1863 1504 Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865 1505	
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES (1809–1894) Old Ironsides 1507 The Last Leaf 1508 The Chambered Nautilus 1509 The Deacon's Masterpiece: or The Wonderful "One-Hoss Shay"	1506
MARGARET FULLER (1810–1850) The Great Lawsuit 1515 [Two Kinds of Slavery: Miranda: No Man Is Willingly Ungenerous] 1515 [Four Kinds of Equality] 1523 [The Great Radical Dualism] 1528	1513
HARRIET BEECHER STOWE (1811–1896) Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life among the Lowly Chapter VII. The Mother's Struggle 1533 The Minister's Housekeeper 1542	1532
GEORGE WASHINGTON HARRIS (1814–1869) Parson John Bullen's Lizards 1552 Mrs. Yardley's Quilting 1557 Hen Baily's Reformation 1564	1551
T. B. THORPE (1815–1878) The Big Bear of Arkansas 1570	1 569
Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs 1579 [A Portrait of the Captain] 1579 The Captain Attends a Camp-Meeting 1580	1578

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American Literature 1820-1865

THE INFLUENCE OF WASHINGTON IRVING

In a painting popular during the late nineteenth century, Christian Schussele reverentially depicted Washington Irving and His Literary Friends at Sunnyside. Working in 1863, four years after Irving's death, Schussele portrayed an astonishing number of elegantly clad notables in Irving's snug study in his Gothic cottagecastle on the Hudson River, north of New York City. Among them were several writers in this anthology: Irving himself, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Cullen Bryant, and James Fenimore Cooper. Intermingled with these men were poets and novelists now seldom read: William Gilmore Simms, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Nathaniel Parker Willis, James Kirke Paulding, John Pendleton Kennedy, and Henry T. Tuckerman, along with the historians William H. Prescott and George Bancroft. The Schussele painting was a pious hoax, for these guests never assembled together at one time, at Sunnyside or anywhere else, and while a few of those depicted were indeed among Irving's friends, he barely knew some of them and pever met others at all. But in several ways the scene is profoundly true to American literary history.

As Schussele's painting suggests, Irving, beloved by ordinary readers and by most of his fellow writers, was the central figure in the American literary world between 1809 (the year of his parody History of New York) and the Civil War, especially after he demonstrated in The Sketch Book (1819-20) that memorable fiction—Rib Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow—could be set in the United States; he also proved, by the book's international success, that an American writer could win a British and Continental audience. Irving's legion of imitators included several of the persons in the painting, and among his fellow writers Irving's reputation was enhanced by his generosity, as in his gallantly relinquishing the subject of the conquest of Mexico to Prescott or in urging the publisher George P. Putnam to bring out an American edition of the first book by the unknown Herman Melville. Although James Fenimore Cooper's fame as a fiction writer rivaled Irving's in the 1820s and 1830s, his influence never approached the breadth of Irving's. Nor did the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson, despite his profoundly provocative effects on such writers as Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Emily Dickinson—effects that make modern literary historians see him as the seminal writer of the century.

Mentioning the names of Fuller, Thoreau, Melville, and Dickinson suggests still another way the Schussele painting is exemplary. Since the painter set out to depict representative literary men (not literary women) as much as to depict genuine intimates of Irving, it is striking that he omitted writers who now seem among the most important of the century: Edgar Allan Poe, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, John Greenleaf Whittier (who was frowned upon as a militant abolitionist until 1866, when Snow-Bound made him seem a safe poet to admire), and Dickinson (in the 1860s an all but unpublished recluse). The painter would probably have

considered Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, George Washington Harris, and other southern or backwoods humorists in this volume to be subliterary, despite the fact that Irving had influenced such writing and had delighted in reading it.

THE SMALL WORLD OF AMERICAN WRITERS

Perhaps most important, paintings like the one by Schussele (and the similar wishful fad of depicting famous literary people in cozy association through the thennew technique of composite photography) capture the fact that in the nineteenth century the American literary world was very small indeed, so small that most of the writers in this period knew each other, often intimately, or else knew much about each other. They lived, if not in each other's pockets, at least in each other's houses, or boardinghouses: Lemuel Shaw, from 1830 to 1860 chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and Herman Melville's father-in-law after 1847, for a time stayed in a Boston boardinghouse run by Ralph Waldo Emerson's widowed mother; the Longfellows summered in the 1840s at the Pittsfield boardinghouse run by Melville's cousin, a house where Melville had stayed in his early teens; in Pittsfield and Lenox, Hawthorne and Melville paid each other overnight visits, in Concord the Hawthornes rented the Old Manse, the Emerson ancestral home, and later bought a house there from the educator Bronson Alcott and made it famous as the Wayside; in Concord the Emersons welcomed many guests, including Margaret Fuller, and when the master was away Thoreau sometimes stayed in the house to help Mrs. Emerson with the children and the property. The popular Manhattan hostess Anne Lynch assigned the young travel-writer Bayard Taylor to write a valentine for a slightly older travel-writer, Herman Melville, in 1848, and three years later, apparently with matchmaking in mind, brought together Taylor's intimate friend R. H. Stoddard and Elizabeth Barstow, a distant relative of Hawthorne. In 1853 Hawthorne received at Wayside young Mr. Stoddard, by then husband of Elizabeth Barstow, and pulled wires to get him a job in the New York Custom House, Hawthorne having the year before written the campaign biography for his old friend, the candidate for president, Franklin Pierce. (When Melville finally got his own appointment to the Custom House in 1866, Stoddard was on desk duty to welcome him; Stoddard kept Melville from being fired once, but Melville outlasted him many years in that nest of corruption.) On a visit to Washington after the Civil War had broken out, the still reclusive, and ailing, Hawthorne seriously considered making the hazardous trip to Wheeling to meet the extraordinary new contributor to the Atlantic Monthly, Rebecca Harding; later he welcomed her at Wayside. At Litchfield, Connecticut, the young Georgian Longstreet greatly admired one of the minister Lyman Beecher's daughters (not Harriet, then a small child).

Many of the writers of this period came together casually for dining and drinking, the hospitality at the editor Evert A. Duyckinck's house in New York being famous, open to southerners like Simms as well as New Yorkers like Melville and Bostonians like the elder Richard Henry Dana. In the late 1850s a Bohemian group of newspaper and theater people and writers drank together at Pfaff's saloon on Broadway above Bleecker Street; for a time Whitman was a fixture there. Of the clubs formed by writers, artists, and other notables (usually male), the three most memorable are the Bread and Cheese Club, which Cooper organized in 1824 in the back room of his publisher's Manhattan bookstore; the Transcendental Club, started in Boston in 1836 and lasting four years; the Saturday Club, a more convivial Boston group formed in 1856; and the Authors Club, founded in New York in 1882. Members of the Bread and Cheese Club included the poet William Cullen Bryant, Samuel F. B. Morse (the painter who later invented the telegraph), the poet Fitz-Greene Halleck, and Thomas Cole, the English-born painter of the American landscape. Emerson was the leading spirit of the Transcendental Club,

but other members included Bronson Alcott, later Margaret Fuller, and George Ripley, the organizer of the Transcendental commune at Brook Farm, near Roxbury. Among the members of the Saturday Club were Emerson, James Russell Lowell, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and the historians John Lothrop Motley and William H. Prescott; Nathaniel Hawthorne attended some meetings. Brander Matthews cofounded the Authors Club, from the first a beloved resource for the literary establishment, which included dominant magazine editors of the time such as Richard Watson Gilder, and critics and poets such as R. H. Stoddard and Edmund Clarence Stedman (an intimate of Samuel L. Clemens and William Dean Howells who also befriended Melville in his last years and whose son Arthur became Melville's literary executor); Matthews recalled that once or twice "the shy and elusive Herman Melville dropped in for an hour or two."

THE SMALL COUNTRY

Such intimacy was inevitable in a country which had only a few literary and publishing centers, all of them along the Atlantic seaboard. Despite the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 and the vast Southwest from Mexico in 1848, most of the writers we still read lived all their lives in the original thirteen states, except for trips abroad, and their practical experience was of a compact country: in 1840 the "northwestern" states were those covered by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan; Wisconsin was still a territory), while the "southwestern" humor writers such as George Washington Harris, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and Johnson Jones Hooper wrote in the region bounded by Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

Improvements in transportation were shrinking the country even while territorial gains were enlarging it. When Irving went from Manhattan to Albany in 1800, steamboats had not yet been invented, although William Longstreet, the father of the writer, had been planning one for a decade; the Hudson voyage was slow and dangerous, and in 1803 the wagons of Irving's Canada-bound party barely made it through the bogs beyond Utica. The Eric Canal, completed in 1825, changed things: in the 1830s and 1840s Hawthorne, Melville, and Fuller took the canal boats in safety, suffering only from crowded and stuffy sleeping conditions. When Irving went buffalo hunting in Indian territory (now Oklahoma) in 1832 he left the steamboat at St. Louis and went on horseback, camping out at night except when his party reached one of the line of missions built to accommodate whites who were Christianizing the Indians. By the 1840s railroads had replaced stagecoaches between many eastern towns, although to get to New Orleans in 1848 Whitman had to change from railroad to stagecoach to steamboat. Despite frequent train wrecks, steamboat explosions, and Atlantic shipwrecks, by the 1850s travel had ceased to be the hazardous adventure it had been. But the few American writers who saw much of the country were still provincials in their practical attitude toward their literary careers, for their publishers and purchasets were concentrated mainly in or near New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.

And the New York, Philadelphia, and Boston of this period were themselves tiny in comparison to their modern size. The site of Brook Farm, now long since a victim of urban sprawl, was chosen because it was nine miles remote from Boston and two miles away from the nearest farm. The population of New York City at the start of the 1840s was only a third of a million and was concentrated in lower Manhattan: Union Square was the edge of town. Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York Tribune, escaped the bustle of the city by living on a ten-acre farm up the East River on Turtle Bay, where the East Fifties are now; there he and his wife provided a bucolic retreat for Margaret Fuller when she was his literary critic and metropolitan reporter. In 1853 the Crystal Palace, an exposition of arts, crafts, and

sciences, created in imitation of the great Crystal Palace at the London World's Fair of 1851, failed—largely because it was too far out of town, up west of the new Croton Water Reservoir that had recently brought running water to the city. The reservoir was on the spot where the New York Public Library now stands, at Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue, and the Crystal Palace was on the site of the modern Bryant Park, named for the nature poet but now long inured to sadder urban visitors than those who made their way to the Fair in the 1850s.

THE ECONOMICS OF AMERICAN LETTERS

Geography and modes of transportation bore directly upon publishing procedures in the United States of this period. For a long time writers who wanted to publish a book carried the manuscript to a local printer and paid job rates to have it printed and bound. Longfellow worked in this fashion with a firm in Brunswick, Maine, when he printed his translation of Elements of French Grammar and other textbooks during his first years as a teacher. Fiction was also sometimes sent to a local printer, as when Longstreet had his own firm in Augusta print Georgia Scenes or when Johnson Jones Hooper paid a firm in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to print A Ride with Old Kit Kuncker before having it brought out the next year by a regular Philadelphia publisher. However, the true publishing centers were major seaports which could receive the latest British books by the fastest ships and, hastily reprinting them, distribute them inland by river traffic as well as in coastal cities. After 1820 the leading publishing towns were New York and Philadelphia, with the Erie Canal soon giving New York an advantage in the Ohio trade. Boston remained only a provincial publishing center until after 1850, when publishers realized the value of the new railroad connections to the West. Despite the aggressive merchandising techniques of a few firms, the creation of a national book-buying market for literature, especially American literature, was long delayed.

The problem was that the economic interests of American publisher-booksellers were antithetical to the interests of American writers. A national copyright law became effective in the United States in 1790, but it was 1891 before American writers had international protection and foreign writers received protection in the United States. Until the end of the century, American printers routinely pirated English writers, paying nothing to Sir Walter Scott or Charles Dickens for their novels, which were rushed into print and sold very cheaply in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities. American readers benefited from the situation, for they could buy the best British—and continental—writings cheaply, but American writers suffered, since if they were to receive royalties, their books had to be priced above the prices charged for works of the most famous British writers. American publishers were willing to carry a few native novelists and poets as prestige items

for a while, but they were businessmen, not philanthropists.

To compound the problem, Irving's apparent conquest of the British publishing system, by which he received large sums for *The Sketch Book* and succeeding volumes, proved delusory. Cooper and others followed in Irving's track and were paid by magnanimous British publishers under a system whereby works first printed in Great Britain were presumed to hold a British copyright. But this practice was ruled illegal by a British judge in 1849, and the British market dried up for American writers.

Throughout this period, making a serious American contribution to the literature of the world was no guarantee at all of monetary rewards. Except possibly for a few authors of sentimental best sellers, including what Hawthorne jealously called "that damned mob of scribbling women," the United States was not a country in which one could make a living by writing. It was not even a place where the best authors could always publish what they wrote. The only writers who could consistently find a publisher were Irving and Cooper, who kept their appeal on the basis

of early success (though more copies had to be sold in order to make the same profit) and the magazine or newspaper editors who could fill some of their own columns when they wanted. These editors included (for various periods of time) Poe, Longstreet, Harris, Thorpe, Hooper, Lowell, and four other notable examples: Fuller, who for several years reported for the New York Tribune at home and from Europe; Whitman, who for much of the 1840s and 1850s was free to editorialize in one Brooklyn or Manhattan newspaper or another; Whittier, who for more than two decades before the Civil War was corresponding editor of the Washington National Era; and, most conspicuously, Bryant, long-time owner of the New York Evening Post. Whitman was his own publisher for most editions of Leaves of Grass. and filled mail orders himself, as Thoreau also did when an occasional request came for one of the seven hundred copies of his first book which the publisher had turned back to him. At crucial moments in his career Melville was balked from writing what he wanted to write, as when he sacrificed his literary aspirations after the failure of Mardi and wrote Redburn and White-Jacket, which he regarded as mere drudgery; and at other times he was "prevented from publishing" works he had written, including at least one which was subsequently destroyed. Ironically, the writer freest to pursue literary greatness in this period was probably Emily Dickinson, whose "letter to the world" remained unmailed during her lifetime.

THE QUEST FOR AN AMERICAN LITERARY DESTINY

In the first half of the nineteenth century, lobbying for the existence of an American literature in magazines seemed to take up more space than the literature itself. Especially after the War of 1812 confirmed American independence, theorists called for a great literature which would match the emerging political greatness of the nation. Huckstering critics soon developed specific notions as to the subjects which would-be writers should choose: preferably the distant colonial past (the nearest we could hope to come to the medieval settings which were serving Sir Walter Scott so well), or possibly Indian legends, or still less desirable (because too near the mundane present), subjects from the recent Revolutionary past. Such exhortations were the stock-in-trade of commencement speakers and literary critics in the 1820s and 1830s. But in *The Poet* (1842) Emerson boldly called for a poet who would write of the United States as it was, not as it might have been:

We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer; then in the middle age; then in Calvinism. Banks and tariffs, the newspaper and caucus, methodism and unitarianism, are flat and dull to dull people, but rest on the same foundations of wonder as the town of Troy, and the temple of Delphos, and are as swiftly passing away. Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes, and Indians, our boasts, and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues, and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon, and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres.

Later Whitman was to say that he had remained simmering, simmering, until Emerson brought him to a boil.

During the 1840s Evert A. Duyckinck and other New York literary men and women (primarily through the columns of the *Democratic Review* and the *Literary World*) mustered a squad of promoters of the great literature that was to come. The propagandists perfected the rhetorical strategy of linking literary destiny to geog-

raphy and political destiny: th. "great nation of futurity" must have a literature to match Niagara Falls and the Rocky Mountains. Herman Melville for several years was associated with Duyckinck's magazines, and he half-champions and half-spoofs the chauvinistic rhetoric in the essay on Hawthorne which he wrote for the Literary World in 1850. An American, he proclaimed, was "bound to carry republican progressiveness into Literature, as well as into Life," even to the point of believing that sooner or later American writers would rival Shakespeare, whom a generation of Bardolators regarded as unapproachable. This was 'terary manifest destiny with a vengeance, warranted only because as he wrote the essay Melville had already written his way well into what he later titled Moby-Dick.

None of the American writers of the period was chauvinistic enough to think that a great American literature could be written without reference to past English and European literature. As Cooper protested in Notions of the Americans (1828), writers in the United States possessed the same literary heritage that writers in Great Britain did. Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Bunyan, Addison, Pope, Fielding, Johnson, and Burns, along with many others (especially some now neglected writers of the eighteenth century) were the possession of all educated Americans born in the late eighteenth century or early in the nineteenth. Americans were not long behind the British in responding to the Romantics Wordsworth and Coleridge, then to Byron, Moore, and Scott. By the 1830s Carlyle was a force in the lives of several American writers through his translations of recent German philosophical works and his own jeremiads against contemporary British values. Americans had access to the latest British and continental discussions of art, religion, politics, and science, for British magazines, especially the quarterly reviews, were imported promptly and widely reprinted. Nineteenth-century American writing reveals its full meanings only in the light of European influences and parallel developments.

THE NEW AMERICANNESS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Despite the cultural cross-connections with Europe, the best literature that emerged in the United States was distinctively new, and a few perceptive critics very early began trying to define its special quality. This analysis from the review of *The Whale* (the English title of *Moby-Dick*) in the London *Leader* had currency in America as well, for the popular *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* quoted it approvingly:

Want [lack] of originality has long been the just and standing reproach to American literature; the best of its writers were but second-hand Englishmen. Of late some have given evidence of originality, not absolute originality, but such genuine outcomings of the American intellect as can be safely called national. Edgar Poc, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville are assuredly no British offshoots; nor is Emerson—the German American that he is! The observer of this commencement of an American literature, properly so called, will notice as significant that these writers have a wild and mystic love of the supersensual, peculiarly their own. To move a horror skilfully, with something of the earnest faith in the Unseen, and with weird imagery to shape these Phantasms so vividly that the most incredulous mind is hushed, absorbed—to do this no European pen has apparently any longer the power—to do this American literature is without a rival. What romance writer can be named with Hawthorne? Who knows the terrors of the seas like Herman Melville?"

Plainly, this was meant as praise, but to employ "weird imagery" in order to "move a horror skilfully" was hardly the ambition of any American writer of the period besides Poe; for their part, Hawthorne and Melville were not concerned with the supernatural except as stage devices for heightening their psychological analyses.

But literary historians have not improved much on the reviewer in the Leader in deciding what was American about American literature. American writers were not achieving originality in form: Irving's sentences were accepted as models of English prose style precisely because they were themselves modeled upon the sentences of Addison and Goldsmith, long the prime exemplars of decorous English prose. Melville's sentences often looked like those of whatever powerful master of the English language he had most recently been reading—Shakespeare, Milton, Burton, Taylor, Sterne, De Quincey, Carlyle. Nor was the content of the best American writing of this period original in anything like an "absolute" sense. Modern scholars have shown that in his most "American" stories, Rip Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Irving drew upon, and even closely translated, parts of German tales. In Moby-Dick Melville's metaphysics are recognizably of the generation of Goethe, Byron, and Carlyle. Thoreau's recurrent ideas came mainly from Emerson (at least Emerson himself insisted they did), but Emerson had picked them up from dozens of ancient and modern philosophers.

Yet, as everyone in the country sensed by the 1850s, there was some elusive quality about its new literature that was American. Irving's German-influenced stories were profoundly moving to Americans, who knew more than most Britons what it was to feel the trauma of rapid change, especially to experience repeated physical uprootings, and Americans found in the ne'er-do-well Rip a model for making a success of failure. In Cooper's novels was a sense of the immensity of physical nature and the power of human beings to destroy nature that most European writers could experience only vicariously. In Melville's Moby-Dick was a sense of the grandeur of the physical universe and man's role in it long suppressed in European consciousness. In Leaves of Grass Whitman undertook another elemental task—to become the national poet of a new people on a new continent. What proved most enduringly "American" about Emerson was his wide streak of Yankee individualism best displayed in Self-Reliance, which became an inspiration to thousands of Americans who were determined to hitch their wagons, as Emerson said, to a star. Even Thoreau's Walden, which many contemporaries took merely as an American counterpart of the English naturalist Gilbert White's Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne, was in fact consciously an American counterscripture, a Franklinesque retort to Poor Richard, a how-to book on getting a living by working at what you love. At a time when grandiloquence in political rhetoric was often taken for eloquence, Abraham Lincoln mastered both the majestic cadences of the King James Version of the Bible and the extravagant toughness of backwoods tall talk. Dickinson's poems in their minute intensity were as ambitious as Whitman's, magnificent attempts to define her experience at whatever cost in wrenched syntax and rhyme. At best, beyond question, American writers were accomplishing things yet unattempted in the English language.

THE AESTHETICS OF A NATIONAL LITERATURE

The great writers of the period for the most part defined their aesthetic problems by themselves, though Emerson's *The Poet* aided some of the others. The primary difficulty of how to keep from being secondhand English writers had not been squarely faced by the theorists of nationality in literature, who most often seemed to think that adoption of an American setting or, more vaguely, the infusion of an American "spirit" guaranteed Americanness. Insofar as the issues had been addressed by Americans before the 1840s. it was primarily by painters and sculptors, the most prominent of whom had received their training abroad, then had found it impossible to reconcile their European notions of noble subject and style with Americanness. The Hudson River school of painters, led by Thomas Cole (one of whose notable followers was Asher B. Durand, the painter of *Kindred Spirits*, a detail of which is reproduced on the cover of this volume), found a pantheistic majesty in

American landscapes not anticipated by the history-filled landscapes of European painting. Some of Cole's own work was marred by a tendency to allegorize as inveterate as Hawthorne's own, but others of the Hudson River school, including Frederic Edwin Church, faced in North-and South-America a New World, a landscape with primeval power both to awe and destroy. Artistic tributes could be as clichéd as Whitman's catalogues (everyone from Church to T. P. Thorpe painted inevitable Niagaras), but Church's recently rediscovered Icebegs (1861) is only a decade away from Moby-Dick, a work by a spirit that was in truth kindred. Other Americans, notably Martin Johnson Heade, born the same year as Melville, found compelling mystery not only in the exotica of South America but also in the salt hay marshes and low coasts of New England. The genre painters who formed so conspicuous a part of the artistic establishment—Melville's and Whitman's acquaintance William Sidney Mount, for instance-were pleasantly but unchallengingly continuing the familiar Dutch tradition—familiar from paintings brought across the Atlantic by Dutch settlers as well as those more recently brought over. Of the major writers of the period Whitman, from his friendships with the members of the Brooklyn Art Union in the early 1850s, was exposed to controversies in art in time to have them affect his poetry—his own aesthetic statements reflect Horatio Greenough's championship of the nude and his disparagement of mere embellishment. Most of the writers, despite the theorizing about painting and sculpting and the actual painting and sculpting available for them to see, were pretty much on their own when they were solving their crucial aesthetic problems—such as Hawthorne's attempts to strike a balance between the allegorical and the realistic, Emerson's difficulty in achieving unity from the mutually repellent particles of his thought, Thoreau's attempts to unite the Transcendentalist and the naturalist in himself. Whitman's struggle to domesticate the epic catalogue without falling into self-parody, Melville's attempt to create a tragedy in a democracy, and Dickinson's attempt to walk the hairline between mere coyness and psychological precision.

THE WRITERS AND THEIR AMERICA

When the great American writers of the mid-nineteenth century took stock of their country, they sometimes caught the contagion of an ebullient, expansionist mood that struck many observers as the dominant one of the time, and even Thoreau, the most relentless critic of the values of his society, insisted that to some extent he counted himself among "those who find their encouragement and inspiration in precisely the present condition of things, and cherish it with the fondness and enthusiasm of lovers." But often they felt a profound alienation. Emerson was a preacher who had renounced his pulpit, and the other great writers—also preachers without pulpits—devoted much of their artistic effort to analyzing conditions of life in America and to exhorting their fellow citizens to live more wisely.

CONFORMITY, MATERIALISM, AND THE ECONOMY

The eccentricity of Americans, especially in rural areas and smaller towns, was notorious among visitors from abroad and was recorded in some of its aspects by writers as diverse as Longstreet, Harris, Melville, and Stowe. In Stowe's novels of the late 1850s and early 1860s there is a gallery of portraits of such mentally angular or gnarled characters. In Amherst, Emily Dickinson out-Thoreaued Thoreau in her resolute privacy, idiosyncracies, and individuality. But she could be understood in relation to real and fictional characters. The night her correspondent Thomas Wentworth Higginson met her in 1870 he strove to convey her character in a letter to his wife without staying up too late; "if you had read Mrs. Stoddard's novels you could understand a house where each member runs his or her own selves." Despite such powerful individualists, it seemed to some of the writers that Americans, even