A COMPANION TO

AMERICAN FICTION

1780–1865

EDITED BY SHIRLEY SAMUELS
A Companion to American Fiction 1780–1865
Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture

This series offers comprehensive, newly written surveys of key periods and movements and certain major authors in literary culture and history. Extensive volumes provide new perspectives and positions on contexts and on canonical and post-canonical texts, orientating the beginning student in new fields of study and providing the experienced undergraduate and new graduate with current and new directions, as pioneered and developed by leading scholars in the field.

Published

1 A Companion to Romanticism
   Edited by Duncan Wu
2 A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture
   Edited by Herbert F. Tucker
3 A Companion to Shakespeare
   Edited by David Scott Kastan
4 A Companion to the Gothic
   Edited by David Punter
5 A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare
   Edited by Dympna Callaghan
6 A Companion to Chaucer
   Edited by Peter Brown
7 A Companion to Literature from Milton to Blake
   Edited by David Womersley
8 A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture
   Edited by Michael Hattaway
9 A Companion to Milton
   Edited by Thomas N. Corns
10 A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry
   Edited by Neil Roberts
11 A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature
   Edited by Phillip Puliano and Elaine Trebarne
12 A Companion to Restoration Drama
   Edited by Susan J. Owen
13 A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing
   Edited by Anita Pacheco
14 A Companion to English Renaissance Drama
   Edited by Arthur F. Kinney
15 A Companion to Victorian Poetry
   Edited by Richard Cronin, Antony Harrison and Alison Chapman
16 A Companion to the Victorian Novel
   Edited by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing

A Companion to Shakespeare's Works

17 A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume I: The Tragedies
   Edited by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard
18 A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume II: The Histories
   Edited by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard
19 A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume III: The Comedies
   Edited by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard
20 A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume IV: The Poems, Problem Comedies, Late Plays
   Edited by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard

21 A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America
   Edited by Charles L. Crow
22 A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism
   Edited by Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted
23 A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South
   Edited by Richard Gray and Owen Robinson
24 A Companion to American Fiction 1780–1865
   Edited by Shirley Samuels
25 A Companion to American Fiction 1865–1914
   Edited by G. R. Thompson and Robert Paul Lamb
## Contents

[List of Illustrations] viii  
[Notes on Contributors] ix  
[Acknowledgments] xvi

[Introduction] 1  
*Shirley Samuels*

### PART I  Historical and Cultural Contexts 5

1  National Narrative and the Problem of American Nationhood 7  
*J. Gerald Kennedy*

2  Fiction and Democracy 20  
*Paul Downes*

3  Democratic Fictions 31  
*Sandra M. Gustafson*

4  Engendering American Fictions 40  
*Martha J. Cutter and Caroline F. Levander*

5  Race and Ethnicity 52  
*Robert S. Levine*

6  Class 64  
*Philip Gould*

7  Sexualities 75  
*Valerie Roby*

8  Religion 87  
*Paul Gutjahr*
Contents

9 Education and Polemic
   Stephanie Foote 97

10 Marriage and Contract
   Naomi Morgenstern 108

11 Transatlantic Ventures
   Wil Verhoeven and Stephen Shapiro 119

12 Other Languages, Other Americas
   Kirsten Silva Gruesz 131

PART II  Forms of Fiction 145

13 Literary Histories
   Michael Drexler and Ed White 147

14 Breeding and Reading: Chesterfieldian Civility in the Early Republic
   Christopher Lukasik 158

15 The American Gothic
   Marianne Noble 168

16 Sensational Fiction
   Shelley Streetby 179

17 Melodrama and American Fiction
   Lori Merish 191

18 Delicate Boundaries: Passing and Other “Crossings”
   in Fictionalized Slave Narratives
   Cherene Sherrard-Johnson 204

19 Doctors, Bodies, and Fiction
   Stephanie P. Browner 216

20 Law and the American Novel
   Laura H. Korobkin 228

21 Labor and Fiction
   Cindy Weinstein 239

22 Words for Children
   Carol J. Singley 249

23 Dime Novels
   Colin T. Ramsey and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola 262

24 Reform and Antebellum Fiction
   Chris Castiglia 274
## PART III  Authors, Locations, Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>The Problem of the City</td>
<td>Heather Roberts</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>New Landscapes</td>
<td>Timothy Sweet</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Retold Legends: Washington Irving, James Kirke Paulding, and John Pendleton Kennedy</td>
<td>Philip Barnard</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>New England Tales: Catharine Sedgwick, Catherine Brown, and the Dislocations of Indian Land</td>
<td>Bethany Schneider</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Harriet Beecher Stowe, Caroline Lee Hentz, Herman Melville, and American Racialist Exceptionalism</td>
<td>Katherine Adams</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Fictions of the South: Southern Portraits of Slavery</td>
<td>Nancy Buffington</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>The West</td>
<td>Edward Watts</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>The Old Southwest: Mike Fink, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson Jones Hooper, and George Washington Harris</td>
<td>David Rachels</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>James Fenimore Cooper and the Invention of the American Novel</td>
<td>Wayne Franklin</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>The Sea: Herman Melville and Moby-Dick</td>
<td>Stephanie A. Smith</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>National Narrative and National History</td>
<td>Russ Castronovo</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Index 445
Illustrations

1.1 “Uniola Cottage: Mrs. Gilman’s Summer Residence Sullivan’s Island” 17
4.1 Illustration from The Token; or, Affection’s Gift 44
5.1 Frontispiece from Further Disclosures by Maria Monk 58
7.1 Title illustration for Ik Marvel, Reveries of a Bachelor 82
16.1 “The Widow’s Hope” 182
18.1 Runaway slave 209
22.1 Title-page for Clara Arnold (ed.), The Juvenile Keepsake 253
23.1 Title-page of Ann Stephens’ Malaeska; The Indian Wife of the White Hunter 263
24.1 “Huzza for the Rummies! That’s the ticket!” 280
25.1 “The Little Pauper” 294
26.1 Title-page from Mrs. C. M. Kirkland, A Book for the Home Circle 308
30.1 “Indians Dream of Heaven” 359
31.1 “Life in Philadelphia” 374
33.1 “The Struggle” 391
35.1 “The Expected Canoe” 420
Notes on Contributors

**Katherine Adams** is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Tulsa, where she teaches courses in nineteenth-century American literature, African American literature, and women’s studies. She is the author of several articles on race, gender, and nationalism in American literature. Her current project is a book about the trope of privacy as it operates within various mid-nineteenth-century publics.

**Eric Gary Anderson** is an Associate Professor of English at Oklahoma State University, where he teaches American, American Indian, and Southern literatures. He is the author of *American Indian Literature and the Southwest: Contexts and Dispositions* (University of Texas, 1999) as well as of numerous essays in books such as *Speak to Me Words: Essays on Contemporary American Indian Poetry* (University of Arizona, 2003) and *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture* (Louisiana State University, 2002). Currently he is working on two research projects, one on early southeastern captivity narratives and one on William Faulkner’s environmental imagination.

**Philip Barnard** teaches in the Department of English at the University of Kansas. He writes on American literature and cultural theory, and has translated and edited fiction and theory by figures including Victor Séjour, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. He is co-editor of *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic* (University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

**Stephanie P. Browner** is the Dean of the Faculty at Berea College and an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Theatre, and Speech Communication. She is author of a book on literature and the internet, and her book *Profound Science and Elegant Literature: Imagining Doctors in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Pennsylvania) will be available in 2004.

**Nancy Buffington** is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Delaware. She has published essays on Robert Montgomery Bird, the history of African Americans in Delaware, the construction of whiteness, and writing pedagogy. She is
co-editor of the composition reader *Living Languages: Contexts for Reading and Writing* (Prentice-Hall, 1997).

**Chris Castiglia** is Associate Professor of English and Women’s Studies at Loyola University, Chicago. He is the author of *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago University Press, 1996) and of *Interior States: The Romance of Reform and the Inner Life of a Nation* (forthcoming from Duke University Press). He is editing, with Glenn Hendler, a critical edition of Walt Whitman’s *Franklin Evans* (also forthcoming from Duke), and, with Russ Castronovo, a special issue of *American Literature* on esthetics and American cultural studies.


**Martha J. Cutter** is an Associate Professor of English at Kent State University, where she teaches classes on multiethnic literature of the United States, women’s literature, and African American writing. Her first book is *Unruly Tongue: Language and Identity in American Women’s Fiction, 1850–1930* (University Press of Mississippi, 1999), and she is currently completing a book on contemporary multiethnic American literature. She has published articles in journals such as *American Literature, African American Review, American Literary Realism, MELUS, Women’s Studies, Legacy, Criticism*, and *Callaloo*.

**Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola** is Professor of English at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and President of the Society of Early Americanists. She has published widely on the Indian captivity narrative form and on early and nineteenth-century American women’s writings. Her most recent book is an edited collection, *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives* (Penguin, 1998). She is currently working on a book-length study of the captivity narratives by whites and Dakotas about the US–Dakota Conflict, entitled *The War in Words: Reading the US–Dakota Conflict of 1862 through the Captivity Literature*.

**Paul Downes** teaches at the University of Toronto and is the author of *Democracy, Revolution and Monarchism in Early American Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). He is currently working on critical human rights theory and nineteenth-century American literature.

**Michael Drexler** is an Assistant Professor of English at Bucknell University. His most recent article, “Brigands and Nuns: The Vernacular Sociology of Collectivity after the Haitian Revolution,” appeared in *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early*

Stephanie Foote teaches at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is the author of Regional Fictions (University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), and is currently at work on two book-length projects. The first, Impossible People, is a study of the parvenu and class mobility in the nineteenth century, and the second, Circulating Women, is a study of the rise of a queer field of literary production in the twentieth-century United States.

Wayne Franklin is Davis Distinguished Professor of American Literature at Northeastern University. Author of Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers (University of Chicago Press, 1979), The New World of James Fenimore Cooper (University of Chicago Press, 1982), and A Rural Carpenter's World (University of Iowa Press, 1990), he is founding editor of the “American Land and Life” series published by the University of Iowa Press. He also co-edited Mapping American Culture (University of Iowa Press, 1993) with Michael Steiner and edited American Voices, American Lives (Norton, 1995), and serves as editor for the “Literature to 1700” section of the Norton Anthology of American Literature. At present he is finishing work on the first biography of James Fenimore Cooper written since the novelist’s papers became available to scholars in 1990.

Philip Gould is Professor of English at Brown University. His most recent work is Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World (Harvard University Press, 2003).

Kirsten Silva Gruesz teaches nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature of the Americas at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her book Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing was published by Princeton University Press in 2002. She has published articles on topics from Spanish print culture in the US borderlands to sentimental poetry to contemporary Central American fiction, and is currently at work on a book about the history of Spanish–English bilingualism in the US.

Sandra M. Gustafson is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. She is currently at work on a book on culture and democracy in the antebellum United States. Her publications include Eloquence is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America (University of Notre Dame Press, 2000) and numerous essays, notably on William Apess, James Fenimore Cooper, Jonathan Edwards, Margaret Fuller, and Deborah Sampson Gannett.

Paul Gutjahr is an Associate Professor of English, American Studies, and Religious Studies at Indiana University. He is the author of An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1770–1880 (Stanford University Press, 1999), the co-editor of Illuminating Letters: Essays on Typography and Literary Interpretation (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), and the editor of an anthology entitled Popular
American Literature of the Nineteenth Century (Oxford University Press, 2001). He has also written numerous articles and book reviews.


Laura H. Korobkin, a former lawyer and litigator, is an Associate Professor of English at Boston University. Her publications include Criminal Conversations: Sentimentality and the Nineteenth-Century Legal Stories of Adultery (Columbia University Press, 1998), as well as law and literature analyses of The Scarlet Letter, Wieland, and Their Eyes Were Watching God.


Robert S. Levine is a Professor in the Department of English at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the author of Conspiracy and Romance (Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity (University of North Carolina Press, 1997), and has edited a number of volumes, including The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville (Cambridge University Press, 1998), a Bedford Cultural Edition of William Wells Brown’s Clotel (Bedford Books, 2000), and Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Dana Luciano is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Georgetown University, where she teaches sex and gender studies and nineteenth-century US literature. She has published essays on Charles Brockden Brown, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Herman Melville, Henry James, and Pauline E. Hopkins, and has completed a book entitled Configurations of Mourning: Embodiment, Loss and the Longing for Form in Nineteenth-Century America. Her current research focuses on the temporality of dissident sexualities.

Christopher Lukasik is an Assistant Professor of English and American Studies at Boston University. He is completing a book entitled Discerning Characters: Social Distinction and the Face in American Literary and Visual Culture, 1780–1850.

Naomi Morgenstern is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Toronto, where she teaches American literature and critical theory. Her essays have appeared in such journals as *differences, Novel, Genders,* and *Studies in the Novel*. She is currently completing a manuscript on contract theory and American literature.

Marianne Noble is an Associate Professor of Literature at American University, Washington DC. She is the author of *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (Princeton University Press, 2000) and of numerous articles on gothic and sentimental literature. She is currently working on a manuscript on the moral and epistemological limits of sympathy in such authors as Melville, Twain, Dickinson, Alcott, and Whitman.


Colin T. Ramsey is an Assistant Professor of American Literature at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. Along with the early history of dime novels, his research interests include Benjamin Franklin’s early career and Indian captivity narratives.

Heather Roberts teaches in the English Department at Clark University.

Valerie Rohy is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Vermont. She is the author of *Impossible Women: Lesbian Figures and American Literature* (Cornell University Press, 2000) and the co-editor of *American Local Color Writing, 1880–1920* (Penguin, 1998). She has also published essays on James Baldwin, Mary Wilkins Freeman, María Cristina Mena, and Pauline Hopkins. Her current book project addresses sexuality, race, and discourses of regression in American literature.

Shirley Samuels is a Professor of English and American Studies at Cornell University. Her most recent book is *Facing America: Iconography and the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 2004). She is also currently the section editor of “American Literature before 1865” for the Blackwell online project literature-compass.com.

Bethany Schneider is Assistant Professor of English at Bryn Mawr College. She is working on a book entitled *From Place to Populace: State Proliferation and Indian Removal in American Literature, 1820–1840*. 
Stephen Shapiro teaches in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Warwick. A co-editor of *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, and Sexuality in the Early Republic* (University of Tennessee Press, 2004), he writes on American literature and cultural materialism, and is preparing a book-length study on Brown, ideology, and the Atlantic world-system.

Cherene Sherrard-Johnson is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is currently at work on a book that analyzes the artistic exchange between writers and visual artists during the Harlem Renaissance (1917–35).

Carol J. Singley is Associate Professor of English and a Fellow in the Center for Childhood Studies at Rutgers University, Camden, where she co-directs the American Studies program. She is the author of *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), editor of books on Wharton, and co-editor of three volumes of critical essays, including *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader* (Rutgers University Press, 2003). She is currently writing a book about adoption narratives in American literature and culture.


Shelley Streeby teaches US cultural studies at the University of California, San Diego. She is the author of *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (University of California Press, 2002) and has also published essays in *American Literary History, boundary 2*, and *Criticism*.

Timothy Sweet is Professor of English at West Virginia University. He is author of *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography and the Crisis of the Union* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) and *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

Wil Verhoeven is Professor of American Culture and Cultural Theory at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. He is co-editor of the Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive and Scholarly Edition (UVA and KSUP) and general editor of a series of ten “Anti-Jacobin Novels” as well as *The Collected Works of Thomas Holcroft* (both for Pickering & Chatto). The author of numerous essays on American literature


**Ed White** teaches in the English Department at Louisiana State University and is the author of “Early America as Imagined Community” (*American Quarterly*, 2004) and *The Backcountry and the City: Feelings of Structure in Early America* (University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).
Acknowledgments

My warm thanks to the contributors, whose prompt and engaged responses to the topics were a fabulous learning experience for me. My gratitude to the two graduate students at Cornell who helped with the nitty-gritty of putting out letters and putting together details: Hilary Emmett and Jen Dunnaway. Among the encouraging voices from Blackwell, I’d like to single out Gillian Somerscales as a wonderful copy-editor. And on the home front, always, I save my hugs for John Briggs Seltzer and Ruth Ayoka Samuels.

Shirley Samuels
Introduction

Shirley Samuels

What does American fiction look like in the foundational period of the early republic, from the earliest declarations of nationhood until secession and civil war? This collection of essays sets out to present the current state of criticism in an area that is at once extremely familiar and just beginning to be studied. During the academy’s earlier appraisals, critics assumed that nineteenth-century American literature needed time to mature from its dependency on English and European models. Even before such landmark studies as those by F. O. Matthiessen (American Renaissance), Richard Chase (The American Novel and its Tradition), and Leslie Fiedler (Love and Death in the American Novel) in the mid-twentieth century, which defined the terms in which the field was thereafter discussed, the period assumed for such maturation was about two generations past the American Revolution. The notorious coincidence of the deaths of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams on the same day (July 4, 1826) marked the close of the first generation. The next generation reached its writerly potential, as this argument has it, during the 1850s, in a lull before the terrible sectional crisis known as the American Civil War put literary appreciation in the shadow of national violence.

Twentieth-century assessments of early nineteenth-century American literature stressed the dependence on English traditions even as the thematics of nationalism, new landscapes, and new racial and ethnic interchanges produced a form of American exceptionalism. The relation between dependency and exceptionalism still included the assumption that fiction needed to evolve. It scarcely needs saying that this volume stresses neither dependence nor exceptionalism. At the same time, we notice the current critical preoccupation with pointing out the problematics of applying the adjective “American” – more appropriately used of a hemisphere – to literature produced within the boundaries of the United States.

Since the 1970s, as literary critics have joined their enterprises with those of cultural historians, they have found different ways of comprehending the literary productions of the 1780s and following decades. Without reprising the tendentious
arguments about American exceptionalism, such critics have described literature in the United States as an enterprise bound up in formative ways with the social, political, and cultural structures of the new nation. In responding to such challenges, this collection includes contributions by critics who present a number of salient approaches to the period. Crucially, they analyze not only fiction but also historical and political crises. These crises place fiction in a context that makes it comprehensible not only as a document of its own time but also as a testament to the shaping power of enterprises like nationalism, class distinctions, gender formation, and the places and displacements associated with race and ethnicity.

Studies of American fiction have been pouring out in recent years, challenging terms set by earlier studies and rendering newly apparent the visibility of fiction in the cultural life of the new nation. Such studies have emphasized, for example, how variant social and sexual formations affected the young men and women who formed associations with each other with purposes ranging from benevolence to social reform. These associations were often described in fictional treatments. Sometimes the fictional treatments were designed to further the purposes of the association, such as the novels published under the auspices of the temperance movement; other, more sensationalized treatments — such as the exposés of George Lippard, the Philadelphia crusader against vice — were published with different ends in view.

The purpose of this new Companion to American Fiction is to situate the work of the newest generation of critics who interpret American literature in relation to each other and to earlier critics. The contributions are organized under three broad headings. The first section is designed to orient the reader to the large categories, such as landscape, race, and ethnicity, within which writers produced their works. The second section explains categories of fictional production. Even though some generic treatments overlap with each other and with the third section, which focuses more specifically on individual authors, critical examinations of styles of literary writing in the period are crucial to the overall project of tracing literary forms and purposes. The third section emphasizes more local details such as the way in which James Fenimore Cooper transformed a Revolutionary War anecdote, the engagement of Catharine Sedgwick with Native American land claims, and how Herman Melville imagined himself into the whaling trade.

How are we to account for the persistence of certain authors and the surprising surges into view of others? Persistence can be perplexing, even as critics such as Jane Tompkins have attempted to comprehend it as a quiet form of conspiracy. That Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose now canonical novel The Scarlet Letter had a limited readership at publication, has become standard fare for students would have surprised most professors in the New England colleges of his day. Still, Hawthorne had influential friends. Tompkins finds them represented by men like Ralph Waldo Emerson, who walked Hawthorne’s casket to its Concord resting place, and she argues that these friends ensured his continuation in the canon. That Susan B. Warner, widely renowned in her lifetime for the intensely private universe of The Wide, Wide World, had disappeared from view by the mid-twentieth century would also have
surprised nineteenth-century American readers. But the virtues she celebrated, virtues closely allied with Protestant prayer tactics, had become separated from a concept of great literature relying on concepts of esthetic value now understood to be divorced from polemic, let alone religious conversion.

On this view, the separation of value from polemic, as well as the concept of influential friendships, might seem to have promoted Hawthorne’s ambiguity over the moral certainty of Warner. Yet, in a thorough reading of Hawthorne’s sketches and novels, a reader finds that an obsessive reiteration of moral values pervades his writing. So the question of persistence versus vanishing remains in many ways generational. Readers of the late twentieth century, influenced by a variety of excellent criticism that provided new strategies for understanding value such as Marxism, feminism, race theories, and psychoanalysis, began to study a plethora of texts. Some forms of criticism were clearly canonical: readings of Melville and Hawthorne continue to be popular. Some were antithetical to the canon: many critics represented in this volume have published books on popular culture. As a measure of representative selection now, exactly as many critics in this volume write about Susan B. Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World* as write about Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

The volume also considers historical, political, and cultural contexts in detail. To study the literature and culture of the early United States must involve at once celebration and shame. The national government celebrated as democratic endorsed what we now see as horrifying practices. These practices included most obviously slavery, but also the abuse and murder of immigrants whose beliefs differed from the norm (such as Irish Catholics), the exploitation of women and children, and the forcible removal of populations whose bodies and concepts of land use stood in the way of an evolving policy of Manifest Destiny. The most famous target of such measures was the Cherokee people, but just as destructively murderous policies were enacted against other Native American tribes and resistant Mexicans. To find in the literature of resistance to such removals qualities of esthetic value to study and even to celebrate may seem distasteful in the face of the historical horrors such literature annotates. Yet the dynamic interchange between historical context and the beauty of an engaged written response can also bear witness to the value of current critical approaches.

In this collection, critics from many backgrounds and diverse regions of the Anglo-European world consider what concepts of value emerge from such interchange. The preparation of an index to track which authors emerge from their vision presents a significant challenge to understanding what it means to make claims on behalf of American fiction before 1865. There seems to be a wonderful persistence of interest in Herman Melville, whose *Moby-Dick* has served for a long while as an avatar of American culture. Here Melville’s ambiguous account of the slave trade, “Benito Cereno,” attracts more critics. A vivid resurgence of interest in authors who absorbed nineteenth-century audiences, notably Harriet Beecher Stowe, results in an extraordinary number of citations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. More surprising, perhaps, is the
attention given to the challenging author Charles Brockden Brown, who shows up in several essays as a key author for, variously, accounts of race, gender, sexuality, class, immigration, legal questions, and environmental anxieties.

Over the course of compiling this volume the works of Charles Brockden Brown and Harriet Beecher Stowe have come to stand out as compass points around which a study of American literature to 1865 can be oriented. Indeed, as Ed White and Michael Drexler have argued in their contribution on literary history, Brown’s work and its historical reception can be used as a barometer of the state of the field in general. Little appreciated in the years following his death, Brown enjoyed a popular resurgence in the late twentieth century largely owing to Leslie Fiedler’s identification of his works as seminal texts of the American incestuous gothic (see chapter 7 by Rohy). Moreover, through their extraordinary allegorical diversity, Brown’s novels provide us with a detailed sense of the anxieties plaguing the founders of the fledgling American republic. Such concerns include the frailty of human reason, the threat of the polluting other, whether racial, ethnic, or propertyless, and an anxiety regarding the often violent westward expansion into Indian territory.

For example, Brown’s gothic family saga *Wieland* appears here as an allegory of a nation haunted by the potential volatility of democracy. Marianne Noble argues that in this work Brown explores the corruptibility of human reason and the threat to the fundamental democratic ideal of government by the people. Noble sets the stage for Stephanie Browner’s discussion of *Arthur Mervyn*, in which she suggests that Brown’s depiction of the plague that hit Philadelphia in the 1790s may be read as a medical allegory of national disease and disorder. As Dana Luciano notes, the culpability for this disease and disorder was laid at the door of the ethnically other: the Irish Clithero, the enigmatic Carwin; Robert Levine and Philip Gould extend such identifications of the other to include the racial other, whether African or Native American, and the propertyless, rootless other. In contrast to the certain lack of sympathy for the Native American implied by Levine’s reading stands Timothy Sweet’s piece on “New Landscapes,” in which he argues that the bloody *Edgar Huntly* is a satirical take on Benjamin Rush’s account of (and endorsement of) westward settlement. Sweet’s essay, then, would seem to show Brown in a more liberal light than do the other contributors, a depiction that is supported by Naomi Morgenstern’s piece on Brown’s rendering of marriage and contract at the end of the eighteenth century.

Above all, we mean for this volume to serve as an invitation. That invitation most explicitly encourages readers to find in the words of deeply engaged critics a place to engage with fascinating authors. These authors can provide windows on new worlds as well as retelling stories that might have seemed familiar. And as they tell these stories they form the language, the manners, the politics, and the culture of the strange and familiar early republic, the formative world of the early United States.
PART I
Historical and Cultural Contexts
National Narrative and the Problem of American Nationhood

J. Gerald Kennedy

In circumstances singular in the history of modern nationalism, the American colonies of the Atlantic seaboard achieved political sovereignty decades before they approached national solidarity. Most subsequent national revolutions in Europe involved the overthrow of dynastic aristocracies by common people already unified by history and tradition. The incongruous beginnings of the United States, however, complicated and indeed obstructed the development of national identity. Geographically far-flung and demographically as well as religiously diverse, the states were “united” (as Jefferson asserted) mainly by their opposition to royal tyranny, and after the British surrender at Yorktown the inherently disunited states confronted a myriad of difficulties on the level of practical governance that long occluded the problem of nation-building. Jefferson had in a sense invented an American nation in the Declaration’s sweeping first sentence, which invokes “the laws of nature and of nature’s God” to justify the separation of “one people” from another (Jefferson 1984: 19). Yet “the people” rhetorically reified by the pronoun “we” were hardly “one”; the putative nation that transcended the individual states existed nowhere except in Jefferson’s eloquent fiction of self-creation. The former colonies could be organized constitutionally into a republic taking its place “among the powers of the earth,” but the United States were not a nation in 1776 or in 1787 or even in 1800.

Unlike France, Greece, Germany, or Italy – all of which underwent national revolutions in the wake of the American Revolution – the several states lacked a language uniquely their own, a shared legendary past, or a binding traditional culture. About their want of a metropolitan center James Fenimore Cooper remarked in 1837: “It is not easy for any but close observers, to estimate the influence of such places as London or Paris. They contribute, essentially, to national identity, and national tone, and national policy; in short, to nationality – a merit in which we are almost entirely wanting” (Cooper 1982: 264).
Unlike the emerging nations of Latin America that likewise overcame colonial origins, the United States possessed no dominant religion and its European population was decidedly less homogenous, composed (as Crévecoeur observed) of a “promiscuous breed” of “English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes” (Crévecoeur 1981: 68). In 1790, 40 percent of the white population was non-English, and within a few decades arriving Irish immigrants faced nativist hostility. Spread across disparate states stretching 1,500 miles from north to south and often 300 miles inland, the populace additionally included vast numbers of non-citizens – the folk dismissively termed “merciless Indian savages” in the Declaration, as well as many thousands of black slaves whose very presence could not be acknowledged in that document’s final draft. In sum, Jefferson’s imagined nation comprised only a portion of the domestic population. Eleven years later, the Constitution’s opening phrase (“We, the people of the United States”) again begged the question: Who belonged to this problematic “people” aspiring to nationhood?

The issue of national belonging presumed a more basic question, however: the one later posed by Ernest Renan in his lecture “What is a Nation?” Demonstrating by examples from Europe and the Middle East that neither race, language, religion, nor geography – alone or in combination – sufficed to explain the kinship inherent in national belonging, Renan suggested that the nation is ultimately “a spiritual principle” drawn from “a rich legacy of memories” and manifesting itself in a “present-day consent, the desire to live together” (Renan 1990: 19) Yet the assent to communal life, to what Benedict Anderson has called the “imagined community” of the nation, depends not only upon memory but also, as Renan concluded, upon its suppression:

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality. (Renan 1990: 11)

Individuals live within national communities precisely because “they have forgotten many things” (Renan 1990: 11) that constitute sources of potential resentment and division. Yet the imperative to reconstruct a national past, to venerate what Anthony D. Smith calls “the myths and memories of the nation” (Smith 1999: 104), ensures that remembering and forgetting will always be locked in a reciprocity fraught with cultural danger and charged by the politics of belonging. And so the nation proves ultimately to be a provisional collectivity, a “daily plebiscite” in Renan’s formulation (1990: 19), a virtual community differently conceived by different internal groups, its operative sense of connection depending on a precarious historical consensus secured by forgetfulness, on an official story always threatened by indignant recollection.
Renan’s claim that nations arise from “brutality” possesses obvious implications for the singular formation of the American nation – the colonists’ wresting of land from a Native population, their subjugation of African Americans, and their simultaneous, contradictory appeal in the Declaration to universal principles of liberty and equality as well as to an exclusionary vision of citizenship. The ethnic heterogeneity, geographical dispersion, religious diversity, and systematic racial oppression (in slavery and Indian removal) that defined the young republic also deeply complicated the forgetting crucial to national unity. Those who produced the images, emblems, songs, and stories of American nationhood found themselves obliged not only to rewrite the past, effacing all that was shameful, but also to ignore or dismiss continuing indignities within the would-be nation. Others, marginalized by national mythology, refused to forget past injustices, instead stirring memory and conscience.

Arguably, nation-building – the multiform, self-conscious construction of ideas and images of nationhood – did not become a general project until the formation of an American mass culture around 1820. And by then the social factors that belied the notion of “one people” made it anything but a unified undertaking. Correcting the view that American literary nationalism was mostly a reaction to British condescension, Robert S. Levine has examined sectional tensions over slavery exposed by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, and he underscores “the crucial role of internal conflict in the formation of the new nation’s literatures” (Levine 1998: 225). Regional attachments and varying moral convictions disposed mainstream writers to different degrees of historical candor. Contested from the outset, the vast effort to articulate the identity of an American nation engaged individuals of all regions, classes, and positions. For several decades it absorbed the first generation of native-born professional writers, many of whom labored to create a national literature in the absence of a perceptible nation. The campaign also generated principled opposition: among others, Poe decried the “misapplied patriotism” that cajoled readers into “liking a stupid book the better, because, sure enough, its stupidity is American” (Poe 1984: 506). Literary nationalism likewise inspired counter-narratives by Native American and African American memoirists, insistent upon claiming a place in the nation or challenging the official, self-justifying narratives of the dominant culture.

Nation-building, or what Eric Hobsbawm has wryly called “the invention of tradition,” encompassed an array of cultural activities. It encouraged the formation of an education system to inculcate an American ideology; the creation of ceremonies and celebrations to glorify national history; and the erection of monuments to commemorate a heroic past. It hastened the adoption of “America” as the common name of the nation after the popular and poetic “Columbia” had been claimed by a South American nation in 1819. It inspired the compilation of Noah Webster’s dictionary of American English (1828) and generated early biographies by Mason Locke Weems, John Marshall, and Jared Sparks that apotheosized George Washington as the nation’s savior. It promoted the study of American geography, history, science (native flora and fauna), and archeology. It determined the iconography of the Capitol rotunda in the 1820s and motivated the composition of songs such as Frances Scott
Key’s “Defence of Fort McHenry” (1814) and Samuel Francis Smith’s national hymn, “America” (1831), defiantly set to the tune of “God Save the King” while extolling the “pilgrims’ pride” in a “sweet land of liberty.” Within the literary sphere, nation-building also fostered the creation of poems, tales, memoirs, and novels that collectively contributed to an overarching national narrative, whose loosely connected elements made up a popular fable representing the struggle for land and freedom by motley Euro-American settlers, even as it obscured their oppression of non-European peoples and masked rifts along lines of region, religion, and ethnicity.

Launched after the War of 1812 by such organs as The North American Review in Boston, the call for literary nationalism acknowledged the weight of British cultural authority and the relative immaturity of American culture, but insisted on the worth of native subjects and the imperative to convert them into distinctive works of literature. In an 1820 essay on “National Literature” James Kirke Paulding remarked:

> It has been often observed by such as have attempted to account for the scarcity of romantic fiction among our native writers, that the history of the country affords few materials for such works, and offers little in its traditionary lore to warm the heart or elevate the imagination . . ., though it seems to be without the shadow of a foundation. (Paulding 1976: 132)

By then, unfortunately, American cultural achievement had become a matter of jest; British reviewer Sydney Smith provoked a furor when he asked, “In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?” He concluded a series of derisive questions by demanding, “under which of the old tyrannical governments of Europe is every sixth man a Slave, whom his fellow creatures may buy and sell and torture?” (Smith 1976: 157). To assuage self-doubt and proclaim the distinctiveness of their own culture, Euro-Americans turned to literature and the arts in the 1820s to affirm a civic faith in liberty, equality, and opportunity. They underscored the nation’s difference from Europe by centering their culture not in metropolitan capitals but rather in relation to the natural wilderness; America was (as Perry Miller observed) “nature’s nation.” Yet efforts by American novelists to construct stories of national identity often exposed an insistence upon racial superiority as a “chosen people” of Anglo-Saxon origin, especially in stories of early struggle with Indian tribes. A closer examination of a few such works will illustrate the unresolved contradictions that beset other versions of the American national narrative.

Irving’s The Sketch-book (1819–20; see Irving 1983) offers a prologue. Conceived to reaffirm Anglo-American kinship, the volume flatters British readers with appreciative views of English scenes as it incorporates a handful of pieces suggesting the worth of American materials. Two well-known humorous tales, “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” project the rise of a Euro-American nation from the storied Hudson valley landscape associated with Irving’s Diedrich Knickerbocker. In contrast, however, the Indian sketches “Traits of Indian Character” and “Philip of Pokanoket”
raise unsettling questions about the fundamental nature of that nation. Susan Scheckel has observed that, for white Americans of the early nineteenth century, “Indians provided a crucial site of reflection on national identity” (Scheckel 1998: 12), and though Irving does not explicitly ponder American nationhood, the subject haunts his meditations on Indian life. He inserts these sketches (reprinted from the *Analectic Magazine*) into a volume that, in an act of unconscious exclusion, celebrates England as “the land of our forefathers” (Irving 1983: 791), and Irving’s own rhetoric inadvertently exposes his racial bias. Although he insists in “Traits” that “the unfortunate aborigines of America” have been “doubly wronged” by white settlers who have called Native people “savage and pagan” (p. 1002) in order to demonize and dispossess them, Irving himself cannot refrain from references to the “savages.” Noting that in *The Sketch-book* the Indian pieces follow a description of “Stratford-on-Avon,” William L. Hedges has suggested that Irving intended them “to do in some way for his own country what he felt Shakespeare had done for his” (Hedges 1965: 114), to invest the national past with memorable imaginative appeal. But if so, Irving adopted a peculiar strategy: he represents King Philip, or Metacomet, as a proto-national hero, “a patriot attached to his native soil” (Irving 1983: 1028), and Native Americans generally as both courageous and aggrieved, thus implicitly rebuking English and American readers, whose common ancestors perpetrated unspeakable injustices. Insofar as Irving evokes his country’s past, he outlines a narrative of persecution too scandalous to be written. He concludes “Traits” by suggesting that should the American poet

venture upon the dark story of their wrongs and wretchedness; should he tell how they were invaded, corrupted, despoiled; driven from their native abodes and the sepulchres of their fathers; hunted like wild beasts about the earth; and sent down with violence and butchery to the grave; posterity will either turn with horror and incredulity from the tale, or blush with indignation at the inhumanity of their forefathers. (Irving 1983: 1012)

Here Irving identifies the ethical dilemma between shameful remembrance and stubborn denial faced by Euro-American writers of his generation. Compared to his genial sketches of English life, the Indian memorials thus mark a puzzling gesture. If Irving meant to appease nationalists at home and to show British readers the rich material available to American writers, he simultaneously raised troubling questions about the emerging nation and its patently disunited people.

In the decades that followed, a plethora of writers nevertheless took up the challenge of producing tales and novels to articulate a larger narrative that would explain the nation to itself and the world. Homi K. Bhabha insists that the “strange forgetting” observed by Renan “constitutes the beginning of the nation’s narrative” (Bhabha 1990: 310); if so, the Indian stories of this generation often revealed symptoms of occupational amnesia. The conscientious Hawthorne could publish “Roger Malvin’s Burial” (1832), for example, only by “casting certain circumstances
judicially into the shade” (Hawthorne 1982: 88), suppressing the bloody details of a preceding militia raid on a local tribe. Cooper, Catharine M. Sedgwick, and Lydia M. Child were among the earliest to produce Indian novels conceived as national stories.

Cooper was the first to embrace fully the challenge of national narrative, and his novels of frontier struggle, beginning with The Pioneers (1823), adapted the historical romance popularized by Sir Walter Scott to the vast, complex subject of frontier settlement – the relentless incursion of Euro-Americans into a wilderness inhabited by Native tribes. Inevitably Cooper told the story from the perspective of the dominant culture, yet he decried what was euphemistically called the “disappearance” of the Indian, and his backwoods hero Natty Bumppo (nicknamed Hawk-Eye or Leatherstocking) preferred the company of Chingachgook, his Indian companion, to life in the settlements. As in The Pioneers when he denounces the wanton slaughter of passenger pigeons, Natty repeatedly voices Cooper’s scorn for the ravages of so-called “civilization.” The scout emerged from a minor role in that novel to become the central figure in four subsequent Leatherstocking novels that display his sagacity and self-reliance as they transform him into a distinctive national hero. From The Last of the Mohicans (1826) and The Prairie (1827) to The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deerslayer (1841), Cooper portrayed different historical phases in the westward advance of Euro-American settlers, capturing as well particular epochs in their hostilities with Native Americans. Revealingly, his heroic frontier scout suffers from both indignation at the decimation of Native tribes and fits of racial pride in which he rails against Indian savagery while boasting of his Anglo-Saxon bloodlines. From such unrecognized contradictions the narrative of the nation began to emerge.

Motivated by Cooper’s example, Child launched her literary career with the 1824 novel Hobomok. Reared in Massachusetts, where Daniel Webster and others were extolling the Puritans not simply as New England’s founders but also as the fathers of the nation, Child felt obliged to honor their “persevering fortitude” (Child 1986: 6) in a historical narrative that nevertheless exposed, in the person of Mr. Conant, the patriarchal harshness of their theology. Deriving her plotline from Yannoyden, a narrative poem about King Philip’s war, she tells the story of Mary Conant, a free-thinking Puritan daughter who becomes an outcast, marrying an Indian named Hobomok after Charles Brown, her banished Anglican lover, has been reportedly lost at sea. Child casts Hobomok as a “good” Indian who warns the Puritans of impending attacks by local tribes; as Carolyn L. Karcher explains, the author “had not yet begun to contest the Puritan chroniclers’ version of the wars that decimated the Indians, as she would five years later in a book aimed at arousing opposition to the U.S. government’s ‘crooked and narrow-minded policy’ toward Indians: The First Settlers of New-England (1829)” (Karcher 1994: 22).

The unexpected reappearance of Brown, however, produces a turn reflective of the buried racial politics of literary nationalism. Deferring to Brown’s prior claim on Mary’s heart, Hobomok privately arranges an Indian divorce and abandons his wife (and their infant son) to disappear into the wilderness, leaving Brown and Mary free to wed. As critics have noted, Hobomok thus personifies the vanishing American, and