

## FOREWORD

“If there be need of a new Journal, that need is its introduction: it wants no preface. It proceeds at once to its own ends, which it well knows, and answers now for the first time. That consummated fitness is a triumphant apology.” Thus wrote Emerson in his journal in 1840, a few months before the appearance of *The Dial*.

The editors of *American Literature* make no apology for launching this new quarterly. The need for such a publication has for some time been evident to all serious students of our literature. In the century and more that has elapsed since Sydney Smith asked, “Who reads an American book?” our authors have produced a body of writing which, although it does not rival the great literatures of the Old World in artistic value, has an increasing importance. Until recent years our scholars were slow to study the national letters or their relation to European literatures and to American life and thought. American literature has been so continually overpraised in certain quarters and so neglected in others that we may well say of it—as Schopenhauer said of life—that it needs neither to be wept over nor to be laughed at but to be understood. Within the last few years American scholars have awakened to the fact that our literary history supplies a rich and comparatively unworked field. For those who wish to discuss the work of living authors, there are many periodicals available; but *American Literature* is the only scholarly journal devoted solely to research in the field as a whole. *American Literature* has been founded to fill a distinct need. Let us hope we may say of it—as Emerson said of *The Dial*—“It speaks to a public of its own, a newborn class long already waiting. They, least of all, need from it any letters of recommendation.”

JAY B. HUBBELL.

Reprinted from *American Literature* 1 (March 1929).

**Houston A.  
Baker Jr.  
and  
Priscilla  
Wald**

Anniversaries and “Whispering Ambitions”:  
*American Literature* at 75

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now  
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors  
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,  
Guides us by vanities. Think now

—T. S. Eliot, “Gerontion”

**A**nniversaries are ambivalent occasions. They usually offer documented cause for celebration. However, they also call attention to time’s passage, finding us older and not necessarily a great deal more adept at discovering our critical blind spots, trespasses, and omissions than those who have gone before us. If there is one thing we have learned in the course of our shared time editing *American Literature*, it is that time is not, *au fond*, progressive. Things change. But they do not always change for the best. More distressing yet, time can simply stand still, finding us ironically sounding real and vigorous trumpets for only imaginary gains. Fields of endeavor can sometimes claim remarkable advances based on incomplete data and but marginal alterations in their canons of attention. While we want to exercise caution in our claims for *American Literature* at seventy-five, we are still patently aware that we edit a journal as diversified in its offerings and as open to developing currents of historical and critical scholarship as any journal in the academy. *American Literature* offers us a scholarly project and challenge that yields enormous intellectual pleasure and critical satisfaction on a daily basis. Still, we know ourselves as historical actors, and we realize at this anniversary moment what stunning blind spots have marked our past and how much those

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failed apprehensions have cost us and our friends in time, energy, and psychological quietude.

If we do not remember and summon to view the past, we know from Santayana the consequences. Perhaps, then, one might say that uncritical celebration consists of too many trumpets and not enough stories. Stories from our own past may set *American Literature* and this seventy-fifth anniversary issue in a useful perspective.

One story commences on a bright day in the western United States on which Houston (hereafter referred to as "I" for narrative felicity) was visiting a friend at his academic home institution. After an absolutely splendid run at sunrise, a brief tour of the territory, and a sumptuously long breakfast, my friend went to pick up his mail and returned to the house. The morning delivery included a large brown envelope. He carefully opened it and pulled out the enclosed pages. I watched his face blanch. He handed the entire package to me and left the room. The contents included a nasty letter of rejection for an essay on a white Southern writer that my friend had submitted to *American Literature*.

The time frame was the mid-seventies. I had read a draft of the essay and thought its prose was impeccable and its insights keen. In my view it was indisputably careful and original work. However, the rejection letter labeled it "tendentious" in its insistence that "race" and "racialism" were of paramount importance to any just evaluation and enlargement of critical perspectives on the white author in question.

My normally imperturbable and nondemonstrative friend said when he returned to the room: "I now understand my 'place' in this profession. I am black and so the only authors I am supposed to touch are, obviously, black ones. I get it. I will never write on a white author again! I know my place." It was an ineffably sad morning. He had spent so much time in the very best institutions securing magnificently weighty degrees, and he was employed at a prestigious institution. Yet like W. E. B. DuBois's John of *The Souls of Black Folk*, he had been told he was unequivocally "out of place" in the world he had sought scholastically to make "home."

The second story occurred a few years later, when I had occasion to visit Duke University to offer comments for a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar presented, I think, by the then editors of *American Literature*. I accepted the invitation because I needed the money; I also needed the recognition on my annual activity report that would come from jotting down the well-known and well-respected

scholars’ names and the fact that I had traveled among them. Arriving in Durham, North Carolina, on a disastrously humid July Sunday afternoon, I looked at the desolate airport surrounds and wanted immediately to climb back into the airplane and go . . . well, anywhere. But I did not desert. I soldiered up and took a battered taxi to the hotel where I was to stay, thinking: “I will have a drink, eat dinner at the hotel, go to bed early, and do what I have been invited to do in the morning. Then, go gladly home to Philadelphia.” But there was no dinner at the hotel, and the clerk was not a pleasant man.

Fortunately, I had brought along the telephone number of a friend, the thunderously talented African American poet Lance Jeffers, a local resident and professor. Lance came and took me away. He offered cold beer, good talk, wonderful hospitality at his home, and brotherly encouragement.

I did not encounter my Duke hosts until the next day when I found my own way to the splendors of the university’s West Campus, designed by the African American architect Julian Abele. I think the remarks I made for the seminar were fine. But it was clear to me that while I was being given that peculiarly enigmatic and indulgent white Southern male smile, my hosts were as eager as I to have me on my early-afternoon plane back to Philadelphia. Later, I did not worry about the ratios of “success” I had achieved. I was just much relieved to be out of the Southern provinces of *American Literature* and back up North.

It has been a long thirty years from the combined stories of my first acquaintances with *American Literature* and Duke University. Much has changed. My friend who was so desolate at his first rejection has turned splendid critical and scholarly attention to white American authors. And lo and behold, I, who have written such a great deal about African American authors, am the editor of *American Literature*. Much has changed. To what do we, the present editors, attribute this remarkable shift? Cathy Davidson is our answer.

With her arrival in 1990, Cathy gave the journal the huge “barbaric yawp” of wakefulness and new energy that transformed the entire enterprise from a sleepy excellence to an active consciousness of “worlds on worlds rolling ever” beyond its, yes, race-and-gender-fixed moorings.

Scholarly projects as expansive and venerable as *American Literature*—no matter what bountiful infusions of fresh air they receive from

an editor such as Cathy Davidson—always have a residue of material, ideological, bureaucratic, administrative, and scholarly work to be done at the moment of the next editorial succession. Post-Cathy, the journal had to realign itself to accommodate the election and reality of its first African American editor in 1999. It took an adjustment to move from scintillating white womanist competence to black male presence and modes of interaction and authority. But our staff is magnificent and loyal, kind, generous, and as brilliant as any editors could wish. Frances Kerr and Kelly Jarrett are at the very heart of *American Literature* at the seventy-fifth anniversary moment. Besides bringing doctorates, of literature and religion, respectively, to the enterprise each day, they represent fields of vision for a new America that, frankly, is nowhere dreamed of in the philosophies of bygone editors of the journal. (O how we hope this is not repeated word for word in description of our editorship when *American Literature* reaches 100!)

It was our editorial agreement that this anniversary issue would include a journey back over *American Literature's* past contours to the point of its founding in 1929. The savvy founder, Jay B. Hubbell of Duke University, probably did not foresee the collapse of the market that would prompt the Great Depression in the United States a scant six months after publication of the first issue of *American Literature*, but he did imagine, and help to nourish, the growth of an academic field. He knew that he was part of a movement, and his role in the early years of the American Literature Group (ALG) of the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the hard work he put into getting the journal founded and housed at Duke suggest devotion to a cause. But his foreword to the first issue of AL is short to the point of sparse and distinctly understated. “In the century and more that has elapsed since Sydney Smith asked in 1820, ‘Who reads an American book?’” Hubbell observes, “our authors have produced a body of writing which, although it does not rival the great literatures of the Old World in artistic value, has an increasing importance” (2). That importance, for the earliest members of the ALG, which selected Duke as the institution that would house the new journal and Hubbell as the first chairman of its board of editors, had everything to do with U.S. nationalism, although within those terms, the politics of the field were varied. And as the nation struggled to rebuild a crumbling infrastructure, the architects of this new field argued for the reevaluation of its literary achievement.

The idea of an American literature is at least as old as the nation. The Constitution was barely signed when Noah Webster issued his call for an “America . . . as independent in *literature* as she is in *politics*, as famous for *arts* as for *arms*.”<sup>1</sup> Webster and others understood how important an identifiable American culture would be to the double task of unifying a diverse group of people into a nation and of distinguishing it from the colonial power from which it had derived. Throughout the nineteenth century, literary nationalists declared the nation an ongoing project, as they founded journals and published anthologies designed to demonstrate the existence and power of a national culture. But if the strategies were similar, the visions themselves varied widely.

American literature classes gradually began to appear in universities in the last decades of the nineteenth century, although papers in the field were rarely included in the conferences of the newly formed MLA. Turn of the century urbanization and immigration gave rise to an anxious nationalism, which was infused by the legacy of patriotism left by the First World War; *Americanism* and *Americanization* became bywords of education movements that rapidly made U.S. history and literature central to primary and secondary curricula. In 1920, professors interested in American literature advocated for professional recognition, and in the following year the ALG found a place in the MLA, although it would not achieve the status of a Section until 1966 (the only Sections at the time were German, English, and Romance Languages). The only thing that unified the earliest agitators for the field was the fact that it should exist, that there was a body of material worthy of study. About how it should be studied, and even about why, there was no consensus. *American Literature* would not resolve the early conflicts, but by rehearsing them publicly, the journal would participate centrally in establishing the field, much to the chagrin of many students of English literature at the time, as a lasting area of study.

The first issue of the journal is a fascinating document; in it rests the story of the ambitions of a group of scholars determined not only to found a field but, in the process, to change the terms of their profession. The journey along the “cunning passages” and “contrived corridors” of seventy-five years is illuminating and humbling, and we take it knowing that we have not reached conclusion in the editorial office of the journal that they founded. It is hard, we find, to know whether

to be more astonished by the differences, the measure of how far we have come, or the similarities that mark how short the journey actually has been.

Sydney Smith's presence in the first issue, in Hubbell's prefatory remarks and then as the subject of the first essay, "The Verdict of Sydney Smith," written by Swarthmore professor and ALG insider Robert E. Spiller, was perhaps more companionate than antagonistic, as Smith had been the founding editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. Spiller puts Smith's infamous question, "Who reads an American book?" in context, insisting on Smith's great respect for the new nation across the Atlantic. "[H]e was impressed by the value of the principles underlying the American state," writes Spiller, "and he was prompted to sympathize with his authors in their praise of the dignified simplicity of the 'Ex-Kings,' Adams and Jefferson." But Smith had insisted that "the Americans," though "a brave, industrious, and acute people," had in those first decades "given no indications of genius, and made no approaches to the heroic, either in their morality or character." With that pronouncement, Smith spoke for most professors of English in the contemporary United States.<sup>2</sup> In 1929, it remained unclear to Hubbell and Spiller's colleagues, and perhaps even to Hubbell and Spiller, that Smith's assessment in 1820 was then, or might still in 1929 be, entirely incorrect. The first professors of American literature knew that they still had to prove the literary worth of the objects they had chosen to study, but that was not their main objective.

Hubbell makes no great claim in his foreword for the aesthetic quality of the literature in the field he was working so hard to launch. He notes only that its study has "an increasing importance." He does not even say why. The need for the journal he deems "evident to all serious students of our literature"—so evident, it seems, that justification would only be redundant. The self-evidence of the field recalls another famous declaration of self-evidence. Adopting the strategy of foundation, Hubbell pronounces a battle fought and won and offers a project, or projects—both *American Literature* and American literature—that would either justify their existence or not, just as the nation had had to do at its inception.

For the founders of the journal, American literature was more than a scholarly project. It was an approach to literature that represented nothing less than a methodological challenge to the discipline. While the essays of the first issue represented a broad range of topics, from

Sydney Smith and Ralph Waldo Emerson to the American manifestations of the allegorical John Bull, it was in the other regular features—including “Notes and Queries,” a list of research in the field, and a book review section—that the editors subtly but firmly declared their professional independence from philological criticism and scholarly irrelevance. At the head of “Notes and Queries,” they spelled out their editorial policy: they were looking for essays that could “bring to light new materials or new facts, which might assist in the critical interpretation of an author or in a fuller understanding of some aspect of our cultural history. Only less important are articles which, though based on old facts, present a new interpretation of some work or movement, made convincing by sound reasoning and the citation of adequate evidence” (75). Their priority, in other words, was literary history, with literary criticism a somewhat “less important” concern (although both made it into the subtitle, *A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*). The politics surrounding this first issue make clear both how important and how controversial the literary historical mandate of American literature would be.

Among the most outspoken proponents of the literary historical approach was Hubbell’s colleague at the neighboring University of North Carolina, Norman Foerster, who had been critical of the influential *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1917–21), to which he had contributed, for its lack of an overall theory of American literature. An active member of the ALG, Foerster (whom Hubbell characterized in a letter to Duke President William P. Few as “more interested in graduate than undergraduate teaching”) worked tirelessly to make the emerging field visible, but his outspokenness and his prominent position among the New Humanists troubled some of his colleagues even within the field.<sup>3</sup> When Hubbell was competing for the opportunity to house the new journal at Duke, he learned from an associate that some members opposed his proposal because, as Kermit Vanderbilt puts it, “[I]f the journal went to Duke, Hubbell would have on his hands a Rasputin as assistant next door at North Carolina. . . .”<sup>4</sup> Foerster came on board as an advisory editor rather than, as Hubbell had at one time hoped, a co-editor, but Hubbell signaled Foerster’s importance to the journal and to the field when he inaugurated the review section with a review of Foerster’s edited collection, *The Reinterpretation of American Literature* (1928), penned by prominent Yale professor Henry Seidel Canby.



Emerging from a series of discussions sponsored by the ALG, and fostered mainly by Hubbell and Foerster, the volume offered directions for the field, filling a gap that Hubbell and Foerster perceived in the esteemed *Cambridge History*. Foerster's *Reinterpretation* does more than simply register "a profounder interest in American literature," as he argues in his introduction; it also bears witness to "a sense of the need of self-knowledge" prompted by "our increasing awareness of our world supremacy in material force. . . ." Even in Europe, "the feeling is growing that the power of America renders it perilous to remain in the dark as to what she really is."<sup>5</sup> A sense of social and political responsibility, then, motivates the reinterpretation of American literature, which is based on the conviction that the study of American books can offer insight into American culture (including, Foerster notes, "the myths that remain undisputed" ["I," viii]). Calling American culture "derivative" and abjuring its provincialism, Foerster implores his readers to recognize that "the study of American literature is essentially a study of comparative literature, a study in the international history of ideas and their literary expression" ("I," ix). Students of American literature should strive to understand what makes it distinctive, what it shares with European literature, and what local conditions shape it. Contributors to *The Reinterpretation of American Literature* were not interested in defending American artistic genius but in reimagining literary study. The list of contributors, including Hubbell, Foerster, and two of the four members of the journal's Board of Editors, reads as a Who's Who of the ALG. The volume served for many years as a touchstone of the field.

Canby's review, which had appeared in the highbrow *Saturday Review of Literature* (of which Canby was a founding editor) in early March—the same month it appeared, later, in *American Literature*—establishes the importance of Foerster's collection. With wild enthusiasm, Canby compares "its contentions" to "the Ten Commandments, indispensable for literary morals though often disregarded," but he finds it nonetheless in need of some revision.<sup>6</sup> Canby is troubled by the underlying effort of the volume to make literary criticism scientific, to "neglect the intuitive powers of the appreciative mind at the moment when pure science is respectfully assigning to them a place where it is impotent" (R, 83–84). One chapter in particular he calls "distinctly dangerous in its premises": the one in which Harvard historian and author of the celebrated *New Viewpoints in American History*

(1922) A. M. Schlesinger argues for a rapprochement between English professors and their colleagues in history departments (R, 81). Much admired by Foerster, Schlesinger advocates “an understanding of the literary culture of a people—their culture as embodied in print—in all its aspects, but with the main attention always fixed on what is broadly diffused rather than on what is unusual or special.”<sup>7</sup> The consequences of approaching letters “as one of the social sciences,” Schlesinger contends, is that a writer such as William H. McGuffey, author of widely used school readers in the mid-nineteenth century, would necessarily get more space in a literary history of the United States than Emerson, whatever the author’s aesthetic preferences (“AHAL,” 162). Canby is scandalized by Schlesinger’s claim that “until the historian of letters frees himself from the domination of the literary critic, his work is certain to fall short of its highest promise” (“AHAL,” 164). “Literature is not the expression of all the people by all the people for all the people,” Canby protests. “[I]f so, court records and the transcript of a stenographer’s notebook kept on the boardwalk at Atlantic City would be worth all the novels in the period” (R, 81). Proceeding to make the case for literary *criticism* as opposed to literary *history*, Canby exemplifies—as Hubbell launches—a (if not the) formative debate in the field.

And Hubbell was conspicuously launching it. He had helped to orchestrate Canby’s review for the *Saturday Review* and had at the same time solicited it for the first issue of his new journal. Poised at the intersection not only of scholarship and highbrow literary culture but especially of literary criticism and literary history (Foerster had proclaimed, in his introduction, the need for the literary historian to be a critic as well), “American literature” marked a change of academic scene, a challenge to the assumptions of philological criticism.

We do not mean to resurrect Jay Hubbell and Norman Foerster as political progressives or to ascribe a progressive politics to their idea of literary history; their ghosts would never forgive us. But their emphasis on literary history remains a legacy and a haunting dimension of the field. And a glance at a syllabus from Hubbell’s papers for the course “American Literature 1896–1917,” taught in the winter term of 1923, registers an approach that we might associate at least as much with new historicism as new humanism. The first section of the course, entitled “The Glory Period—1896–1903,” starts with the following paragraph:

*Social Backgrounds:* A new imperialism. (1) A jingoistic nationalism arising from the Spanish war, with its aftermath of Philippine annexation. See William Vaughn Moody, *An Ode in a Time of Hesitation*. (2) An exuberant capitalism freed from the fear of populism following the election of 1896. The swift rise of “big business,” with economic centralization, monopolistic expansion and foreign trade and investments. The gospel of prosperity and the “full dinner pail” created enormous dividends with corresponding optimism.<sup>8</sup>

It is perhaps the inevitable irony of institutionalization that the legacy of founders is believed to consist of the letter rather than the spirit of their own work. Those who have sought most to defend the “legacy” of American literature have all too often focused on the *what* rather than the *how*. This course, presumably Hubbell’s, trained students to read literature for its reflection of and engagement with culture and politics, which positions literature as much as a catalyst for political debate as for what it may reveal of artistic genius.

Foerster found the scholar, rather than the author, the one most in need of critical introspection. “Too seldom,” he intones, “is the scholar really aware of the standards he employs, and of the sources whence he derived them.” Foerster enjoins his readers to subject their own critical standards to the same reflection as their evaluations of literary works (“I,” xiv). As we all well know, the practice of such critical reflection is easier said than done, and from its earliest issues, *American Literature* bears witness to the sincerity of the ideal and to the flip side of the editors’ visions, which is to say, their blind spots. They were faithful to their engagement with history but endlessly caught, as who isn’t, in its “cunning passages.”

It would take nearly four decades from the publication of that first issue for the ALG finally to become an acknowledged Section of the MLA—and the same amount of time for students and supportive faculty around the country to stop the daily workings of the university as they demanded a more democratically representative curriculum. Asking not that their classrooms become more political but that the politics intrinsic to all classrooms be more fully in view and more open to debate, activists in the 1960s forced the kind of critical reflection for which Foerster had called. Literature was indeed the stuff of revolution. What we read, how we read, why we read, all became questions that could wait no longer. And we asked them.

Of our teachers, of our books, of ourselves we asked what we had not been told, returning to the past through the traces of the omissions. Neither the Duke English Department nor *American Literature* was at the vanguard of the changes. By the 1960s, in fact, the journal's range of authors seems, if anything, to have narrowed after the earliest years, a mark of the institutionalization of the field. "The Negro" and "the Indian" were topics of investigation in the works of Faulkner or Cooper, but the absence of discussions of literary works by nonwhite authors into the 1970s, and the dearth of such essays for another decade and a half, is striking. The literary world was changing, but the profession was a bit slower to register the changes. Take, for example, the career of Ralph Waldo Ellison, who won a fellowship to the National American Academy of Arts and Letters in Rome for 1955–57, was elected a vice president of both the American P.E.N. (1964) and the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1967), received the Medal of Freedom in 1969, and was named Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres in 1970. Despite this international recognition, the literary achievement of Ellison was not a subject that found its way into the journal during this time. An essay on James Weldon Johnson published in March of 1971 (the forty-third volume of the journal) was the first essay about a literary work by an African American author.<sup>9</sup> With this catalog, we do not intend to cast blame on our predecessors; the journal is a record of a much larger institution, an archive of "passages" and "corridors" that we, too, have walked. Our own stories are a matter of record. By the time Priscilla took her first American literature class in college (with Robert Stepto), Zora Neale Hurston, Sterling Brown, and Abraham Cahan were, like Henry James and Edith Wharton, uncontested authors on an American literature syllabus.

In the sciences, evolution is inevitable. The chance event of a mutation is perpetuated, or not, according to the specificities of reproduction. The recombination that is the nature of reproduction leads to genetic drift. We all know by now the danger of modeling social on scientific change, but to say that evolution in the social world is equally inevitable is not to discount the work of visionaries like the first female editor of *American Literature*. A good editor sees the potential of an essay and helps the author realize it; a great editor, animating an emerging project, becomes the chance event that is necessary to the process of its evolution. Through the force of her vision, Cathy Davidson made *American Literature* the place, to borrow a slogan from the

current American Literature Section, “Where Melville Meets Zitkala-Ša.” The opportunity of this meeting creates in turn a recombination that further develops a changing field. An expanded canon does not mean simply more books in print or on a syllabus. The canon wars were not just about whether or not we should read *Eat a Bowl of Tea*. They were about studying literature and its relation to questions of social justice and democracy. To borrow Foerster’s formulation, they were about critical introspection and a growing awareness of how American literature registered and reproduced a history and a culture. And they were inevitable. It is, again, the particular irony of institutionalization that Cathy Davidson was seen, as she verifies in her contribution to this issue, as a threat rather than a primary actor in the very spirit of *American Literature*’s best innovative moments. The journal’s special issues alone could chronicle the changes, moving us beyond separate spheres, introducing a new Melville and a new South, investigating “unnatural formations.”<sup>10</sup> So many excellent pieces on African American literature came pouring in at the end of the twentieth century that one special issue, “Unsettling Blackness” (June 2000), pretty much compiled itself.

Of course we demur. There are editorial decisions behind the topics and the selection and presentation of essays. But editorial decisions are not made in vacuums or, for that matter, in back rooms. Like all historical actors, editors are both what they eat and subjects of the sovereignties of the era they occupy. More often than not, they register change rather than institute it. So we find ourselves processing essays that speak eloquently of a changed and fascinating American literature. In this anniversary issue, for example, we have essays on Federalist criticism, Melville conceived in terms of disability studies, debtor masculinity in antebellum popular fiction, and author studies from Child to James to Larsen. A review essay on several critical studies of Latin American literature considers the proliferation of hemispheric studies and the expansion of the very definition of *American*. The range is wide. The texts, authors, and objects of study in the journal’s seventy-fifth year represent a signal difference from the content of some former years. Our job is to be as equal as we can to the critical change and challenge this difference presents.

One of the challenges now is to take seriously Foerster’s injunction for critical introspection. Founded amid the stresses of the Great Depression, the journal turns seventy-five in a world that Jay Hubbell

and Norman Foerster would not recognize, but we believe ourselves very much in their tradition when we avow that criticism and introspection are not unpatriotic. Just the opposite: "the power of America renders it perilous to remain in the dark as to what she really is." American literature is changing, and with it, each of its terms. Although in a different register, we continue to ask the questions that motivated the early founders of *American Literature* and American literature. Knowing it is our job to allow the full play of many perspectives, traditions, and innovations in the field, it is humbling to consider what, from the perspective of the one-hundredth anniversary of *American Literature*, our predecessors might point to as our blind spots. So in the spirit of Norman Foerster, we turn the lens of critical introspection not only on *American* and *literature* but also on ourselves, and wonder by what vanities we are guided.

Duke University

#### Notes

- 1 Noah Webster to John Canfield, 6 January 1783, *Letters of Noah Webster*, ed. Harry R. Warfel (New York: Library Publications, 1953), 4.
- 2 Robert E. Spiller, "The Verdict of Sydney Smith," *American Literature* 1 (March 1929): 4.
- 3 Jay B. Hubbell to William P. Few, 8 November 1929, Jay B. Hubbell Papers, Box 6, in Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University. Expounded primarily by Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer Moore, and their students (including Foerster), New Humanism was a response to modernism. It deplored relativism and scientism and advocated ethical and aesthetic standards as guiding principles in both life and art.
- 4 Kermit Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy: The Roots, Growth, and Maturity of a Profession* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 287.
- 5 Norman Foerster, "Introduction," *The Reinterpretation of American Literature: Some Contributions toward the Understanding of Its Historical Development*, ed. Norman Foerster (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928), vii. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as "I."
- 6 Henry Seidel Canby, review of *The Reinterpretation of American Literature*, edited by Norman Foerster, *American Literature* 1 (March 1929): 80; reprinted from *Saturday Review of Literature*, 2 March 1929, 721–22. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as R.
- 7 A. M. Schlesinger, "American History and American Literary History,"

- in *The Reinterpretation*, ed. Foerster, 162. Further references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text as “AHAL.”
- 8 Jay B. Hubbell, Syllabus for English 165: American Literature—1896–1917,” Box 6, Jay B. Hubbell Papers, 1928–1929 (March), in Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.
  - 9 See Robert E. Fleming, “Irony as a Key to Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*,” *American Literature* 43 (March 1971): 83–96.
  - 10 See, among others, the following special issues of *American Literature*: “New Melville” (March 1994); “Unnatural Formations,” ed. Michael Moon (March 1997); “No More Separate Spheres!” ed. Cathy N. Davidson (September 1998); and “Violence, the Body, and ‘the South,’” ed. Houston A. Baker Jr. and Dana D. Nelson (June 2001).