

EDWARD WATTS and DAVID J. CARLSON, eds., *John Neal and Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2012), xxxiv + 319 pp.

In many a review, claiming the importance of the volume under discussion is little more than a rhetorical strategy. In the case of *John Neal and Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture*, it simply reflects the facts. As an experimental writer, contentious critic, unconventional editor, and fearless reformist, John Neal (1793-1876) played a central role in the cultural matrix of the early national period and in the transatlantic negotiation of an emerging literary marketplace. Equally influential as a proponent of literary nationalism, pioneer of American historical fiction, advocate of women's rights, and new type of regionalist, he helped pave the way for a phenomenon later known as the American Renaissance. That an intellectual ranked by Edgar Allan Poe as "among our men of indisputable *genius*,"¹ remembered by Nathaniel Hawthorne as "that wild fellow,"² and praised by Margaret Fuller as "truly a man"³ could ever be written out of literary history would have been unthinkable in his time. As late as 1962, Hans-Joachim Lang was unable to imagine that Neal's place in American literature was bound to become insecure: "It would be an exaggeration to say that John Neal [...] is a neglected author. He was too forceful a personality [...] to be easily forgotten [...]." What Lang still labeled an "exaggeration" must now be called an understatement.⁵ This is evidenced by the fact that the present volume turns out to be the first collection of critical essays ever published⁶ on this key figure of nineteenth-century American culture. Its publication should in particular be of interest

¹ Edgar Allan Poe, "Marginalia" [1849], *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison (1902. New York: AMS P, 1902) 16:152; emphasis in orig.

² Nathaniel Hawthorne, "P.'s Correspondence" [1845], *Mosses from an Old Manse*, The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. William Charvat, Roy Harvey Pearce, and Claude M. Simpson ([Columbus]: Ohio State UP, 1974) 10:378.

³ Fuller Papers (manuscripts), Boston Public Library; qtd. in Bell Gale Chevigny, *The Woman and the Myth: Margaret Fuller's Life and Writings* (Old Westbury: Feminist P, 1976) 234.

⁴ Hans-Joachim Lang, ed., Introduction, "Critical Essays and Stories by John Neal," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 7 (1962): 204. In his optimism, Lang seems to have been influenced by the enormous output (and the works in progress) of Irving T. Richards and Benjamin Lease, scholars who dominated Neal Studies from the early 1930s to the late 1970s: cf. Richards, "The Life and Works of John Neal," 4 vols., Diss. Harvard U, 1932; "Audubon, Joseph R. Mason, and John Neal," *American Literature* 6 (1934): 122-40; "Mary Gove Nichols and John Neal," *New England Quarterly* 7 (1934): 335-55; "John Neal's Gleanings in Irvingiana," *American Literature* 8 (1936): 170-79; "John Neal: A Bibliography," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 7 (1962): 296-319; and "A Note on the Authorship of 'David Whicher,'" *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 7 (1962): 293-96; cf. also Lease, "Yankee Poetics: John Neal's Theory of Poetry and Fiction," *American Literature* 24 (1953): 505-19; "John Neal's Quarrel with the *Westminster Review*," *American Literature* 26 (1954): 86-88; "The Authorship of 'David Whicher': The Case for John Neal," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 12 (1967): 124-36; "Robert Carter, James Russell Lowell and John Neal: A Document," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 13 (1968): 246-48; *That Wild Fellow John Neal and the American Literary Revolution* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972); "John Neal and Edgar Allan Poe," *Poe Studies* 7 (1974): 38-41; as well as Lease and Lang, eds., *The Genius of John Neal: Selections from His Writings* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1978).

⁵ Compared to the 5,496 entries for Melville, the 4,027 entries for Poe, and the 3,981 entries for Hawthorne included in the *MLA International Bibliography* under the heading "Primary Subject Author," the 43 entries for Neal are more than depressing (search date: October 10, 2013).

⁶ Earlier collections contain selections from Neal's work: Windsor Pratt Daggett, ed., *A Down-East Yankee from the District of Maine* (Portland: Huston, 1920); Fred Lewis Pattee, ed., *American Writers: A Series of Papers Contributed to Blackwood's Magazine (1824-1825)*, by John Neal (Durham: Duke UP, 1937); Harold Edward Dickson, ed., *Observations on American Art: Selections from the Writings of John Neal (1793-1876)* (State College: Pennsylvania State UP, [1943]); Hans-Joachim Lang, ed., "Critical Essays and Stories by John Neal," *Jahrbuch für*

to German Americanists, whose scholarly interventions have been instrumental in preventing Neal's oeuvre from sinking into obscurity.⁷



As the editors explain in their acknowledgments, the idea for this collection was formed during the Sixth Biennial Conference of the Society of Early Americanists in Hamilton, Bermuda (March 4-7, 2009). While none of the seventy-two panels were dedicated specifically to Neal,

Amerikastudien 7 (1962): 204-319; and Benjamin Lease and Hans-Joachim Lang, eds., *The Genius of John Neal: Selections from His Writings* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1978).

⁷ See Hans-Joachim Lang, "The Authorship of 'David Whicher,'" *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 7 (1962): 288-93; Lang, ed., "Critical Essays and Stories by John Neal," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 7 (1962): 204-319; Lang, ed., Introduction, "Critical Essays and Stories by John Neal," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 7 (1962): 204-10; Alfred Weber, "Der Autor von 'David Whicher' und das Geheimnis der grünen Brille," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 10 (1965): 106-25; Lang, "Drei Wurzeln der Wahrheit im historischen Roman: John Neals *Rachel Dyer*," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft in der amerikanischen Literatur*, ed. Karl Schubert and Ursula Müller-Richter (Heidelberg: Quelle and Meyer, 1975) 9-32; Benjamin Lease and Hans-Joachim Lang, eds. *The Genius of John Neal: Selections from His Writings* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1978); Lease and Lang, eds., Introduction, Lease and Lang vii-xxiv; Fritz Fleischmann, *A Right View of the Subject: Feminism in the Works of Charles Brockden Brown and John Neal* (Erlangen: Palm and Enke, 1983); Ulrich Halfmann, "Auf der Suche nach der 'Real North American Story': John Neals Kurzgeschichten 'Otter-Bag' und 'David Whicher,'" *Wirklichkeit und Dichtung: Studien zur englischen und amerikanischen Literatur* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1984) 213-26; Dieter Schulz, "Frühe amerikanische Erzählliteratur," *Die amerikanische Literatur bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Helmbrecht Breinig and Ulrich Halfmann (Tübingen: Francke, 1985) 78-99; Fleischmann, "'A Likeness, Once Acknowledged': John Neal and the 'Idiosyncrasies' of Literary History," *Mythos und Aufklärung in der amerikanischen Literatur / Myth and Enlightenment in American Literature. Zu Ehren von / In Honor of Hans-Joachim Lang*, ed. Dieter Meindl and Friedrich W. Horlacher, in collaboration with Martin Christadler (Erlangen: Universitätsbund Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1985) 161-76; Halfmann, "In Search of the 'Real North American Story': John Neal's Short Stories 'Otter-Bag' and 'David Whicher,'" *New England Quarterly* 63 (1990): 429-45; Klaus Lubbers, *Born for the Shade: Stereotypes of the Native American in United States Literature and the Visual Arts, 1776-1894* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994); Heike Hartrath, "Die Salemer Hexenverfolgung in der amerikanischen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts: Eine Romananalyse von John Neals *Rachel Dyer*," *Die Salemer Hexenverfolgungen: Perspektiven – Kontexte – Repräsentationen / The Salem Witchcraft Persecutions: Perspectives – Contexts – Representations*, ed. Winfried Herget (Trier: WVT, 1994) 209-31; Lang, "Washington and/or Byron: Preliminary Remarks on John Neal's *Seventy-Six*," *Democracy and the Arts in the United States*, ed. Alfred Hornung et al. (München: Fink, 1996) 183-93; Werner Reinhart, "Die Provokationen John Neals," *Literarischer Wahn: Studien zum Irrsinnsmotiv in der amerikanischen Erzählliteratur, 1821-1850* (Tübingen: Narr, 1997) 189-209; Hartrath, *Fiktionalisierung der Salemer Hexenverfolgung in amerikanischen Romanen vor 1860* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1998); Jörg Thomas Richter, "Exemplary American: Logan, the Mingo Chief, in Jefferson, Neal, and Doddridge," *Colonial Encounters: Essays in Early American History and Culture*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Grabbe (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003) 152-72; Jörg [Thomas] Richter, *Nationalität als literarisches Verfahren: Der amerikanische Roman (1790-1830)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004); Clemens Spahr, Review of *Nationalität als literarisches Verfahren: Der amerikanische Roman (1790-1830)*, by Jörg Richter (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 52 (2007): 582-84; Reinhart, "Subversives Gelächter als erzählerische Strategie: Vier Beispielanalysen zum US-amerikanischen Humor," *Wie die Welt lacht: Lachkulturen im Vergleich*, ed. Waltraud 'Wara' Wende (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2008) 69-86; Richter, "The Willing Suspension of Etiquette: John Neal's *Brother Jonathan* (1825)," *Civilizing America: Manners and Civility in American Literature and Culture*, ed. Dietmar Schloss (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009) 111-32.

“seven papers discussed his work” (ix). Convinced that these papers were striking proof of the author’s relevance to current research, Edward Watts and David J. Carlson decided to offer a textual platform for further investigation. The contributors the editors finally managed to bring together in this collection make for a productive mix of specialists like Carlson, Elmer, Fleischmann, Orestano, Richter, Watts, and Weyler, whose publications account for almost half of what has been written on Neal in the last three decades,⁸ and scholars like Hayes, Holt, Insko, Merlob, Pethers, and Sivils, who look at Neal’s writings from the angle of more general approaches to early American history, literature, and culture.

The collection comprises thirteen essays and an introductory chapter. The editors’ introduction, “Headlong Enterprise: John Neal and Nineteenth-Century America,” is nothing less than a masterpiece. It affords revealing glimpses at Neal’s uneven career and idiosyncratic character, illustrates why the author gradually disappeared from the radar of American literary historiography, and lists compelling reasons for his current rediscovery. By criticizing his generation of writers for their lack of Americanness and continuing dependence on the aesthetic tastes of the mother country—and thus enabling “Emerson and his associates” to “imagine for themselves a fresh start” (xiii)—Neal ironically contributed to a nationalist narrative that would eventually exclude him from the American Renaissance he had called for all along. By re-interpreting the originality, experimentation, and contrariness of his life and art as emblematic of the tensions and contradictions underlying the social fabric of the early republic and antebellum America, scholars have increasingly begun to see John Neal as “an important touchstone for understanding the culture wars of his age” (xviii).

In “I Must Resemble Nobody”: John Neal, Genre, and the Making of American Literary Nationalism,” the first essay of the volume and one of its best, Matthew Peters (University of Nottingham) highlights the unconventional use of orality, time, and genre in Neal’s early novels—ironic, self-reflexive, and digressive texts, from *Keep Cool* (1817) to *Rachel Dyer* (1828), “whose generic indeterminacy paralleled and complemented an ongoing exploration of the competing forces within American literary nationalism” (3). Taking cues from theoretical constructs such

⁸ See Fritz Fleischmann, *A Right View of the Subject: Feminism in the Works of Charles Brockden Brown and John Neal* (Erlangen: Palm and Enke, 1983); Fleischmann, “‘A Likeness, Once Acknowledged’: John Neal and the ‘Idiosyncrasies’ of Literary History,” *Mythos und Aufklärung in der amerikanischen Literatur / Myth and Enlightenment in American Literature. Zu Ehren von / In Honor of Hans-Joachim Lang*, ed. Dieter Meindl and Friedrich W. Horlacher, in collaboration with Martin Christadler (Erlangen: Universitätsbund Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1985) 161-76; Francesca Orestano, “The Old World and the New in the National Landscapes of John Neal,” *Views of American Landscapes*, ed. Mick Gidley and Robert Lawson-Peebles (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 129-45; Orestano, *Dal neoclassico al classico: John Neal e la coscienza letteraria americana* (Palermo: Compostampa, 1990); Orestano, “John Neal: Gender, Genre and the Literary Canon,” *RSA: Rivista di Studi Anglo-Americani* 11 (1991): 347-59; Orestano, “The Case for John Neal: Gothick Naturalized,” *Gothick Origins and Innovations*, ed. Allan Lloyd Smith and Victor Sage (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) 95-114; Karen A. Weyler, “John Neal,” *The American Renaissance in New England*, Fourth Series, Dictionary of Literary Biography 243, ed. Wesley T. Mott (Detroit: Gale, 2001) 256-64; Jörg Thomas Richter, “Exemplary American: Logan, the Mingo Chief, in Jefferson, Neal, and Doddridge,” *Colonial Encounters: Essays in Early American History and Culture*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Grabbe (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003) 152-72; Richter, *Nationalität als literarisches Verfahren: Der amerikanische Roman (1790-1830)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004); Jonathan Elmer, “Melancholy, Race, and Sovereign Exemption in Early American Fiction,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 40.1-2 (2006/2007): 151-70; David J. Carlson, “‘Another Declaration of Independence’: John Neal’s *Rachel Dyer* and the Assault on Precedent,” *Early American Literature* 42 (2007): 405-34; Elmer, *On Linger-ing and Being Last: Race and Sovereignty in the New World* (New York: Fordham UP, 2008); Richter, “The Willing Suspension of Etiquette: John Neal’s *Brother Jonathan* (1825),” *Civilizing America: Manners and Civility in American Literature and Culture*, ed. Dietmar Schloss (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009) 111-32; and Edward Watts, “Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Strategy,” *American Literary History* 22 (2010): 459-70 [also published in: *Early American Literature* 45 (2010): 447-58].

as Benedict Anderson's "imagined community"⁹ and Wai Chee Dimock's "deep time,"¹⁰ Peters demonstrates that Neal considered "the noisy diversity of the nation as requiring representation at the formal level as well as the thematic level" (29) and that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, "the triumph of a linear historical narrative over more accretive methods [...] was by no means absolute or uncontested" (31).

While Matthew Wynn Sivils (Iowa State University) in "'The Herbage of Death': Haunted Environments in John Neal and James Fenimore Cooper" uses heterotopic concepts, e.g. Yi-Fu Tuan's "middle landscape,"¹¹ to diagnose a focus on "artifacts of injustice buried within the earth" (40) and "a decidedly gothic environmental imagination" (47) in *Logan: A Family History* (1822), *Brother Jonathan* (1825), and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Jeffrey Insko (Oakland University) suggests that "Neal might be interesting, not *despite*, but precisely *because* of his incoherencies" (Chapter three: "Eyewitness to History" 59, emphasis in orig.). A good case in point is *Seventy-Six* (1823), Neal's romance of the Revolution, where "[t]he function of a narrator [...] is [...] not to explain, but simply to present incidents with such vividness of interest that the reader becomes 'an eye-witness'" (64), reflecting the idea that "narrative is not immanent in our experience, but merely a structure that is imposed upon it retrospectively" (64).

In his brilliant reading of *Authorship: A Tale. By a New Englander Over-Sea* (1830), Jörg Thomas Richter (Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin) shows that Neal's little-understood novel is far from being merely a thinly disguised autobiography, sentimental romance, or fictionalized travelogue but a trailblazing self-reflexive work that stages the problematic relation between author, text, and audience.¹² Replete with allusions to contemporary English intellectual life and the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham,¹³ Neal's novel, through the allegorization of its characters (Holmes = the 'author'; Mary = the 'reader/muse'; Edwards = the 'real text') and the conflation of gambling and professional writing, "explores the collapse rather than the juxtaposition of the fact-fiction divide" and questions "the epistemic validity of authorial self-expression" (83).

Maya Merlob's (Tel Aviv University) "Celebrated Rubbish: John Neal and the Commercialization of Early American Romanticism" foregrounds the ways in which Neal's oeuvre textualizes the rise of a market society and reflects his program of literary patriotism. Following Harold C. Martin's argument that Neal's rambling style and excessive verbosity are "entirely intentional,"¹⁴ Merlob's analysis allows us to see the interconnections between the author's satire on the publishing industry and his celebration of "Yankee speech" (105) as an innovative form

⁹ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

¹⁰ See Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006).

¹¹ See Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998) 24-25.

¹² By calling this phenomenon "the anxieties of literary performance" (82), Richter freely quotes formulations contained in the first chapter ("The Anxiety of Performance" [3-22]) of Stephen Railton's *Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991). For his multilayered analysis, Richter was able to draw on both his unpublished master's thesis "John Neals *Authorship*: Verzeifelte Ästhetik" (TU Dresden, 1998) and the published version of his doctoral dissertation (TU Dresden, 2003), *Nationalität als literarisches Verfahren: Der amerikanische Roman (1790-1830)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004).

¹³ The title of Richter's essay, "Notes on Poetic Push-Pin and the Writing of Life in John Neal's *Authorship*," refers to Bentham's provocative remark that "a game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry" (*The Rationale of Reward* [London: Hunt, 1825] 206) and Clifford Geertz's appropriation of Bentham's notion of "deep play" in "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973) 412-53. Richter's conclusion that the intertextual loadedness of novels such as *Authorship* exemplify the need for "a critical edition of Neal's work" (91) could not be more to the point.

¹⁴ Harold C. Martin, "The Colloquial Tradition in the Novel: John Neal," *New England Quarterly* 32 (1959): 455-75; quote on 474.

of authentic writing. By making the “extempore man”¹⁵ “dashing off”¹⁶ texts because he is “paid by the page”¹⁷ the prototype of professional American authorship, Neal turns the ‘flaws’ of his art into a literary trademark and encourages a reappraisal of early American Romanticism as “a commercial enterprise” (110).

In “John Neal, the Rise of the Critick, and the Rise of American Art,” Francesca Orestano (Università degli Studi di Milano) emphasizes the author’s “independence of taste and originality” (130), which, in addition to defining “new aesthetic territory” (125), resulted in critical judgments that, according to Harold Edward Dickson, “have stood the trying test of time.”¹⁸ Jonathan Elmer (Indiana University) uses Neal’s 1824 London encounter with the ‘white Indian’ John Dunn Hunter¹⁹ and the former’s preoccupation with the latter’s staging of himself as a true American²⁰ to offer a psychoanalytic reading of Hunter as Neal’s alter ego, a “double” (152) who has to be demonized in order to suppress parallels in literary adventurism and self-marketing (Chapter seven: “John Neal and John Dunn Hunter”).

David J. Carlson’s (California State University, San Bernardino) “Another Declaration of Independence”²¹: John Neal’s *Rachel Dyer* and the Assault on Precedent,” a notable contribution to the interdisciplinary field of law and literature studies²² and arguably the best essay in the volume, reads Neal’s historical novel as “a thinly veiled commentary on the need [for] [...] a systematic codification movement” (163). Redirecting our attention to “Neal’s embeddedness in a range of transatlantic legal and aesthetic discourses” (174), including Bentham’s attack on the common law tradition à la William Blackstone, Carlson interprets Neal’s propagation of “a more unruly kind of speech” (170) in the subtexts and paratexts of *Rachel Dyer* as effectively calling for “a radical rejection of the authority of the past” (172) and the willingness to embrace “an authentically ‘American’ culture” (173).

The author’s development as a regionalist and his deconstruction of ‘Indian Hater’ narratives are focalized in the next two essays. “Here, There, and Everywhere: The Elusive Regionalism of John Neal” by Kerin Holt (Utah State University) elucidates how Neal’s weekly magazine *The Yankee*, by relying on a dialogical structure and presenting northern New England as a contested space, provided “a literary form that encouraged citizens to read the federal nation in diverse, yet cohesive terms” (194). In “He Could Not Believe that Butchering Red Men Was Serving Our Maker: ‘David Whicher’ and the Indian Hater Tradition,” Edward Watts (Michigan State University) comprehends Neal’s 1832 short story as “challeng[ing] the role of popular fiction in the articulation, perpetuation, and celebration of Indian killing,” a story in which the

¹⁵ See John Neal, “Thinking Aloud; or, Suggestions and Glimpses,” *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 11 (July 1852): 171-75.

¹⁶ Pattee, ed., *American Writers* 159.

¹⁷ John Neal, “Yankee Notions,” No. 4, *The London Magazine* 4 (April 1826): 437-50; quote on 442.

¹⁸ Harold Edward Dickson, ed., Introduction, *Observations on American Art: Selections from the Writings of John Neal (1793-1876)* (State College: Pennsylvania State College, [1943]) xxii.

¹⁹ The publication of Hunter’s *Memoirs of a Captivity Among the Indians of North America* (1823) had caused a sensation on both sides of the Atlantic and enabled its author to associate with famous people such as Thomas Jefferson, Robert Owen, and the Duke of Sussex.

²⁰ See John Neal, “Mr. John Dunn Hunter; the Hero of Hunter’s Captivity Among the Indians, &c.,” *Monthly Magazine* 5 (May-August 1826): 317-43; “The Adventurer,” *The Token* (1831): 189-212; and Neal’s autobiography *Wandering Recollections of a Somewhat Busy Life* (1869). After publishing *Logan* (1822), a novel about mixed-race characters and the complexities of ethnic identity on a ‘new’ continent, meeting an assumed cultural hybrid and possible impostor like Hunter must have been an uncanny experience.

²¹ Carlson’s title phrase refers to Neal’s “Unpublished Preface to the North-American Stories [...],” in which the author demands “another DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, in the great REPUBLIC OF LETTERS” (John Neal, *Rachel Dyer* [1828. Amherst: Prometheus, 1996] xviii) and thus creates “a sustained metaphorical link between legal and literary reform by appealing to a sacred text from the nation’s revolutionary past” (165).

²² For the field’s ‘foundational text,’ see Robert A. Ferguson, *Law and Letters in American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984).

restraint of its protagonist seems to “impl[y] the possibility of an American frontier governed by more civil models of interracial contact and behavior” (213).

Two essays are dedicated to the core of Neal’s social philosophy and reformist program, namely his feminism. Putting his works “in conversation” (228) with British and American writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Catharine Macaulay Graham, and Judith Sargent Murray, Karen A. Weyler (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) in “John Neal and the Early Discourse of American Women’s Rights” traces the author’s emergence as one of the “forefathers” (227) of the American women’s movement, a feminist thinker whose “relentless advocacy was crucial in bringing women’s rights back into the mainstream [...] and recuperating it from its scandal-tainted eighteenth-century origins” (241-42). In “‘A Right Manly Man’ in 1843: John Neal on Women’s Rights and the Problem of Male Feminism,” Fritz Fleischmann (Babson College) continues the conversation by extending it to include Neal’s synergetic relationship with Margaret Fuller and exemplifying the former’s lifelong engagement with issues of gender. Displaying an admirable grasp of Neal’s biography and literary oeuvre, Fleischmann selects 1843 as “a banner year” (248) for public manifestations of the author’s ‘male feminist’ agenda. With the aid of incisive readings of “Idiosyncrasies” and “Ruth Elder” as related tales of masculine hubris and patriarchal insanity, Fleischmann points to “Neal’s increasing doubts about the oppressor’s ability to speak for the oppressed” (253) and the necessity of rethinking a personality that is “notoriously multifaceted and a challenge to categorize” (262).

In the last essay collected in this volume, Kevin J. Hayes (University of Central Oklahoma) examines “How John Neal Wrote His Autobiography.” Encouraged by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and written almost completely from memory after the great Portland fire of 1866 had destroyed most of Neal’s personal papers, *Wandering Recollections of a Somewhat Busy Life* (1869), although warmly reviewed at the time of its publication, “has received virtually no critical discussion” (272). Composed in the same “free-and-easy, rambling style” (272) that characterizes his fiction, Neal’s autobiography is not only an indispensable source on the author’s life and works but, as Hayes argues, a self-reflexive and highly original text exploring “the give-and-take between memory and narrative” (271).



In terms of content, this collection deserves nothing but praise. It contains essays offering thematically varied, methodically innovative, and intellectually stimulating research that meets the highest academic standards. It also conveys new insights into Neal’s amazing range of interests, multiple talents, and incredible productivity. The image of the author that emerges from these excellent contributions is that of an irrepressible figure radiating vibrant energy and enormous vitality. A man who reviewed more than 130 American authors, only to tell his audience that, with very few exceptions, none of them was worth reading²³; a man who, under the guise of his pseudonym ‘Carter Holmes,’ shamelessly, if self-ironically, described himself as “the most original writer, that America has produced”²⁴; and a man who was not afraid of shocking his readers by opening the preface to *Logan: A Family History* (1822) with a hilarious antipreface: “I hate Prefaces. I hate Dedications. Enough for the one to say, that here is an American sto-

²³ See Fred Lewis Pattee, ed., *American Writers: A Series of Papers Contributed to Blackwood’s Magazine (1824-1825)*, by John Neal (Durham: Duke UP, 1937).

²⁴ Pattee, ed., *American Writers* 68. Neal’s self-reflexive irony becomes more apparent if one looks at the passage in which his self-praise is embedded: “Neal is altogether too much of a poet. He overdoes everything—pumps the lightning into you, till *he* is out of breath, and *you*, in a blaze.—In his lucid intervals, he appears to be a very sensible fellow; but, in his paroxysms—there is not a page of his, that wouldn’t take fire, in a high wind. He writes volume after volume, to the tune of three or four a-month; hardly one of which it is possible to read through; and yet, we could hardly open at a passage, without finding some evidence of extraordinary power—prodigious energy—or acute thinking. He is, undeniably, the most original writer, that America has produced—thinks himself the cleverest fellow in America—and does not scruple to say so.—He is in Europe now” (Pattee 68).

ry. [...] I do not dedicate my book to anybody; for I know nobody worth dedicating it to.”²⁵ The audacity of Neal’s outrageous self-praise and forceful iconoclasm foreshadows and anticipates Walt Whitman, who, reviewing himself anonymously after the publication of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), welcomed the artist enthusiastically as “An American bard at last!”²⁶ and in poems such as “Song of Myself” uninhibitedly celebrated his ‘expanded’ self. The same is true for Neal’s admiration for the vernacular and experimentation with textualized orality (“talking on paper”²⁷) and notorious propensity to contradict himself—personal idiosyncrasies which we find immortalized in Whitman’s much-quoted lines “I permit to speak at every hazard, / Nature without check with original energy”²⁸ and “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes).”²⁹

The only misgivings I have about this book relate to formal weaknesses. To be precise, the text is riddled with editorial oversights of all types and categories: for instance, inaccuracies in the table of contents³⁰; lack of congruence between titles given in the list of illustrations and titles used in the main text³¹; typos³²; misspellings of authors’ and publishers’ names³³; incorrect format-

²⁵ John Neal, *Logan: A Family History* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1822) 1:3.

²⁶ See headnote to *Leaves of Grass* in Nina Baym, gen. ed., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Volume B: *American Literature 1820-1865*, 6th ed. (New York: Norton, 2003) 2146.

²⁷ John Neal, *Wandering Recollections of a Somewhat Busy Life: An Autobiography* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869) 186.

²⁸ Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” (1855/1881), section 1, lines 12-13, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Volume B: *American Literature 1820-1865*, ed. Nina Baym et al., 6th ed. (New York: Norton, 2003) 2232.

²⁹ Whitman, “Song of Myself” (1855/1881), section 51, lines 1323-25, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Volume B: *American Literature 1820-1865* (2003) 2274.

³⁰ E. g. a missing entry (“List of Illustrations”); incorrect page numbers (“vii” instead of “ix” [page v, line 2 (v.2), Acknowledgments]; “309” instead of “307” [vi.24, Index]; and “319” instead of “317” [vi.25, List of Contributors]); or lack of congruence between essay titles given in the table of contents and essay titles used in the main text (see v.13 – 57.3).

³¹ E. g. vii.2 – 195.35.

³² E. g. “Aufklarung” instead of “Aufklärung” (ix.11); “presumptions” instead of “presumptptions” (xix.12); “which its his” (7.24); “Fretz” instead of “Fritz” Fleischmann (97.4); “thirving” instead of “thriving” (144.4); “principle” instead of “principal” (161.30); “fiance” instead of “fi-ancée” (212.22); “no” instead of “not” (222.14); “Souveni” instead of “Souvenir” (307.6); “Idiosyncracies” instead of “Idiosyncrasies” (312.44); or “Putitans” instead of “Puritans” (314.27).

³³ E. g. “Hans Joachim Lang” instead of “Hans-Joachim Lang” (xiv.24); “Thomas Woolf” instead of “Thomas Wolfe” (xxiv.37, 316.13); “Jorg” instead of “Jörg” (xxvii.5, 294.3); “Schieck” instead of “Scheick” (xxxii.2-3, 177.20, where Carlson even uses two variants [one correct, one incorrect] in two lines of the same note [see 177.20-21; also incorrect in the bibliography (301.16) and index (314.35)]); “Mathiessen” instead of “Matthiessen” (32.28 [mistake in the quoted original (Gould) that should have been marked with “sic” (in the index the editors opt for another incorrect variant, namely “Matthieson” [311.41])]); “Nussenbaum” instead of “Nissenbaum” (177.29, 308.25); “McClennen” instead of “McClellan” (180.4 [“corrected” to read “McClellan” but still incorrect in the volume’s bibliography (see 295.9) and index (see 311.43)]); “Phillips” instead of “Philip” Bradley (183.30 [equally incorrect in the bibliography]); “Fleishmann” instead of “Fleischmann” (216.15); John “Greenlief” instead of “Greenleaf” Whittier (225.2); “Clarke” instead of “Clark” (225.7); “Brooks, Peters” instead of “Brooks, Peter” (286.3); “Glen Handler” instead of “Glenn Hendler” (286.33, 308.16); “Fluck, Winifred” instead of “Fluck, Winfried” (289.39, 309.42); “Dimock, WaiChee” instead of “Dimock, Wai Chee” (309.33); “Shakesperare, Wilam” instead of “Shakespeare, William” (315.11); “Shelley, Percy Brysshe” instead of “Shelley, Percy Bysshe” (315.14); “Sue, Eugene” instead of “Sue, Eugène” (315.5 [including incorrect page number (“266” instead of “271”) in the index]).

ting³⁴; extraneous words³⁵; extraneous or missing spaces³⁶; missing words³⁷; incorrect, missing, or inconsistent punctuation³⁸; grammatical mistakes, including collocation errors and incorrect word division³⁹; mistakes, gaps, and inaccuracies in the volume's bibliography⁴⁰; incorrect, incomplete, or inaccurate bibliographical information in the endnotes and list of contributors⁴¹; as well as insufficient streamlining of the different systems of documentation.⁴² Watts and Carlson are so consistent in their laissez-faire approach to scholarly publishing—starting the book with an incorrect page number on its first page (v.2) and ending it with an incorrect title on its last (319.21)—that one feels tempted to read their editorial performance as a post-postmodern homage to Neal's "overhasty" writing style (271) and "lackadaisical attitude toward accuracy" (276). A question that arises in view of the above-mentioned blunders is why Bucknell University Press did not provide the editors with competent proofreaders, instead of suggesting they "improve the project through a series of revisions and restructurings" (ix). Unquestionable is the fact that a groundbreaking volume such as this would have deserved some sort of professional editing.



Prior to discussing a few research desiderata that follow from the conversations collected in this volume, it is worthwhile recalling the canon-critical debates of the 1980s. In "Masterpiece Theater" (1984), Jane Tompkins pointed out that literary classics "embody the changing interests and beliefs of those people whose place in the cultural hierarchy empowers them to decide which works deserve the name of classic and which do not."⁴³ The awareness of the contingent nature of literary value⁴⁴ in turn entails the obligation to deal with the vicissitudes of canon formation and search for authors who have fallen through the grid of contemporary tastes:

The recognition that literary texts, like everything else, are humanly created, historically produced objects, whose value has been created and re-created by men and women out of their particular needs, suggests a need to study the interests, institutional practices, and social arrangements that sustain the canon of classic works. It also opens the way for a re-

³⁴ E.g. 102.22 (extraneous boldface [period]); 179.10, 266.27 (extraneous italics [*The*]); 245.17, 312.29 (missing italics); 213.2 (small caps instead of caps).

³⁵ E.g. xxiii.28, 99.15, 130.6, 165.6, 183.30, 183.30, 240.10, 294.3.

³⁶ E.g. 137.25, 299.39, 307.2, 308.14, 309.40, 312.25, 313.12, 313.27, 315.42.

³⁷ E.g. 4.13, 154.34, 318.22.

³⁸ E.g. dashes instead of hyphens (cf. 113.4; 160.4, 311.2, 312.11, 312.22, 313.19, 313.37, 313.43, 313.25, 315.36, 315.28, 315.29); commas missing after appositions (cf. 179.16, 179.17, 179.33); inconsistent use of medium and long dashes (cf. 180.1, 180.15); missing or incorrect quotation marks (cf. 181.15, 243.41); missing parentheses (cf. 224.23, 243.8, 243.36); missing or extraneous periods (cf. 177.6, 177.40, 178.9, 225.37, 225.43, 244.9, 247.13, 299.32, 304.36, 314.3, 315.5); and missing or extraneous commas (cf. 183.13, 183.33, 216.14, 263.36, 310.34, 315.35).

³⁹ E.g. xx.35, 161.13, 220.13, 222.9, 242.23 as well as 266.16, 267.28, 294.1.

⁴⁰ E.g. incorrect or incomplete authors' names and titles (see 285.34, 289.41 [cf. 208.22], 298.33 [cf. 282.2], 299.39 [cf. 267.29], 301.16, 303.26, 304.30 [cf. 184.3]); titles cited in the main text or the endnotes missing in the bibliography compiled by the volume editors (see Venable [205.13], Widmer [208.4], Hentz [211.14], Orians [224.32]); missing alphabetical order (see 284.18-25, 286.26-33, 302.16-20).

⁴¹ E.g. 157.9, 176.21, 177.30, 178.4, 224.4, 224.35, 225.14, 225.31, 319.15, 319.21.

⁴² E.g. punctuation, page numbers (one-, two-, three-digit system), etc. The fact that the majority of mistakes are to be found in the notes sections gives rise to the assumption that in several cases, essays originally formatted in classic MLA style (parenthetical documentation plus list of works cited) have unprofessionally been converted into a system based on endnotes (cf. e.g. 225.19-22 [correct] and 225.42-44 [catastrophic]).

⁴³ Jane Tompkins, "Masterpiece Theater: The Politics of Hawthorne's Literary Reputation," *American Quarterly* 36 (1984): 617-42; quote on 641.

⁴⁴ Cf. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Contingencies of Value," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983): 1-35.

trieval of the values and interests embodied in other, noncanonical texts, which the literary establishment [...] has—for a variety of reasons—suppressed.⁴⁵

Responding to the seminal work of Tompkins, Annette Kolodny in her article “The Integrity of Memory” (1985) called for a “heroic rereading [...] that must proceed from the commitment to take seriously those works with which we are least familiar, and especially so when they challenge current notions of art and artifice.”⁴⁶ The willingness to face the risks of “defamiliarization” enables the modern critic “to stand before the vast array of texts—canonical and non-canonical alike—and view them as more or less complex assemblages of rhetorical and stylistic devices whose meanings and value have been variously constituted over time by changing audiences.”⁴⁷ Correspondingly, Kolodny demands a rehistoricizing of any early American text to be evaluated from today’s perspective: “To understand how a text works out ‘problems inherent in the culture at the moment of composition’⁴⁸ [...] allows us to reassess our literary heritage by means and in terms of reembedding texts and authors into encompassing, complicated, and dense historical processes.”⁴⁹ At the end of the 1980s, it was David S. Reynolds who, brilliantly if controversially, dared to throw stones at one of the temples of Americanist canon-building by taking on F. O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford UP, 1941). In *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1988), a title both paying tribute to and intertextually undermining the magnum opus of his famous predecessor, Reynolds argued for a methodology of “reconstructive criticism,” asking scholars “to reconstruct as completely as possible the socioliterary milieu of literary works through the exploration of a broad array of forgotten social and imaginative texts, paving the way for responsible reinterpretations of canonized works and making possible the rediscovery of lost literature.”⁵⁰ Although sticking to an essentialist hierarchy of ‘major’ and ‘minor,’ exemplified by the use of “beneath” as a guiding metaphor, Reynolds was the first literary historian to appreciate Neal’s special achievement:

He put theory into practice in a series of remarkable novels, which are our earliest full examples of the American Subversive Style, characterized by emotions heightened to a fever pitch, extreme sensational action creating a dizzying effect, sudden shifts in perspective, and narrative discontinuities. Subversive fiction, as introduced by Neal [...], tried to be deliberately outrageous, inflammatory, disquieting. It spit in the face of conventional literature. [...] What may seem the most glaring flaw of many Subversive novels—their formlessness, their wildness—was an extremely important groundbreaker for the major writers.⁵¹

In his foreword to the 2011 paperback edition of this pioneering text, Sean Wilentz confirms the critical potential of Reynolds’s revisionist methodology and pleads for its fruitful application in an era of digitalization: “The time is propitious for this reconstructive approach to intensify and spread [...], since many rare works that once had to be hunted down in archives are now available online.” According to Wilentz, we are now in a unique position “to rescue [‘representative

⁴⁵ Tompkins, “Masterpiece Theater” 641-42.

⁴⁶ Annette Kolodny, “The Integrity of Memory: Creating a New Literary History of the United States,” *American Literature* 57 (1985): 291-307; quote on 302.

⁴⁷ Kolodny, “The Integrity of Memory” 303.

⁴⁸ Kolodny quotes Jane Tompkins, “‘But Is It Any Good?’: The Institutionalization of Literary Value,” *The Grip Report: Second Draft*, Vol. 2 (March 1984): 30.

⁴⁹ Kolodny, “The Integrity of Memory” 304. For my references to Tompkins and Kolodny, I am indebted to Fritz Fleischmann’s pathbreaking reading of Neal’s story “Idiosyncrasies” (1843) in “‘A Likeness, Once Acknowledged’: John Neal and the ‘Idiosyncrasies’ of Literary History,” *Mythos und Aufklärung in der amerikanischen Literatur*, ed. Dieter Meindl et al. (Erlangen: Universitätsbund Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1985) 161-76.

⁵⁰ David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (1988. New York: Oxford UP, 2011) 561.

⁵¹ Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* 200-02.

geniuses"] lesser known contemporaries from undeserved oblivion, by tapping into the kinds of hidden cultural energies that Reynolds reveals in his landmark book.⁵²

Keeping in mind these calls for more holistic readings of American literature and culture, one should not read Neal as someone who contributed to discursive layers “beneath” the American Renaissance but as a personality who was part of a complex literary polysystem in which competing voices were vying for recognition. More specific desiderata concern a recontextualization of Neal’s life and writings within the parameters of current research paradigms; a reinvestigation of his influence as a mentor and literary critic; a reappraisal of his role in the Delphian Club and early nineteenth-century belles lettres culture; a comprehensive survey of his activities as a social reformer and political activist; a new reading of the author as an innovator and epistemological skeptic experimenting with early forms of stream of consciousness, literary self-reflexivity, and the dissolution of genre boundaries; studies of the deeper meaning and intratextual connectedness of Neal’s short fiction; and a reconsideration of Neal’s later life and work (1840s to 1870s).



At the end of their excellent introduction, Edward Watts and David J. Carlson make a claim that, like Whitman’s poetry, seems to be inspired by the bravado of the younger Neal: “Neal’s erasure from the literary and cultural history of his moment should, by now, be at an end” (xxx). That a renaissance in Neal studies is not only proclaimed but has actually begun manifests itself in both the publication of this long-awaited volume and the positive evaluation of Neal’s oeuvre in recent literary histories. In *Truth’s Ragged Edge: The Rise of the American Novel* (New York: Farrar, 2013), for instance, Philip F. Gura devotes almost ten pages to Neal and his writings. Unlike Reynolds, however, for whom writers like Neal were primarily pathfinders destined to pave the way for their more important successors, Gura recognizes Neal as an author ahead of his time, a major catalyst whose art is worthy of study on its own: “There were also novelists—the incomparable John Neal most memorably—who questioned the very efficacy of historical knowledge to inform behavior in a time of transformative change” (Gura xv). Hence, Neal was convinced that writers “who truly confronted contemporary challenges had to conceive of new kinds of narratives [...]”⁵³ which explains the radical otherness and originality that distinguish Neal’s handling of the novelistic form:

[...] [Neal’s] own works fit the description he gave [Charles Brockden] Brown’s oeuvre: full of perplexity, incoherence, and contradiction. Frequently criticized for a lack of discipline [...], Neal filled his novels of the 1820s with raw and exhilarating energy. In his struggle to contain his large, unruly imagination, he openly broached topics that few other American novelists would touch, and to do so, broached various stylistic conventions and literary genres.⁵⁴

If other standard works follow Gura’s example and enough scholars seize the opportunity to explore the fascinating oeuvre of one of the most neglected authors of his age, rewriting Neal into the cultural history of nineteenth-century America will no longer be wishful thinking but a viable and realistic project.

Mainz/Germersheim

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⁵² Sean Wilentz, Foreword (2011); Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* xii. That Wilentz misremembers the subtitle of Matthiessen’s famous study (“*Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Melville*” [ix.19] instead of “*Emerson and Whitman*”) may be astonishing, but does not detract from the cogency of his argument.

⁵³ Philip F. Gura, *Truth’s Ragged Edge* xv.

⁵⁴ Gura, *Truth’s Ragged Edge* 42-43.