Introduction

"We white Anglo-Saxon Abolitionists are too apt to assume the whole work as ours," announced Transcendentalist minister Thomas Wentworth Higginson to a packed house at New York City's Mozart Hall on a May evening in 1858. Having fought alongside African Americans in the increasingly violent antislavery struggles of the decade, he hoped to convince his fellow white abolitionists that blacks were more than capable of taking up the battle themselves. We must not "ignore the great force of the victims of tyranny," Higginson insisted, or overlook the plain fact that, in English Romantic poet George Gordon Byron's words, "to be free 'themselves must strike the blow.'"[1] During the next few years, Higginson sought to prove this point in both print and deed. He wrote a series of slave rebellion narratives in the *Atlantic Monthly*, aided John Brown as he plotted to spark a slave uprising at Harpers Ferry, and, eventually, served as colonel of the first Union regiment of former slaves to fight in the American Civil War.

Higginson was not the only abolitionist who employed Byron's verse to urge black resistance to subjugation. He was not, in other words, alone in interpreting the challenges posed by slavery in romantic terms. A decade earlier, black abolitionist Martin Robison Delany had chosen Byron's call to self-enacted emancipation – "HEREDITARY BONDSMAN! KNOW YE NOT WHO WOULD BE FREE, THEMSELVES MUST STRIKE THE BLOW!" – as the motto of his antislavery newspaper, the *Mystery*. Like Higginson, Delany had long argued that blacks themselves must resist

[1] *Liberator*, May 28, 1858; George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto 2, st. 76.

their enslavers, at any cost. Just weeks before Higginson gave his Mozart Hall address, in fact, Delany had organized a meeting in the black community of Chatham, Canada, to consider John Brown's plans to invade the South and build an army of ex-slaves who would bring down slavery from within. Despite his support for Brown, by 1858, Delany settled on a different course of action. Having relocated to Canada a few years earlier, he had little hope for African Americans within the United States.[2] Instead, Delany began to organize an expedition to scout potential sites for an African colony comprising free black emigrants and their African-born brethren. While Higginson endorsed a biracial assault against slavery with people of African descent working alongside white supporters to bring down the institution in the United States, Delany envisioned – and worked to create – a black abolitionist enclave abroad.

Delany's former partner Frederick Douglass had little patience for this emigration scheme. He viewed slaves and free blacks as essential components of the American body politic. Since the early 1850s Douglass had dedicated himself to finding a way to use the nation's liberal ideals and institutions to destroy the chains that bound African Americans. Yet Douglass, too, was drawn to Byron's words, more so than even Higginson and Delany. In 1847 he quoted the same stanza at a meeting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, urging free blacks to resist state encroachments upon their citizenship rights. Douglass also punctuated his tale of physical confrontation with the slave-breaker Covey with Byron's verse in his 1855 and 1881 autobiographies.[3] Finally, five years after Higginson's appeal in Mozart Hall, the black abolitionist called on the newly recruited troops of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment to put aside their personal hesitations about northern prejudice and go to war because "Action! Action! not criticism, is the plain duty of this hour." Douglass continued, "Liberty won by white men would lose half its luster. 'Who would be free themselves must strike the blow.'"[4]

[2] Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 60–61; Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robison Delany, 1812–1885* (1971; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 169–175; Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 182–183; David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 259–264.

[3] FD, "The Material and Moral Requirements of Antislavery Work: Addresses Delivered in Norristown, Pennsylvania, on 5, 6, August 1847," in *FDP*, 2: 89; FD, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in *FDPAW*, 2: 142; FD, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (Hartford, CT: Park Publishing, 1882), 178.

[4] FD, "Men of Color, To Arms!" in *LWFD*, 3: 318.

This militant catechism, echoed time and again by Higginson, Douglass, Delany, and countless other abolitionists, highlights the long shadow that Byron – and romanticism more generally – cast over the young republic. Lord Byron, wrote Boston publisher Samuel G. Goodrich, "could no more be kept at bay than the cholera." Harriet Beecher Stowe said that "Byronic fever" reached its greatest heights among young people who, like her, grew up in the early nineteenth century.[5] While the Romantic poet's life and work spoke to the nation's youth, his potent concoction of emotionalism, martial heroism, and calls for political and social liberation inspired reform-minded Americans in particular. Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel Gridley Howe, and Abraham Lincoln, among others, pored over Byron's writings, imitated his hairstyle and dress, and hoped to live up to the heroic example he set by joining the Greek war for independence from Ottoman rule.[6] And Byron's influence was not singular. A handful of European Romantic poets and writers – including Walter Scott, William Wordsworth, and Thomas Carlyle – found a receptive audience in the nineteenth-century United States. Ultimately, European Romanticism merged with homegrown romantic currents to cut a wide path through the American cultural landscape – the nation's literary forms, artistic styles, and patterns of thought would never be the same.[7]

[5] Samuel G. Goodrich, quoted in Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 28; HBS, in *SLL*, 40; Peter X. Accardo, "Byron in America to 1830," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 9 (Summer 1998): 6.

[6] Booker T. Washington, *Frederick Douglass* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1906), 303; John Stauffer, *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass & Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Twelve, 2008), 125; John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 60; Mayer, *All on Fire*, 36; John T. Cumbler, *From Abolition to Rights for All: The Making of a Reform Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 39–40; Stewart Winger, *Lincoln, Religion, and Romantic Cultural Politics* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 180.

[7] In order to reinforce that romanticism had indigenous and popular sources as well as high European ones, I have elected not to capitalize "romanticism" and related terms except when they are used to refer specifically to European Romantics and their work. On indigenous forms of romanticism, see Henry F. May, "After the Enlightenment: A Prospectus," in his *The Divided Heart: Essays on Protestantism and the Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 192; Perry Miller, "New England's Transcendentalism: Native or Imported?" in *Critical Essays on American Transcendentalism*, ed. Philip F. Gura and Joel Myerson (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982), 387–401; and Michael O'Brien, "The Lineaments of Antebellum Southern Romanticism," in his *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), esp. 42–45.

Nowhere were these changes more significant than in the antebellum campaign against slavery. As Byron's oft-repeated ode to self-emancipation suggests, romanticism provided a lexicon for militant abolitionists like Higginson, Delany, and Douglass. But it did more than that. Romanticism repeatedly transformed the antislavery movement. In the 1830s, romantic reformers such as William Lloyd Garrison combined moral perfectionism – the belief that individuals and society could be perfected – with demands for immediate emancipation to formulate a radical antislavery approach, which broke sharply from the gradualism of early abolitionists. Relying on direct, often emotional appeals to hearts and minds, Garrisonians hoped to convert the nation to the cause of the enslaved. Two decades later, a second generation of abolitionists also turned to romanticism as they crafted new – and often more militant – responses to solve the problem of slavery. Frustrated by political defeats, especially the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, they embraced a wide range of romantic motifs and doctrines, from immediatism, perfectionism, and sentimentalism to self-culture, martial heroism, romantic racialism, and even Manifest Destiny. In the process, they reshaped American abolitionism yet again.

Historians have not fully appreciated these latter developments. Although we know a great deal about early types of romantic reform – particularly the immediatism and perfectionism associated with the birth of radical abolitionism in the 1830s – the connections between romanticism and the antislavery movement in the 1850s have not received sufficient attention. Some scholars have viewed the decade before the Civil War as a mature and settled period when it comes to ideas about social reform and as such, unworthy of study. Aileen Kraditor, for example, has argued that by 1850 "most of the major tactical problems that arose in the entire history of the abolitionist movement [had been] thrashed out," while Louis Ruchames has concluded that "the late 1840's and 50's saw no important changes in anti-slavery theory or practice."[8]

To other students of American culture, the period was not static but regressive. According to this line of thinking, the United States transitioned from a spirit of boundlessness – a limitless faith in the possibilities of the nation and its people – to a pattern of consolidation, which resulted

[8] Aileen Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834–1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), vii; Louis Ruchames, ed., *The Abolitionists: A Collection of Their Writing* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), 24. See also Gilbert H. Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830–1844* (1933; repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1957), 197.

in "the formation of a more stable, more disciplined, less adventurous culture," in the 1850s. For antebellum reformers, this meant that utopian attempts to transform the very building blocks of American society and culture gave way to "a more limited, if perhaps more realistic, vision of the possibilities of social change." One scholar has bluntly maintained that "the romantic phase of the antebellum reform movement came to an abrupt halt in 1850."[9]

Yet the 1850s were not simply a time of intellectual stasis or retrenchment, especially among romantic-minded Americans. Noting the remarkable number of American literary masterpieces that appeared in just the first half of the decade – including *The Scarlett Letter*, *Moby-Dick*, *Walden*, and *Leaves of Grass* – literary scholar F. O. Matthiessen long ago dubbed the period the "American Renaissance."[10] Although some of the artists associated with the American Renaissance (Poe, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville) were indifferent, if not hostile, to abolitionism, recent scholarship has made it clear that others became outspoken opponents of slavery. We now know, for instance, that despite early skepticism about organized social reform Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau increasingly allied themselves with abolitionists over the course of the 1850s. In shoring up the antislavery credentials of these leading American romantics, however, scholars of Transcendentalism have undersold the breadth and impact of romantic reform in the decade before the Civil War. For, notwithstanding their eloquent pleas on behalf of the enslaved and encomiums to abolitionist martyrs like John Brown, Emerson and Thoreau remained aloof from

[9] John Higham, "From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848–1860," in *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture*, ed. Carl J. Guarneri (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 158; Lori Ginzburg, "'Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash': Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850s," *Journal of American History* 73 (Dec. 1986): 604; Donald Yacovone, *Samuel Joseph May and the Dilemmas of the Liberal Persuasion, 1797–1871* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 155. See also Lori Ginzburg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990) and John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815–1865," *American Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1965): 656–681. For arguments that this shift away from romantic reform occurred during or after the Civil War, see George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001); and Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

[10] F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), vii.

more formal parts of the antislavery struggle. They were fellow travelers, rather than the vanguard, of the movement.[11]

The same cannot be said of another set of romantics who came of age as abolitionists in the 1840s and 1850s. As the secession crisis intensified after the Mexican War, opponents of slavery were forced to revisit their fundamental beliefs, reimagine prevailing strategies, and reconsider their roles in the movement. Some flocked to the new Republican Party and its free labor ideology, which opposed the expansion of slavery into western territories. Others abandoned long-standing commitments to nonviolence, exploiting "intellectual loopholes" to accommodate more resistant approaches to abolitionism.[12] The rise of the Republican Party and the compromises of would-be pacifists, however, have long overshadowed the emergence of a new generation of romantic reformers in the 1850s. This group, whom I call the New Romantics, had close ties with many

[11] Len Gougeon, *Virtue's Hero: Emerson, Antislavery, and Reform* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990); Richard F. Teichgraeber III, *Sublime Thoughts/Penny Wisdom: Situating Emerson and Thoreau in the American Market* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Albert J. Von Frank, *The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson's Boston* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); T. Gregory Garvey, ed., *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on Emerson and Social Reform* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist*; Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, *To Set This World Right: The Antislavery Movement in Thoreau's Concord* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Albert J. Von Frank, "On Transcendentalism: Its History and Uses," *Modern Intellectual History* **6** (Apr. 2009): 189–205; Alan M. Levine and Daniel S. Malachuk, eds., *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011). For works that downplay the Transcendentalists' engagement with the slavery question, see Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism* and Anne C. Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830–1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

[12] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party* (1970; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 239. On antislavery violence, see John Demos, "The Antislavery Movement and the Problem of Violent 'Means,'" *New England Quarterly* **37** (Dec. 1964): 501–526; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, "Confrontation and Abolition in the 1850s," *Journal of American History* **58** (Mar. 1972): 923–937; Lawrence J. Friedman, *Gregarious Saints: Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830–1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 196–222; John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold, eds., *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999); Stauffer, *Black Hearts of Men*; Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004); Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist*; Matthew J. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 1–73; and Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

early antislavery romantics, including Garrison, Lydia Maria Child, and Theodore Weld. Yet, as we shall see, the New Romantics broke decisively with their predecessors with regard to their tactics for fighting slavery and the ideas they used to justify those tactics.

Romantic Reformers is a study of the thought and action of five of these figures – Higginson, Delany, and Douglass as well as Theodore Parker and Harriet Beecher Stowe – all of whom became household names in the 1850s. Today, the fame of a few of these abolitionists remains as strong as ever, while the others tend to draw nods of recognition mainly from students of antebellum American culture. But in the years leading up to the Civil War, all five played a decisive role in the most important social movement of the era. They campaigned tirelessly across the country, decrying the institution of slavery from the pulpit and lectern, in novels and newspapers. By inspiring – and in some cases leading – violent conflict in the streets of Boston, plains of Kansas, and mountains of Virginia, they transformed the antislavery movement, pushing it toward increasing militancy. And, critically, they framed their objections and justified their actions chiefly on romantic grounds.[13]

Although many abolitionists abandoned romantic reform in the 1850s, thereby signifying that "the day of romantic dreams and visionary philanthropy had gone by," the New Romantics did the opposite.[14] They blended the immediatism and perfectionism of early reformers with new romantic points of emphasis, including martial heroism, romantic

[13] My interpretation builds on the recent efforts of a handful of historians and literary critics who have explored connections between romanticism and abolitionism in the 1850s. This includes studies of the Transcendentalists and the slavery question (see footnote 11) as well as works that focus on how romanticism proved an important set of ideas for abolitionists who theorized about, for instance, slave revolt. *Romantic Reformers* combines, and extends, these two lines of interpretation, pushing beyond the usual subjects – Emerson and Thoreau – to expose the ways in which a wide range of antislavery minds turned to romantic ideas as the sectional crisis intensified. For studies that explore romanticism and social reform in the 1850s, see Stauffer, *Black Hearts of Men*; Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist*; Stanley Harrold, "Romanticizing Slave Revolt: Madison Washington, the *Creole* Mutiny, and Abolitionist Celebration of Violent Means," in *Antislavery Violence*, 89–107; Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass*; Winger, *Lincoln, Religion, and Romantic Cultural Politics*; Mathew J. Grow, *"Liberty to the Downtrodden": Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); David S. Reynolds, *Mightier than the Sword:* Uncle Tom's Cabin *and the Battle for America* (New York: Norton, 2011); and Larry J. Reynolds, *Righteous Violence: Revolution, Slavery, and the American Renaissance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

[14] Sarah Smith Martyn, quoted in Ginzburg, "'Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash,'" 601.

racialism, sentimentalism, and self-culture. Historians have done much to expose the ways that evangelicalism, republicanism, and Free Soil ideology shaped the sectional crisis. At the same time, earlier studies have lost sight of another prominent intellectual tradition.[15] We cannot understand the final chapter in the antislavery struggle, or the coming of the Civil War, until we acknowledge the pivotal role that romanticism – arguably the most influential set of ideas in nineteenth-century America – played in the tumultuous events of the 1850s and 1860s.

Romantic America

Romanticism captured the antebellum American imagination like nothing else. At once a state of mind and a constellation of motifs and doctrines, romanticism was fed by both indigenous and imported sources, finding expression in varied forms. It seemed to speak directly to the young nation's citizenry, whether cultured Boston Brahmins or rough-hewn frontiersmen. Romanticism's emphasis on organic growth and the beauty and wildness of nature appealed to a people who, in just a half century, pushed from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. The romantic commitment to individuality and self-expression likewise resonated in a liberal republic that was transitioning from classical republicanism to mass democracy.[16] Meanwhile, romanticism's dark and decadent elements tempted

[15] David Goldfield's *America Aflame* is a case in point. In emphasizing the role of evangelicalism in the coming of the Civil War, this otherwise masterful synthesis misidentifies Theodore Parker as an evangelical and claims that "most" of the "Secret Six" – the abolitionists who supported and advised John Brown as he planned his raid at Harpers Ferry – had "close ties to evangelical Protestantism." Yet four of the Secret Six – Parker, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Samuel Gridley Howe, Franklin Sanborn – were Unitarians and Transcendentalists who shared romantic ideas with evangelical Protestants but were nonetheless theologically worlds apart. Goldfield is not wrong to point to evangelicalism's centrality in the Civil War period, but if we want a term that encompasses the antislavery theories emanating from both evangelicals and liberal Christians, then we would be better off choosing "romanticism." David Goldfield, *America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 47, 158. On abolitionists' evangelicalism, see Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*; Friedman, *Gregarious Saints*; and Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). On the role of Free Soil and republican forms of antislavery thought in the sectional crisis, see Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor*, Daniel J. McInerney, *The Fortunate Heirs of Freedom: Abolition and Republican Thought* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), and Adam-Max Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley's* New-York Tribune*: Civil War-Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[16] Stow Persons, *American Minds: A History of Ideas* (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), 201–208.

even the country's most stern moralists. Revivalist Lyman Beecher, for example, was a great Byron aficionado in spite of – and, perhaps at some level, because of – the poet's scandalous eroticism. Upon Byron's death, Beecher lamented, "What a harp he might have swept," had the English Romantic been converted to God's work.[17] By the middle of the nineteenth century, romanticism was all but inescapable. As historian Henry May has written, "Romanticism pervaded every aspect of American culture, from low to high, from politics and religion to literature" in the three decades before the Civil War, dominating the young republic more thoroughly than just about any European nation.[18]

Elite minds, from Boston to Charleston, devoured the works of Goethe, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Madame Anne Louise Germaine de Staël. American intellectuals were fascinated by the challenges that European Romantics posed to the Enlightenment's stale, passionless world. While the latter stood for order, predictability, and universality, romanticism took the side of emotion, idiosyncrasy, and subjectivity.[19] Romantic writers intoxicated their readers with visions of medieval knighthood and brooding, valiant heroes. One summer, a young

[17] Lyman Beecher, quoted in *SLL*, 39; May, "After the Enlightenment," 188.

[18] May, "After the Enlightenment," 190–91, 195–96; O'Brien, "Lineaments of Antebellum Southern Romanticism," 45. For a fascinating discussion of the ways in which romanticism can be used to describe the cultural transition of middle-class Americans in the nineteenth century, see Anne C. Rose, *Victorian America and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[19] These points of comparison fail to capture the breadth of romanticism in either its European or American context. To some minds, the word "romanticism" refers to a series of literary, artistic, and philosophical movements that emerged in Europe and spread elsewhere between the 1780s and 1830s. Yet others have used "romanticism" more broadly, describing it as a state of mind that has found subscribers in the ancient, medieval, and modern world. Indeed, as Arthur Lovejoy wrote seventy years ago, the term "has acquired so many – and such incongruous and opposed – meanings that no lexicographer has ever yet come near to enumerating them correctly and exhaustively." This wisdom applies as much today as it did when Lovejoy wrote it and, for the record, I have no interest in being the first to summit this lexicographic mountain. Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (June 1941): 257–278 (quotation 258); Russell B. Nye, *Society and Culture in America, 1830–1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 19–24; Persons, *American Minds*, 201–208; Norman Risjord, *Representative Americans: The Romantics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), xi–xiii; Rollin G. Osterweis, "Romanticism Defined," in his *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1949), 235–239; Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. 1–20; O'Brien, "Lineaments of Antebellum Southern Romanticism," 38–56; Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), esp. 2–9.

Harriet Beecher Stowe plowed through Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* seven times, memorizing a good portion of it. And, as popular as Scott was in antebellum America, Stowe believed that Lord Byron's reign "was, if possible, more universal, binding, and absolute. How many young men of tolerably respectable talents, began to tie their collars with black ribbon, to gaze with sullen gloom on everything general or particular, to drink gin and water, and write bad poetry, has never been accurately computed."[20]

New England Transcendentalists, too, consumed the verse of Byron and Scott with "feverish excitement."[21] Even so, these American romantics – who formed the most influential intellectual coterie in the young republic – devoted more time to plumbing the philosophical and epistemological depths of high European Romanticism. Dissatisfied with the Lockean sensationalist philosophy that then prevailed in Boston's Unitarian circles, Emerson, Parker, Margaret Fuller, and George Ripley found a far more satisfactory explanation of the world and its workings in a romantic emphasis on intuition and organicism. They read *Sartor Resartus*, in which Thomas Carlyle outlined what he called "natural supernaturalism": a quasi-religious strain of romanticism that invested the natural world and thus humankind with divine potential. Transcendentalists also embraced new theories of knowledge, largely derived from Immanuel Kant but disseminated by English and French Romantics, including Coleridge and de Staël.[22]

But romanticism was not simply an imported tradition, spreading from Europe to the United States "like ripples on a pond into which Immanuel Kant had thrown a stone."[23] Although the Transcendentalists crafted an epistemology that invoked Kant's authority and employed some of his terminology, they pushed beyond his philosophical position. Kant, for instance, made some room for sensory impressions in his epistemology;

[20] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc. of Lyman Beecher, D.D.* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1864), 1: 526; Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 20; *New-York Evangelist*, July 28, 1842.

[21] William Henry Channing, quoted in Barbara L. Packer, "Romanticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*, ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, and Laura Dassow Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 85.

[22] Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 164; Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life, Vol. 1: The Private Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 181; M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971); Barbara L. Packer, *The Transcendentalists* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 20–23.

[23] O'Brien, "Lineaments of Antebellum Southern Romanticism," 42.