



In honor of July 3rd Thursday, The Mastheads commissioned artist Michael McKay to install word art posters with quotations from Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Longfellow, and Holmes throughout North Street storefronts. Photographed by James Sylvia.

Welcome to our third Mastheads fold in The Berkshire Eagle: *THE PLACE*. The Mastheads is a new literary and architectural project in Pittsfield. Our final fold, *THE PRODUCT*, will be released on August 13. Learn more at themastheads.org, and thank you for following along! - Tessa Kelly and Chris Parkinson, Project Directors

The Mastheads Roundtable, July 17

Excerpt from Conversation with David L. Smith

On Monday, July 17th, David L. Smith, John W. Chandler Professor of English at Williams College, spoke at Hotel On North as part of *The Mastheads Roundtable*, an ongoing series of talks organized in conjunction with The Mastheads residency program. Smith spoke about writers and Berkshire County residents Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., Herman Melville, Fanny Kemble, and John Greenleaf Whittier.

Smith's scholarly interests include Mark Twain, Southern Literature, Nature Writing, and the Black Arts Movement, and he is editor, with Jack Salzman and Cornel West, of *The Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History*. As the poet D. L. Crockett-Smith, Smith has published *Cowboy Amok* and *Civil Rites*, both from *The Black Scholar Press*.

...At this point I'd like to pause and shift directions in order to incorporate some other writers of our region, important contemporaries of Holmes and Melville: Fanny Kemble, 1809-1893, and John Greenleaf Whittier, 1807-1892. See all of these people—Melville is ten years younger, but the rest of them are all within a year of each other, both in their birth and in their death. It's amazing.

Kemble and Whittier are both essential to discussions that I would encourage us to pursue regarding Antebellum writers of our region and more broadly, of American literary culture in that period. Unfortunately they are both commonly overlooked.

[overheard from the adjacent room: "Yo-ga!, yo-ga!, yo-ga!..."]

You should tell them it should be "Melville, Melville..."

Nevertheless, there are many obvious reasons for why these two writers belong in the conversation. Kemble is sometimes included in the discussion of Melville because he satirizes her in the character of Goneril in *The Confidence Man*, and he also speaks disparagingly of her in some of his personal letters and correspondences. However, she lived in Lenox at the same time that Melville did in nearby Pittsfield. And you know, even now, how close Melville's house, "Arrowhead," is to the Lenox line, just a quick walk. Also coincidentally she was almost an exact contemporary of Holmes, and she moved to Lenox within a few months of when he bought his estate there in 1848. In distance she was about as close to Melville as Holmes was, during the time when Hawthorne was also living there. By the time she moved to Lenox she had become an abolitionist and a woman's rights advocate. She made her home into a kind of saloon for artists, intellectuals, and political activists and other non-conformers. But for complicated reasons she's been undervalued in discussions about all of these things of her era.

Kemble was from one of the most prominent theatrical families in England. She was considered one of the most gifted young actresses there, and was a star in many productions at Covent Garden. Her parents were equally involved both as performers and one the management side of things. Fanny came to the U.S. to do a tour performing scenes and recitations of Shakespeare. She enjoyed great acclaim. I think she enjoyed the acclaim but she didn't like being in the plays. She liked doing recitations, she liked doing other things on the stage, but she didn't like the acting part. But she was a great actor and celebrated.

In Philadelphia she met Pierce Butler—sounds like a name out of a movie, right? Pierce Butler. He was a very wealthy man in Georgia. After a brief romance the two married. Shortly afterward, Butler inherited a pair of Georgia plantations and 625 slaves. He was already a rich man, and he inherited this from his grandfather. And he becomes one of the richest men in America at that time. He moved back to Georgia with Fanny, who had no inkling of slavery and plantation life. She was horrified by what she saw there. She battled with her husband trying to persuade him to move back North, or at least to make changes in the treatment and in the living conditions of the slaves and he refused on both counts.

She soon left him. She moved to Lenox. She sued for divorce, which was granted in 1849. However, as one of the richest men in America—other rich people remind us of this from time to time—if you are really rich you can hire very expensive lawyers, if you can get them to work for you. So Butler counter-sued. He charged her with abandonment because legally they were still married when she came up to Yankee country. He won custody over the daughters and he also won concessions that required her to cease her public lecturing based on what she had observed at his plantations.

She was so outraged she went and picked up with abolitionists immediately, and was a great sensation with audiences. She had horror stories to tell. Everybody in the South knew what was happening on plantations, but they didn't talk about it. And so there was no firsthand accounting from white people of the horrors of slavery and she did that for a few months and then she had to obey the rulings in court. However, she wrote a book called *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation*, published 1863. Though it was not published until the Civil War was underway, it still had a significant impact in winning the northern public in a commitment to abolish slavery and not just to preserve the union.

the place

It was an ongoing struggle and people in the North did not want the South seceding and forming another country. Some of them thought slavery was an abomination, some thought it was not their business, but they still wanted to keep the Union together. It was still a struggle. It didn't end when the Southerners fired on Fort Sumter. It was ongoing, so the fact that Kemble could not publish her work until 1863 does not mean that it was not a very important factor in shaping opinion in the north.

This book has a unique historical status as one detailing the abusive day-to-day life on plantations observed by a non-southerner who lived as one for fourteen years. She was married to this man from 1834 to 1848, so she saw, including—and she's the only person I've seen to give an accounting of the Southern ritual, although this is captured a little in *Django Unchained*, the Tarantino movie—Southern men have this elaborate ruse—you're served by the server, and, the wife of a plantation owner would be in her best Southern Belle routine—and after dinner the gentlemen would have brandy and then they would go for a walk with cigars. They would go on a tour of the slave cabins. And that was a euphemism for picking out some slave woman to abuse. Even if she had a husband or whoever, they'd say "Get out of bed, you are property." So, Kemble writes about that. It's not something you find in other texts about life in the South during that time. It is still an illuminating book.

(continued on next page)



So, Kemble persisted. And, her work included five other volumes of memoirs, a novel called *Far Away and Long Ago* published in 1889 and four volumes of poems. Clearly, she was a productive writer over time and not just a theatrical performer and artist. All the more reason for why literary people should include her in the conversation about what was happening then, especially here in the Berkshires during those years, and also generally. She was a major cultural figure. She was a phenomenon. We've forgotten about her. Even many of the famous historians have forgotten about her, which is a real shame.

John Greenleaf Whittier lived in Cummington and was focused on devoting his life to poetry from his early youth. He was a Quaker, and became committed to the Abolitionist Movement while he was still in his teens. He published poems in *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison's magazine, and the leading outlet of the movement, in nearly every issue once they began to publish his poems, and so he became known as the slaves' poet. Whittier was essentially an autodidact, certainly not a Harvard man nor a blueblood. He came from a long line of farmers, and he embraced that. He and Holmes became lifelong friends, and they have an interesting correspondence.

The fact that he is a Quaker is also important. People who study the Civil War and the Abolitionist Movement understand that Quakerism was a major force in shaping the Abolitionist Movement. Garrison was not a Quaker, he was an evangelical baptist, but his mentor was a Philadelphia Quaker who took him under his arm and so Garrison's thinking about politics, about moral responsibility and so forth, were shaped by Quaker ideas. The teaching of a Quaker who was also a political activist and who was committed to nonviolence. Much of that came into the program for the American Anti-Slavery Society, which was the group that published *The Liberator*, the group that Garrison was essentially the leader of. There are some peculiarities and paradoxes to mainstream abolitionism, for example, if you reading Garrison's introduction to the first edition of Frederick Douglass's autobiography, Garrison ends his introduction with some slogans. One of which is "No Union with slaveholders." And so, when I taught this book I asked my students, well what does that mean? "No Union with slaveholders." They don't know. Well, once in a while somebody has had a history course and they know. What it meant was, Garrison's position was that the North, the Constitution itself was a corrupt document because it gave sanction to slavery. And so, what should happen is that the North should secede from the South, rewrite the Constitution, and make itself a sanctuary for escaped slaves. Now, that's a kind of hopeful, indirect way of trying to achieve the Abolition of slavery, but it reflected that Quaker sensibility that you cannot commit violence. Avoid conflict. So there is a kind of elegance to it, in that contest. American Southerners aren't that subtle. They aren't interested in such elegance.

And so, the black people in the Abolitionist Movement, of whom there were many in the Hudson Valley, not so far from here, including Douglass himself, who came in as Garrison's protege in his organization, had to support that slogan, but he knew perfectly well that's not the way to get black people out of slavery. So there was this internal battle--struggle, I should call it--over the strategic outlook of the Movement. Ultimately, for a lot of reasons, and especially when John Brown entered the picture, that was changed within Garrison's organization. Garrison especially did so with reluctance, but the Movement became focused on the reality that you were not going to get Southerners to--and especially once the war starts--to agree. So it was a real problem.

Part of this digression, is to say that I think we do not talk enough about Quakerism, about the influence of the Quakers on American social and political movements, then and now. It hasn't gone away. The Quaker presence is still there. Here in Berkshire County there are Quakers who are active.

So, Whittier became a very popular poet, and he was a Quaker, not just somebody who was influenced in the way Garrison was. It was part of Whittier's sensibility, part of his formation as a political activist, that Quaker outlook. We need to understand that. It was a complicated thing that also had power to it, and shaped people's thinking and the way that they behaved in carrying out the struggle.

The Mastheads Roundtable, July 24

Excerpt from Conversation with Tess Chakkalal

On Monday, July 24th, Professor **Tess Chakkalal** of Bowdoin College spoke at Hotel on North on local abolitionist circles and the importance of preserving physical ties to our literary past. The talk was part of **The Mastheads Roundtable**, a series of events organized in conjunction with the Mastheads residency program.

Tess Chakkalaka has published widely on nineteenth-century African American and American literature. She is the author of *Novel Bondage: Slavery, Marriage, and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century America* (Illinois, 2011) which earned the Robert K. Martin Prize for best book on American literature from the Canadian Association of American Studies. She is co-editor of *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs* (Georgia, 2013).

TESS CHAKKALAKAL: As a result of the Stowe House now being put on the National Network to Freedom, the college decided to put forward a million dollars to renovate the Stowe House. With that million dollars—now I had wanted to do a lot of stuff with the house. I wanted to recreate the space where Stowe harbored a fugitive slave. They didn't go for that. What they did go for was, though, they needed the upstairs real estate for faculty offices, because they had to justify to the trustees why they were going to spend a million dollars on this house. That has now all become faculty offices. But I was able to get one room of the house which we have since called "Harriet's Writing Room," and there is a permanent exhibit that tells the story of the house, Stowe's time in the house, and her meeting with John Andrew Jackson. There is also of course a plaque that says the house is now on the Network to Freedom.

And most importantly, I think—or, I'm not sure, and I want to hear your responses and questions—what I think is most important about the house is how it changes the story of Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the anti-slavery movement in New England. When Stowe was living in the house, there was abolitionist sentiment in Brunswick. But there was also pro-slavery sentiment. There was a real debate going on about what was to be done



about the slavery problem, and there were many who were not as vocal as many of the abolitionists that we now recognize like William Lloyd Garrison, or Frederick Douglass. Stowe, because she wanted to take a more active role, decided to use her actual physical space, her house, in order to become involved in the fight.

And this is what I continue to teach my students. There's something about knowing what happened in this house as students are reading the novel that helps them to have a more active interpretation of the novel than they might otherwise have.

TESSA KELLY: I have a question that could be for you, Tess, or it could be for the residents, but I'm curious, as a literary scholar or as a writer, how important do you think the place where a certain thing was written is to preserving a work, or thinking about a work?

TC: Well, writers, where you write your work, how important is that to the work itself?

PAUL PARK: Well I was wondering, if in your thinking about the Stowe House, whether you had I think some theories that John Andrew Jackson who had stayed there was in some sense a kind of historical collaborator to the veracity of some of the stories that Harriet Beecher Stowe was then using in the novel. But in sort of more pragmatic terms, had you come to some kind of general thoughts about the relationship in certain writers' works of the location of where it was written to the actual form of the work itself? It seems to me this is really a kind of interesting thing. My guess is that it varies radically from writer to writer but at certain moments I would think that that would be a really fruitful way of thinking about texts.

TC: For me, it's less about, and I know this might be an unpopular view, it's not just about the place, it's about an event. To think about a literary event having occurred in the space is what produced the literature itself. And for me it's about this event: it's the meeting with John Andrew Jackson in Brunswick, which helps her to, which *inspires* her to write the novel.

Before this, she had only just written a few sketches, and after this she does continue writing anti-slavery stories: *Dred* for instance, and *The Minister's Wooing*, two very different kinds of novels. So what is it about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Now remember, it is the most popular American novel of all time, and John Andrew Jackson and her, they weren't friends, they had a different kind of relationship, but when she met him she wrote a letter to her sister describing this meeting and how he showed her the scars on his back and how moving this meeting was. Moreover she harbored this fugitive slave in her house. Her husband wasn't there, Calvin Stowe hadn't come yet to Brunswick yet to be with her, he was still in Cincinnati. So she was alone with seven children in her house, and this man comes knocking on the door of another family, a wealthy white family in Brunswick, and they say, We can't take you in because the risk is too high, but we know a lady who might do it—and it was Stowe, because of her beliefs. And these weren't just political beliefs for Stowe as you see in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* they were religious beliefs, that is her faith, and anti-slavery is her faith.

And so one of the reasons I wanted to come [to Pittsfield] where things are happening is to collect arguments, to become more conversant in what is now becoming a literary field, an architectural field, that has the potential to, in my view, change communities, but hopefully it's changing the communities for the better, and I think that too is an open question.

The Mastheads Authors in Historical Berkshire

Excerpt by Jeffrey Lawrence from *The Mastheads Reader*

Excerpt from the introduction to *The Mastheads Reader*, "The Past in the Present: Pittsfield's 19th-Century Literary Legacy" by Jeffrey Lawrence, Assistant Professor of English at Rutgers University and Director of Research for *The Mastheads*. A free copy of *The Mastheads Reader* may be picked up at *The Berkshire Museum*, *The Berkshire Athenaeum*, or *The Lichtenstein Center for the Arts*.

Melville's penchant for divining the far in the near—the global in the local—is central to one of his best known Pittsfield stories, "The Piazza." Perhaps the greatest challenge for the first-time reader of the story is to make sense of its myriad allusions to other places, peoples, and times. At the level of plot, "The Piazza" is relatively simple. After building a porch (or "piazza") for his farmhouse, the narrator, a Pittsfield man modeled on Melville himself, becomes obsessed by a "golden sparkle" on Mount Greylock that he takes as evidence of a human abode. Riding out to the mountain to investigate, he finds a young woman living in a dilapidated cottage; ironically, she looks back at the man's farmhouse with the same fascination with which he initially eyed the mysterious sparkle. "Oh, if I could but once get to yonder house," the woman laments, "and but look upon whoever the happy being is that lives there!" The story is often taken to be a meditation on relativism, and indeed, the ending does suggest that both the narrator and the Greylock woman idealize the life of the other because of the limits of their particular—and particularly distorted—viewpoints. But the story's Melvillean flavor is also established by the narrator's insistence on filtering his impressions through everything else he has ever seen and read (recall that *Moby-Dick* begins with a list of all of the literary references to the whale from antiquity to the nineteenth century). He likens the Greylock woman to a Tahiti girl, Arrowhead to Mecca, and a rainbow to the Bolivian mines of Potosí. In the Berkshire summer, he remarks, "one is often reminded of the sea [...] the vastness and the lonesomeness

are so oceanic, and the silence and the sameness, too, that the first peep of a strange house, rising beyond the trees, is for all the world like spying, on the Barbary coast, an unknown sail.” His eyes migrate from the scene before him to the vast ocean of his recollection to the classical volumes on his bookshelf. He catches glimpses of Shakespeare all around him (“two sportsmen, crossing a red stubble buck-wheat field, seemed guilty Macbeth and foreboding Banquo”) and gleans insights from Spenser and Cervantes. The very name of the woman in the cottage (Marianna) invokes a character from *Measure for Measure*, as well as Lord Tennyson’s well-known 1830 poem. Indeed, by the last paragraphs of the story, we begin to suspect that the entire Greylock encounter may be a flight of fancy emanating from the narrator’s overheated brain. Like so much of Melville’s fiction, “The Piazza” evinces the style of a man who had traveled widely, read deeply, and imagined even more.

Before his arrival in Lenox in early 1850, Hawthorne, too, led an itinerant lifestyle, though his journeys had been largely confined to New England. Born in the coastal seaport of Salem to a family whose Puritan roots stretched back far into the colonial era, Hawthorne spent most of his adult life moving from place to place. In the early 1840s, he was one of the original stockholders in the utopian community Brook Farm, and later rented a parsonage in Concord that belonged to the family of Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1849, after briefly moving back into his childhood home in Salem, he wrote the historical romance that cemented his reputation, *The Scarlet Letter*. In 1850, still struggling financially, Hawthorne accepted an offer from his friends the Tappans to move with his family into a small red house on their estate on the border between Lenox and Stockbridge. During the eighteen months he lived in the red house, a period in which he made several visits to Arrowhead (spending the night in the barn next to Melville’s farmhouse), he wrote the Gothic romance *The House of the Seven Gables* and the children’s book *A Wonder-Book For Boys and Girls*.

The House of the Seven Gables takes place in a seaport city that resembles Salem rather than Lenox, but the novel’s contrast between New England’s past and present also reflects the rapid changes that Western Massachusetts was undergoing at the time. Like all of the other Mastheads authors, Hawthorne traveled to and from the Berkshires on the Western Railroad, which (as Richard Birdsall notes) began making regular trips across the Berkshire Barrier in 1842. In the most dramatic scene of *The House of Seven Gables*, Hepzibah and Clifford, desperate to escape the deathly airs of their ancestral house, board a locomotive that speeds them “onward like the wind.” Midway through their voyage, Clifford begins to wax poetic about the new mode of transportation to a fellow passenger: “These railroads [...] are positively the greatest blessing that the ages have wrought out for us. They give us wings; they annihilate the toil and dust of pilgrimage; they spiritualize travel! Transition being so facile, what can be any man’s inducement to tarry in one spot.” Of course, those who have read the novel know that Clifford has reasons other than wanderlust to get on the train, and there are hints of irony in his tone. But the broader purpose of the scene is to underscore that the mid-nineteenth-century expansion of the railroad effected an upheaval of worldview as well as a narrowing of distances. In the words of the novel’s narrator, who could just as easily be talking of the Berkshires as of Salem, “The spires of meeting-houses seemed set adrift from their foundations; the broad-based hills glided away. Everything was unfixed from its age-long rest, and moving at whirlwind speed in a direction opposite to their own.” Adrift from his own foundations while composing *The House of Seven Gables in Lenox*, Hawthorne here dramatizes the lives of those who literally see their social universe being whisked away.

Hawthorne’s *A Wonder-Book* has a more obviously Berkshire setting, though even in this work regional elements mix freely with borrowed literary sources and far-off worlds. The book’s premise is that a young Williams student, the aptly named Eustace Bright, recounts a series of classical myths to a group of children while roving the area around the Tappan estate. Like Melville in “The Piazza,” Hawthorne uses *A Wonder-Book* as an occasion to explore how local conditions stimulate the literary imagination. For instance, Eustace introduces “The Gold Touch” (the story of King Midas) by observing that, within a Lenox dell, the “touch of Autumn had transmuted every one of its green leaves into what resembled the purest gold.” The changing natural environment of the Berkshires becomes an allegory of the power of the American imagination to transmute classic stories into contemporary national tales. Like King Midas, who turns everything he touches into gold, the American author possesses the alchemical power to create a new national currency out of the myths of the past. When accused by the professorial Mr. Pringle of “meddling” with the ancients, Eustace indignantly replies, “an old Greek had no more exclusive right to [these myths] than a modern Yankee has. They are the common property of the world, and of all time. The ancient poets remodeled them at pleasure, and held them plastic in their hands; and why should they not be plastic in my hands as well.” In Hawthorne, too, we encounter the moral of The Mastheads, that creation necessarily entails recreation. “Bald-Summit: After the Story,” the final chapter of *A Wonder-Book*, provides contemporary evidence that Berkshire authors recognized themselves as part of a strong, identifiable literary community. From the summit of Bald Mountain, Eustace draws a virtual map of the Berkshire’s writers and intellectuals; in addition to The Mastheads authors Melville, Longfellow, and Holmes, he also refers to the historical romancer George P.R. James, the Unitarian clergyman Orville Dewey, and the unnamed Lenox writer Catharine Maria Sedgwick, “our most truthful novelist.” The chapter also includes a playful self-portrait of Hawthorne himself: “that silent man, who lives in the old red house, near Tanglewood Avenue.” The fraternal metaphor that Hawthorne employs to designate this community—they are all Eustace’s “brother-authors”—seeks to recruit these writers of different provenances and persuasions into a common intellectual pursuit. Hawthorne was notoriously shy, and he eventually tired of the Berkshires, as he had of Brook Farm and Concord (both of which received similar literary treatment). But the final chapter of *A Wonder-Book* remains a testament to his effort to create literary community, even if it achieved its fullest form only on the page.

Far more famous in their time than in ours, Pittsfield’s two summer residents, the poets Longfellow and Holmes, were a major draw for the city’s summer literary colony. Born into an illustrious Massachusetts family, Longfellow was by almost all accounts the most popular American poet of the nineteenth century, exemplifying the measured verse of the Boston area literary group known as the Fireside Poets. An epic poet, esteemed translator, and professor of modern languages (first at Bowdoin, then at Harvard), he first came to Pittsfield during his honeymoon in 1843. His wife’s family owned the Elm Knoll home in the city center, and over the next decade he visited the home several times. According to local accounts, the clock that sat in the foyer of Elm Knoll inspired Longfellow’s best-known Pittsfield poem, “The Old Clock on the Stairs,” and his periodic stays in Pittsfield influenced the writing of his 1849 novel, *Kavanagh, A Tale*, set in the small New England town of Fairmeadow.

Unlike Melville’s and Hawthorne’s texts, which revel in the specificities of Berkshire topography, Longfellow’s Pittsfield works draw a more universal message from country life. In *Kavanagh*, Longfellow enlists one of his characters, Mr. Churchill, to expound his view that “universality” of thought and language should take precedence over national or regional literary aims. In response to the novel’s Duyckinck-like editor, who advocates “a national literature commensurate with our mountains and our rivers,” Churchill insists, “Literature is rather an image of the spiritual world, not the physical... of the internal, rather than the external. Mountains, lakes, and rivers are, after all, only its scenery and decorations, not its substance and its essence.” In “The Old Clock on the Stairs,” Longfellow uses a traditional rhyme scheme and regular meter to distill an essential truth about time. Although “The Old Clock on the Stairs” alludes to its rural setting—“Somewhat back from the village street/Stand the old-fashioned country-seat”—the ticking of the “ancient timepiece” prompts a reflection on the basic frailty of human existence. The speaker reminds us that change is inevitable for mortal beings (“All are scattered now and fled/Some are married, some are dead”) and that only Time itself (“The horologe of Eternity” embodied by “the old clock on the stair”) is immune to this change. That the historical Berkshire clock continues to exist—currently housed in the visitor’s room of Arrowhead—would seem to confirm Longfellow’s insight.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. is perhaps best known today as the father of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., the founder of legal realism and the most influential Supreme Court justice of the early twentieth century. Yet he was both a key institution builder and celebrated author in his day, one of the founding sponsors of *The Atlantic Monthly Magazine* in 1857 and the author of the popular book of essays *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*. Like Melville, his family had owned property in Pittsfield, and he too visited frequently as a child. In 1843, Holmes inherited the 280-acre property Canoe Meadows, and five years later, he began construction on a summer villa he called “Holmesdale.” From 1848 to 1856, he spent “seven blessed summers” of his life at Canoe Meadows, where he produced a variety of essays, speeches, and occasional poems, including “Dedication of The Pittsfield Cemetery,” an extended meditation on death, nature, religion, and the importance of place. It resembles Longfellow’s “An Old Clock on the Stairs” not only in its themes but also in its conventional form, the heroic couplets (paired lines of rhyming iambic pentameter) that had long been a staple of English poetry. It also belongs to a venerated New England tradition of the topographical poem, which Lawrence Buell defines as a description of the prospect



of a specific regional locale (a mountain, an estate, a town, etc.) “embellished with historical, legendary, moralistic, and sometimes also personal reflections.” Holmes’s “Dedication” shares with the other poems in this tradition both its powerful emphasis on the continuities between the region’s past and present (“Here spread the fields that heaped their ripened store/Till the brown arms of Labor held no more” and its stereotypical nostalgia for the displaced Native American population (“The dark-haired maiden loved its grassy dells,/The feathered warrior claimed its wooded swells”). One feature that distinguishes it from the more straightforward examples of the genre is the precision with which it captures the vicissitudes of rural life. For instance, a line that begins with a celebration of the munificence of the natural environment, “Here sprang the healing herbs,” reverses course midway, leading to the sobering reminder that they “could not save/The hand that reared them from the neighboring grave.” The poem ultimately ends on a pious note, with a religious image of God gathering the burial ground’s inhabitants into his celestial fold. It’s a fitting homage to the city’s dead.

In 1844, Henry David Thoreau hiked to the top of Mount Greylock, and in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, he documented his Berkshire impressions. A lifelong resident of Concord, Thoreau is primarily known today for his iconic 1854 individualist manifesto *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. The excerpt detailing the night he spent on Williams College’s mountaintop observatory suggests that he may have had this Berkshire trip in mind when he embarked on his famous experiment in solitary living on the edge of Walden Pond. Indeed, the makeshift solutions he finds on top of Greylock for warmth (“as it grew colder towards midnight, I at length encased myself completely in boards” and company (“My only companions were the mice, which came to pick up the crumbs that had been left in those scraps of paper” anticipate similar moments in *Walden*. Thoreau’s return trip through the Berkshires also led him to many of the county’s most iconic destinations. In *Literary Luminaries of the Berkshires*, Bernard Drew uses Thoreau’s diaries along with contemporary accounts to show how the renowned essayist incorporated the Berkshires into his literary perspective, from his glimpse of a lake near the peak of Bald mountain (the scene of Eustace Bright’s mapping of Berkshire’s literary community) to his walk by Monument Mountain (the scene of Hawthorne’s and Melville’s later meeting).



Cheese and Violets

by Aaron Thier

One night, my wife came home from a meeting and asked me what I'd given our toddler for dinner. All he'd eaten was cheese and violets, and I said so. No small number of violets either, but something like two or three hundred individual flowers. Luckily, she approved of this meal on rhetorical grounds; the phrase "cheese and violets" was so appealing that she had no substantive objections.

I've been eating violets and other weeds for a long time. I grew up in the Berkshires, and I know what's out there. I might have tried to hide this from our son, so that he isn't tempted to eat every wild plant he sees, but he pays close attention, and he's inclined to eat every wild plant he sees anyway. I decided that the best thing was to teach him what I know, so that he grows up with a robust understanding of his environment.

And I think it's a good idea to do something similar for our Mastheads writers. After all, becoming a writer means sitting at a desk and writing, but it also means learning to *live* as a writer, by which I mean learning to endure humiliating privations. A writer who knows that he or she can find nourishment in an open field or flower garden has a clear advantage over the writer eating Ring Dings under a bare bulb. At least in the summertime.

Here's a warning: Don't eat anything you can't identify. Don't take my word for anything either. Etc.

And here's a handy Berkshire County foraging guide: Violets are gone by mid-June, but violet leaves are available all summer.

July is a good time for blackcaps, which are wild black raspberries. They grow at the margins of woodlands.

Wild blueberries are ripe too. You're more likely to find them on top of a mountain than outside your studio, but you never know.

Dandelion greens have gotten pretty bitter this time of year, but they're everywhere, and there's a puritan rigor about them that makes up for the unpleasant taste.

Goosefoot—also called lamb's quarters—grows in hot disturbed dusty places, like parking lots or construction sites. There's often a pink blaze at the base of each leaf. It's related to quinoa. Once I ate too much and burned my mouth. Maybe it's best to blanch it.

Purslane grows in hot disturbed places as well. It's a creeping succulent-like plant with a tart flavor and slimy finish.

Pigweed is wild amaranth. You need to cook it, but it actually tastes good.

Chickweed looks like clover. Maybe it's a kind of clover. It has bright green leaves, small yellow flowers, and tastes like sorrel. It also makes tart little beans, of which our son is particularly fond.

Day lilies are edible. They taste like sweet musty lettuce. The Mastheads, needless to say, strongly discourages the theft of garden plants, so I am simply making a neutral observation when I say that day lilies are a ubiquitous garden plant. The bulbs are supposed to be edible too, but I've never tried them.

If you want to get serious, eat some dock or sheep dock. At this time of year, both have a robust unpleasant flavor and the texture of something permanent.

This reminds me that dock is related to hosta, another popular and productive garden plant. Hostas are pretty good as long as they haven't flowered, and a writer *in extremis* could forage a large amount without anyone noticing. Once again, The Mastheads discourages the theft of garden plants. But there are crimes and there are crimes, and The Mastheads does not lack a sense of proportion.

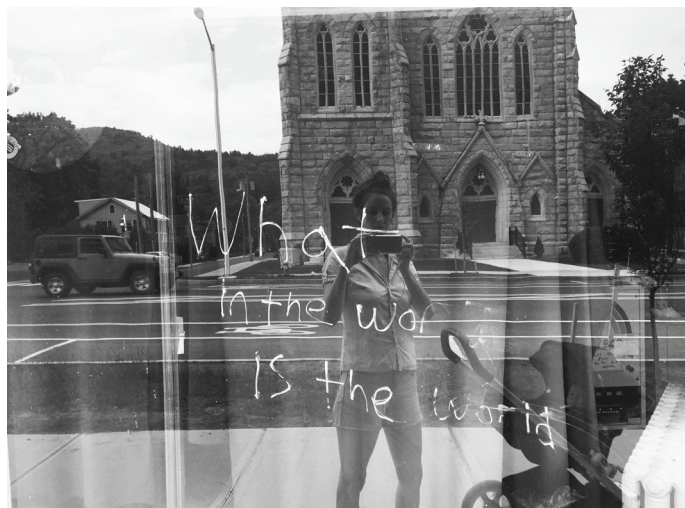
Young milkweed pods are supposed to be starchy and potato-like. I've never tried them.

Tea can be prepared from linden flowers. That's what Marcel is drinking when he has his Big Idea at the beginning of *In Search of Lost Time*.

And what about Big Ideas, come to think of it? An important function of this writer's residency, and any writer's residency, is to provide artists with the time and space they need to go looking for new ideas. I make the following claim as a writer—in the full knowledge that it may not be a real claim, or that it's reality, like a child's meal, may be purely rhetorical—but it seems true to me: Writing is a little bit like foraging.

Ideas, in any case, really are like weeds. They flourish in disturbed places or at the margins of things. You don't always know them when you see them. Sometimes they're bitter, and sometimes they're sweet, and some require careful preparation to make them palatable.

Aaron Thier is the author of three novels, *The Ghost Apple*, *Mr. Eternity*, and *Godspeed* (forthcoming 2018).



Walking the Baby Our Reflection

by Sarah Trudgeon

Is a cyborg shadow in endless unsentenced circles
Is smeared windows is all buckeye petals is all way terrain
Is still soft is In Memory Of is What in the World Is
The World is *your chemical cocktails in your brain*

Is this baby's first unlabeled months on Earth
Is a vague *desideratum* only is no Business Hours From
Is his hand his hand holds is a damp stranger
To him is *the deep and the face of the waters* is Open!
Come

Is the picture of the smell of the lilacs is a pane of *Gravity Waves are audible on Earth in the form of a chirp*
Is a bluebird is gravity no a bluebird is the elm is Cable TV
Is a Buried Gas Line is a Part-time dishwasher

Is Fresh Young Chicken is The Fire King
Is the *mimic canvas* again this afternoon this morning.

Sarah Trudgeon is the author of the chapbook *Dreams of Unhappiness* (Poetry Society of America). She is the Director of Education for *The Mastheads*.

Mastheads Fireside

The following poems were written by students in Mrs. Cutler's and Ms. Wagner's third grade class at Morningside Community School as part of Mastheads Fireside, our writing-in-schools program led by Sarah Trudgeon.

My Hideout

I go to the lower cabinet in the kitchen. Then I put the pots and pans out the cabinet. I like to go there at night and it is quiet in there. It is dark and black in there. I hear nothing but the sleeping thing (I don't know what name it is... whatever just forget about what it is.) What I do is... I sleep! (that was it... just sleep... that's it... all of the poem is done.)
-Jonathon Gonzalez

I go behind my dad's chair, quiet, pink, soft, wide, play games and ice cream No bad words No being rude to each other.

I watch TV in my closet, quiet, blue, soft, wide, play games and ice cream and drink soda and coffee.
-Lindsay Devitt

My Hideout

It is in an oven in the kitchen in my house. I cook my legs and body into bacon. There is no rules.
-Dominic Lannon

In the universe the world is like an ant. The mountain looks like it takes up half of the world and the other looks like it has tiny houses on it.
-Ronnie Sanford

My secret hiding spot is in a wolf den it's warm with the baby wolf its fur is the warmest fur I ever felt it is quiet and dark.
-Armani Santiago



Comic by Melissa Mendes

Melissa Mendes was born and raised in Hancock and now lives in Adams. She's working on her third graphic novel, *The Weight*, which you can read at mmmendes.com.