



### Greg Allendorf

Excerpt from *Beyond Greylock*, a poem

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As it fell through me, the river  
of it all became a name for me. I point only  
at the sky and mouth *beauty*, head turned away.  
Pages in me, crows in sweating cages. In my cape,  
underneath the crepe of all this hurt, the land  
of my body splits and splits again, my mind—  
don't even ask—it cascades and refuses—it crushes  
the gas and drives the soul right through the man.

\*

I remember all I ever needed know: you can't go on  
living the world as if it's you. You know that.  
You know the pain I saved up for, you know the sore  
I wore to the dance like an answer—you fingered it wide  
open, in fact, peered inside. What stunning luster;  
tectonic pain; the tick-tock of the censer.  
Pain like that, that's what we loved, long pain—  
we lost a face and drew another name.

\*

I will not be expunged. I am it all.  
I am the One and its troubling humor.  
I am the sweetness and the ant's glass jaw  
glued to it. Haven't lost it. May have dived  
into the disposal; the dove's eyes  
uncross and croak, *O, Lord, we love thee so*.  
I love the leaves and love to know them know.  
The school of turning leaves: what shadow learns.  
I sing over the ocean; croon my burns  
awake. *O, folding whore, O, racing heed*.

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As far as the drowning, the wound  
was a war and welkin. Homonym  
nimble and stable; stumbling harm,  
all night long. My tongue sang to my brain,  
*O, rhythm gone missing, O dead one,*  
*loved and dead one, off'ring unredeemed*.  
I awoke there—naught betokened dream;  
when I railed enough, I gathered steam;  
to be a sailor's never been so clean.  
I perish for the 100,000th time.

\*

I perish withal—that I promise.  
I cherish the hush in your voice.  
The arrogance leaves me completely;  
at least I had *once*, if not *twice*.  
Ardor is only an anchor; reason's a slug,

a shot boar. Drilling bones, closing thumbnail,  
horoscope lost on the stars.  
That anyone hears me is doubtful;  
I tilt my ear up to the owls;  
fill me, one lover, I'm empty—  
my belly feels hollow; it howls.

\*

Thistles lean like wild handwriting,  
hairline pain gone panicked down the trail;  
beyond the wood, between the trembling legs,  
no ambience asserts itself; no dearth;  
no scarcity—take that, thou mind:  
you are a servant—I wield you;  
I crush your love letters and love the earth,  
my every act dripping with green design.  
I sing to the stars; up floats my heart.

\*

It sears me, don't you see it? I am charred  
to the core—that's my seepage; my runnel,  
this bloody glass channel, subtle womb. The humming  
of my little mind, dead serious, dread funnel;  
agreeing without hearing; smiling; *fine; mmhmm;*  
*I'm fine I'm fine I'm fine*—stygian steam,  
mind-smoke rising up between my heart  
and the world that I would furnish with this art.

\*

Mine was a backward poetics.  
Everywhere were signs, but I bent them.  
I languished in the shadow of my gifts  
as if I were all beast. I grasped the grass,  
and clasped it to my breast: umbilical.  
Imbecile rotting; once my face. May-apples  
dissolving; my old eyes. So, so unwise  
was I, so insolent, so clueless, turning,  
pointing at dim letters in low light.

\*

Banner unbidden, no love blush; thing  
of humped anxiety, spare form capering  
unsteady beneath over-bitten trees,  
clutching something to its chest. A heart.  
It bleeds. The thing's shirt grows wetter,  
it walks on its hind legs, it harms itself  
there in the over and over  
dampness; it can't help but please.

\*

Subtle-sentient docent, I am roses.  
I am beautiful, self-replicating tears.  
I wonder at this stillness. I am nameless.  
I am a wiry moonbeam through the ears.

I am the thing and its shadow; I am its fear.  
I leap into the air and disappear.  
I cannot find my own face in the mirror  
anymore, and would report I do not care.

\*

And this is what I wondered of the stars,  
plane on plane on plane: aspirant pain,  
rippling wish to wither, now to grow.  
It wasn't that I didn't want to know,  
but my blood bounced. It sang un-shown.  
There were secrets crawling through my hair  
whispering to one another: *we're alone*.  
The planet earth has only one real bone;  
how sweetly she floats slowly through herself.

### Justin Boening

The Box

Once, long ago, though it could have been  
yesterday, I spotted a box bobbing  
(it was swaying) in a nearby inlet.  
I threw a line into the waters  
to fish it out with a green green net.  
Even sodden, wilting, it rattled  
when I shook it. It seemed important  
that it be opened, which is to say  
I couldn't open it; it unfolded  
as if by itself. I wanted to keep it  
by my side, close to me, in the middle  
of the boat (the boat was rocking),  
but I dropped it out of fear. I was afraid  
to peer inside, and yet I peered  
inside. And in it, at the bottom of it—  
I don't remember what was in it, but  
remember that it smelled of piss,  
fermented sugar, and that the wind  
when it entered it, sounded like an animal  
desperate to break free—which is to say  
that what was in it now seems  
beside the point, but that it was there  
or allowed itself to be seen, or that it wasn't  
for me but was mine, however briefly.  
I would give it away gladly to anyone  
who promised to give it to the living.  
But who can sure who the living are anymore.

### Mariam Rahmani

Excerpt from *Of the Dismembered Past*, a novel

Nima and I had agreed to rise early to make the most of our final day  
in Istanbul together. Our trip had been intentionally timed to avoid the  
weekend, when rates hiked, and I rose to the screaming of the hotel  
alarm in a good mood. Since my earliest schooldays, I had always liked  
Thursdays the most, for the anticipation of Friday and the weekend  
seemed even better than the fait accompli.

Packing the scattered items that had migrated outside my small  
suitcase over the course of the trip, including the toiletries that peopled  
the bathroom counter and the novel at my bedside, I showered, made  
myself up, and put on my favorite of the outfits I had planned, a pair of  
flattering, dark jeans so new I had not yet washed them, so that I pre-  
pared myself for the likelihood that the indigo would bleed at the mercy  
of was sure to be a humid day, and a billowing top, in silk, the color of the  
Platonic ideal of lipstick, realized on earth perhaps most perfectly in the  
Qing dynasty's sacrificial red. For me, it had always been best for last, a  
motto that depressed me more, the more tenaciously I put it to practice.

After we had checked out, leaving our bags, probably foolishly, in the  
care of the distracted teen manning the front desk, Nima insisted that  
we forego the hotel's sorry continental breakfast in favor of returning to a  
café we had tried and liked one afternoon.

As I was chasing the meal with a second pot of tea, Nima handed me  
a gift. It was a book, clearly old, covered in a dusty skin of navy fabric. I  
opened it. The title was in Arabic script: it was a copy of Maulana, of the  
Divan, but translated into Turkish, evidently printed just shortly before  
Ataturk switched his nation to Cyrillic, cleaving a canyon in the country's  
literary history with its Islamicate past stranded on the other side.

I began to flip through the copy, my fingers quickly landing on a sec-  
tion in the belly of the book. A small square hole the depth of two or three  
hundred of the tissue thin pages had been carved out of the poetry, a bit  
messily so that the edges of the cavity were uneven. A plain velvet box sat  
inside. I glanced at Nima, who was staring at me without a word.

I extracted the box, opening it. A delicate ring set with a trio of small  
diamonds winked at me eagerly.

I smiled, locking eyes with Nima. Still he said nothing.

There was a scroll of paper tucked into the hollow of the ring. I unrav-  
eled it. "Dear Tima," it read, printed along a single line, "will you marry  
me?"

Drawing a pen from my bag, I turned the note over, scribbled some-  
thing down, and pushed it toward him. He read it and let out a laugh.  
"Of course."

As much as the proposal pleased me, it had not been, really, a  
surprise. Before leaving for Istanbul, I had begun to suspect that Nima  
had spoken to my parents, for my father had failed to badger me about  
making things official last we'd spoken. This was our routine, and the  
omission was conspicuous, even more so because he had concluded our  
conversation by asking after Nima and declaring, in what I now saw as a  
preemptive offer of permission, the commonplace, "he's a good kid."  
Nima and I walked back to the hotel, hand in hand, an intimacy we

had not allowed ourselves since that evening in Oxford, after our fight.  
Nina, evidently, had explicitly demanded that we call her as soon as the  
engagement was official, but I dutifully insisting on phoning my parents  
first.

I could hear how happy they were, Baba especially, who was formal  
and flowery, wrapping his joy in an everyday poetry: "May you grow old at  
one another's feet." He hadn't seemed so pleased since I had been admit-  
ted to MIT. Maman wished us everlasting happiness then said good-bye,  
conscious of the cost of calling long distance and not wanting to incon-  
venience Nima, whose phone was against my ear. Nima's parents offered  
a few of the same lines before Nina took the phone, shrieking in joy as  
if she were the one freshly affianced, with the exaggerated reaction of a  
reality TV actress, a reaction that pleased me, as if Nina could take the  
burden of expressing my joy in a way I myself knew not how.

"Tima, I'm so happy," she said in a more even tone before we hung  
up. "Now we'll really be sisters."

The ring fit astonishingly well, so that I began to wear it immedi-  
ately, without any of the usual wait for a jeweler's adjustments. I was  
unaccustomed to the feeling of the metal around the only of my fingers  
throughout the years to have been consistently bare, so that the ring was  
always in my sight, unlike my other jewelry, which I hardly noticed I so  
often slept and showered with various pieces, occasionally losing things  
this way like one of the two ruby studs with which my parents had had my  
ears pierced as an infant. This conspicuousness irritated as much as it  
pleased me, for I was plagued with the nagging thought, which I hated to  
indulge—it seemed so petty in the face of how touched I had been by the  
proposal—that I couldn't have imagined a less appropriate ring, a piece  
of jewelry less suitable to my personality. Unimpressed by the pallor of  
platinum, which my mother and aunts all greatly preferred, considering it  
classy, but which I considered unbecoming against my olive skin, I never  
worn anything but yellow gold. Had Nima never noticed? What about  
Nina, my friend? Surely she had approved of the token, likely even helped  
pick it out?

I felt guilty for being so materialist, imagining what my father, who  
had warned me against the evils of the carnal soul through all those  
years of Sufi poetry readings, would say: the ring was mere metal and  
stone, no more. So I bit my tongue, faithfully wearing the ring around my  
finger even after Nima and I had parted and I had returned to England  
via Lebanon to commence the second year of my Master's education,  
allowing the white stone to be suspended day and night so close to my  
person—as was expected of me and as might have, had it taken another  
form, truly brought me pleasure.

### Justin Boening

#### Paradise When Almost Everyone Lived in Paradise

Paradise never had enough chairs and remained resistant to installing traffic lights at even the most dangerous intersections in Paradise.

All about Paradise there were women dressed up to look like our mothers, women who spent their entire lives on the streets of Paradise, never returning to their families or friends, always reminding us, without ever saying a word, who we could be in Paradise.

For many years, Paradise was a set for a TV game show called Paradise, where people would be left alone in a white halogen-lit room where they would be asked to wait for their cue so they could finally walk onto the set of Paradise—of course, few of them heard their cue. Inside every house in Paradise was another, smaller house inside it, one with fewer windows, that had less room for us, and felt more inviting than the houses we lived in in Paradise.

In Paradise, people talked about the war as if it could end any day in Paradise.

In Paradise, we were the most beautiful humans on the planet—we were alone.

And once, under a hunter's moon, that cast Paradise in a burnt auburn glow, the municipal lake went white, like the milk we all loved to drink in Paradise, and several older residents walked into it, carrying one or two of their favorite things from home—a cob pipe, a hand thrown mug, a few bamboo spoons. And though it didn't happen all at once, we realized, as the last of them were fully submerged, out of view, what we'd gotten so right with Paradise

8

### John Babbott

*Excerpt from Topaz, a novel set 500 years from now in an unforgiving California landscape. Human beings are few, and the life-limiting resource is water.*

The farther away they got from the old world the more the lines formerly existing between things blurred. Things became less known and more the same, the world monotone, the possibilities of Ayla's life nearly completely flattened to present a very small number of possibilities stemming from a very small number of inputs, because Ayla lived at the edge of a desert that threatened to swallow her up, alone with her two brothers, and the only thing she had was her violin.

Ayla did not know how to write or read, but she knew how to memorize, and after she found the violin and learned what it would take to keep playing it until she lost the thing, broke it, or herself died, she memorized the list of things she needed to learn about, find, or figure out how to make.

She had found the violin in the back of a closet. The violin was in a black case and lay cast to the side and on the floor of the ransacked closet was a half-used box of shotgun shells, the cardboard disintegrating.

She opened it up.

YAMAHA

She was four.

It sort of played. She made Erasmus explain everything he could find out about it, and she began memorizing the list, thing by thing.

But before she could make the list she had to commit to memory the things she learned from Erasmus, in the order he found them, as she sat in the makeshift library in the living room and Erasmus climbed up and down the tall stepladder picking through the stacks of books, setting aside all the music he could find (the owner of the library had been the owner of the violin, probably, and they had been stacked in with music), and then settling in on the floor to look through what he'd pull down, and very slowly, frowning, he would begin, with protracted silences collecting in between, to deliver translated sentences for her, ones he'd invented from the raw material of the ones he'd consumed, setting them down for her one by one, very carefully, like glass jewels, his little-boy voice soft and solemn.

The violin  
Has a swan-bill head on the bow  
It produces ringing tones  
From its spruce top,  
The maple ribs and back.  
Here is the peg-box and scroll  
The ebony fingerboard  
And animal hide glue for the joints.  
A violin-repairer is a luthier.  
This is nacre purfling around the decorative edge of  
the top plate.  
Let me see yours.  
The neck is maple,  
The bridge is maple,  
The sound is the transmitted string-vibration to the

9

body.

Inside is the sound post, but I like soul post.  
Oh right.  
The bow.  
The bow is made of horse hairs.

Ayla would ask a question.

Then Erasmus would rise to his feet and start hunting through the books for the meaning of *horse*.

She would have to figure out a whole lot of things if she was going to be able to keep playing it, because you have to learn a whole lot of things in order to become a luthier.

Rosin was one. Rosin was the amber-colored block of soaplike crystal she rubbed onto the bow. She started with a sizeable block of it, about as big as Frank's fist. But she needed to find out how to make *rosin*, *sap collected from certain types of pines, eastern pines mostly, pines in places that are not here*, and so she used the pines that were here. They were dried-up and seldom dripped but she tapped them and after small breaths of rain the trees would flow a bit and she collected tiny bits of resin from the scored trees, not too much, had to keep them healthy, and she brought it home and put it on the stove to melt it because in order to make rosin you have to burn off the terpenes.

Strings were easier because all she had to do was learn to twist gut from the dried intestines of antelope, and they had plenty of those. String

was made of gut.

But she had a slight problem because she didn't have any horses. That one had taken a while longer to solve, but she got it figured out pretty quick, because she had made Frank grow his hair longer, because his hair was closest to that of a horse. Her hair was no good. Her hair was too soft and it didn't catch enough on the strings. She had tried using gut, but gut on gut made it sound like she was sawing wood, not playing the violin. Fortunately there were two bows, and after half a year Frank's hair was long enough. It had already been pretty long. She used the other bow until it wore out and then she switched completely to the red one, which, when she rosined it right, worked about as well as the first, though the sound was softer, and she'd resigned herself to that, but in the third year of playing the violin a huge animal appeared at the edge of the desert, nothing like a deer, big shaggy dark head and enormous body, horns, covered in black wool. It walked out of the desert to the aqueduct and drank and then shortly died, and Frank had brought the thing piece by piece to the house and cured it and Ayla found she liked buffalo, a deeper flavor than the gamey tang of venison or hardtack antelope that did something to disguise the magnesium taste of the alkali salts Frank used when he dried meat. They still had the hide. There was plenty of hair.

Animal hide glue, replacement woods—manzanita for hard, jack-pine for soft—resin and gut and hair and keeping the violin protected, inside the case, out of the heat, any time she wasn't playing it, which was very seldom, except when she was asleep.

11

### Maria Pinto

*Excerpt from novel-in-progress*

*"And then I knew that the voice  
of the spirits had been let in—  
as intense as an epileptic aura—  
and that no longer would I sing  
alone."*

— Anne Sexton

"Get up, you useless child. I'm tired to see you in this state," is what Alette thought she heard, in her mother's honey-sweet voice, that tone Manman used to chide gently. If the voice was just aural exhaust from a receding dream, Alette wanted to absorb it into her lungs. She took a deep breath. Sleep was still within reach. She rolled onto her stomach and buried her face in the pillow.

"Get up, now, and don't let me have to say it once more." Unmistakable this time and in the room with her for sure: that voice with its uniquely Caribbean way of being both hard and soft in one breath. An uncle once told Alette she hadn't inherited whatever Haitian quality brought the hard and soft aspects of a woman into harmony. That uncle was dead now, but what he said still lived in her, growing like a well-fed parasite. Words were so much more durable than flesh. She grunted and pushed onto her back.

"Get up!"

The slant and intensity of the light on Alette's eyelids told her it was midmorning. She started to reach for her bedside table, eyes still closed, when it came back to her, again, that this was not her apartment bedroom, so her phone was not within reach. In fact, it had been confiscated a little under a month ago. Even if the phone had been there, though, the fact remained that she could not have recorded her mother's voice with it, as she'd intended to do, since her mother was three months dead.

"Alette, come on. The simple girl is at the nurse station today, the one who likes you. She let you sleep even though you're supposed to be at 'group,' see? Get up and talk to her. Make her to discharge you. I can't stand to watch you living here like a marginal anymore." Alette's eyes were shut so tight the space between her eyebrows ached. The voice had stolen those seconds of unpersonhood she usually enjoyed before coming fully conscious after sleep. She mourned that end to vagueness. And now, even the lithium fog was lifting just enough that her mind could feel the sharpest edges of reality but not its details, not quite. How many seconds after she heard the words "get up" had she known again, certain as the thump of her pulse in her throat, that she was still at Oakwood Psychiatric Hospital? That it had been mere weeks since she'd tried to kill herself, and that only months separated whatever moment she was living now from news of the quake, the flight down, the ruins?

She opened her eyes to outrun those images before they could fully form and there, sure as trouble and standing over her bed, was a thing that looked as well as sounded exactly like her mother. To think Alette had been worried she was forgetting the woman's face! There were the full cheeks and luminous skin, the broad shoulders, the selfsame, yellowed eye-whites and air of permanent amusement. This thing's solidity in the room was like the shock of leaping into too-cold water, head first. Its form suffered none

12

of the fadedness Alette would have expected. It was more real than real. If not for the powerful mood stabilizers at work in her bloodstream, Alette would have screamed.

"Look at you. You're so full of drugs, and wrong-colored, and too skinny. But I can't blame you for not eating their nasty food. You need some *mabi*, get your appetite back." The thing gave Alette another once-over and smiled, showing the gap between its front teeth. "Too skinny up top, but I bet the your donkey is still as fat as ever." Alette frowned, drawing her legs up and hugging her knees. "I long to make you laugh, to see you smile," it said, softly.

*Alright, enough*, Alette thought. She needed to get up and get the day going. There were big moves ahead of her this morning and here she was, still in bed, stuck in her head, sculpting a phantom out of grief.

But it spoke again.

"You're wasting time in here. Precious time that could be used to start a family while you're still young. If you had your own family to look after, you would never be in here. All you have is work. You're going to break your mother's heart."

Alette almost laughed. Even in death, even at the beginning of her long visit with eternity, her mother had found a way, through this thing, to voice her desire for grandchildren. Never mind that Alette lacked almost everything it took to make a family.

She couldn't manage a laugh, so she said, "My mother's dead."

She was gratified that the words came easily, tearlessly; her mother was dead, even if this thing's impersonation was inspired. She thought of her mother's actual broken down heart, how the substance of it still existed, was decomposing in a catacomb in Petionville among much of her extended family. The thing drew closer, loomed over her. Against the white background of the room, it looked like the first cutout in a collage.

Alette forced her eyes all the way open despite her terror. She wanted to drink in this likeness of her mother's body intact, since for weeks she'd been helpless against the memory of the remains she'd had to identify at the morgue. At the same time, she was horrified by the sophistication of the parody. How was it that she could be surrounded by her mother's signature scent of orange blossom and sweat, as if the woman were really there?

Alette looked up at the fluorescents on the ceiling. She had planned to leave the hospital today, to somehow charm her way out. Dr. Miller had said he wouldn't be in and he was the major barrier to exit; he'd taken a special interest in her "case" because his adopted son was Haitian. For reasons unknown to Alette, who had never possessed a love of poetry, he'd called her his Admirer of the Anne Sexton method. It would be easier to escape without his particular surveillance. How annoying that her mind should pick this moment to give her a legitimate reason why she should absolutely stay put.

**Mastheads Roundtable with Lawrence Buell**

On Monday, July 31st, Lawrence Buell, Powell M. Cabot Professor of American Literature Emeritus at Harvard University, participated in the final Mastheads Roundtable, wrapping up The Mastheads residency program for the summer of 2017.

I'm delighted to join this final roundtable of this summer's Mastheads series on the eve of Herman Melville's 198th birthday, August 1. In fact our two authors' birthdays just happen to book-end your whole program, since Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on the 4th of July.

I'll talk tonight about the historic meeting between Melville and Hawthorne: its significance for them, for the cultural history of the Berkshire region, and for the whole history of American literature.

The two men were near neighbors for just a little more than a year—Melville based in Pittsfield, Hawthorne in Lenox, visiting back and forth a half dozen times while Melville labored through his breakthrough novel *Moby-Dick* and Hawthorne completed his second major novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*. Afterwards they corresponded occasionally but saw each other seldom. Nonetheless, the friendship left very large marks on both, especially Melville.

It began a little south of here, on August 5, 1850, on an excursion up Monument Mountain by a bevy of literary dudes—writers, publishers, and other literati. Legend has it—apocryphal, but too good not to be true—that the two found shelter from a rainstorm in a cave and talked intensely for hours, thereby launching the friendship.

Whatever the truth, Hawthorne, the repercussions were immediate and far-reaching. Hawthorne, amazingly for him, impulsively invited Melville for a several days visit. Melville, no less impulsively, set at once to composing the most influential, over-the-top enthusiastic essay ever written on Hawthorne's work ("Mosses from an Old Manse"), and launched into a nine-month overhaul of his own book from a fairly straightforward whaling narrative to the masterpiece we know, dedicating *Moby-Dick* to Hawthorne "in token of my admiration for his genius." Hawthorne was astonished and thrilled both by Melville's dedication and by his essay, which in turn retrospectively suggests how Melville's excited reading of Hawthorne as a prober of the somber reaches of the moral imagination inspired his own work.

From our standpoint here tonight, a special fascination about the historic convergence of the two authors is its significance as a microcosm of and culminating episode in the Berkshire region's emergence as a cultural center. This began to happen in the second quarter of the 19th century, thanks at first especially to such local talent as William Cullen Bryant (nicknamed the American Wordsworth) and Catherine Maria Sedgwick (this country's first major woman novelist), but then through extensive cross-pollination of literary and artistic talent from the northeast's two major cultural centers, Boston and New York. The demography of the Monument Mountain excursion was typical in this respect. So too the relation between Hawthorne, the Salemite with predominantly coastal ties and experience, and Melville, whose geographical home base was the Hudson River watershed from New York to Albany. Melville can even be thought of as a voluntary Berkshire adoptee. He'd known Pittsfield from boyhood—one wide-eyed city-slicker friend claimed he knew "every stone and tree"—and was about to buy Arrowhead and settle in for some years. Backing each of the two authors were the leading metropolitan literary publishers, Harper's of New York for Melville (although later on they ditched him, alas) and Ticknor and Fields of Boston for Hawthorne. Hawthorne's Lenox landlords were themselves microcosms of inter-

regional convergence: Bostonian Caroline and New Yorker Arthur Tappan, now chiefly remembered in these parts as the owners of the grounds of present-day Tanglewood, on the downhill outskirts of which still sits the modest "workman's cottage" where the Hawthornes sojourned in 1850-1.

For students of American literature, however, the Melville-Hawthorne meeting and Berkshire's cultural emergence will always seem preeminently important as part of a pivotal moment in the nation's literary history. American literature as an actor on the world stage, so to speak, was only a generation old. Only in the late 18-teens and 20s did Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper become our first international literary hits. Professional authorship was still a perilous pursuit, as both Hawthorne and Melville were acutely aware—one of the many bonds between them. Only during the second quarter of the century did literary activity and publishing in the U. S. evolve decisively beyond a scene of dispersed activity across various east-coastal regional centers. Only then did Boston and New York become major literary centers, and only then did robust networking among the players associated with those centers begin to happen. All this explains why, when "American lit." as a field of study started to take shape in the mid-1900s, that mid-19th century moment became dubbed "the American Renaissance"—although "naissance" would have been more like it, since there hadn't been anything remotely like it on this side of the Atlantic ever before. And of the conjuncture and cross-pollination of authors and publishing media from different urban centers, the Melville-Hawthorne relationship and Berkshire's emergence were and are key defining examples.

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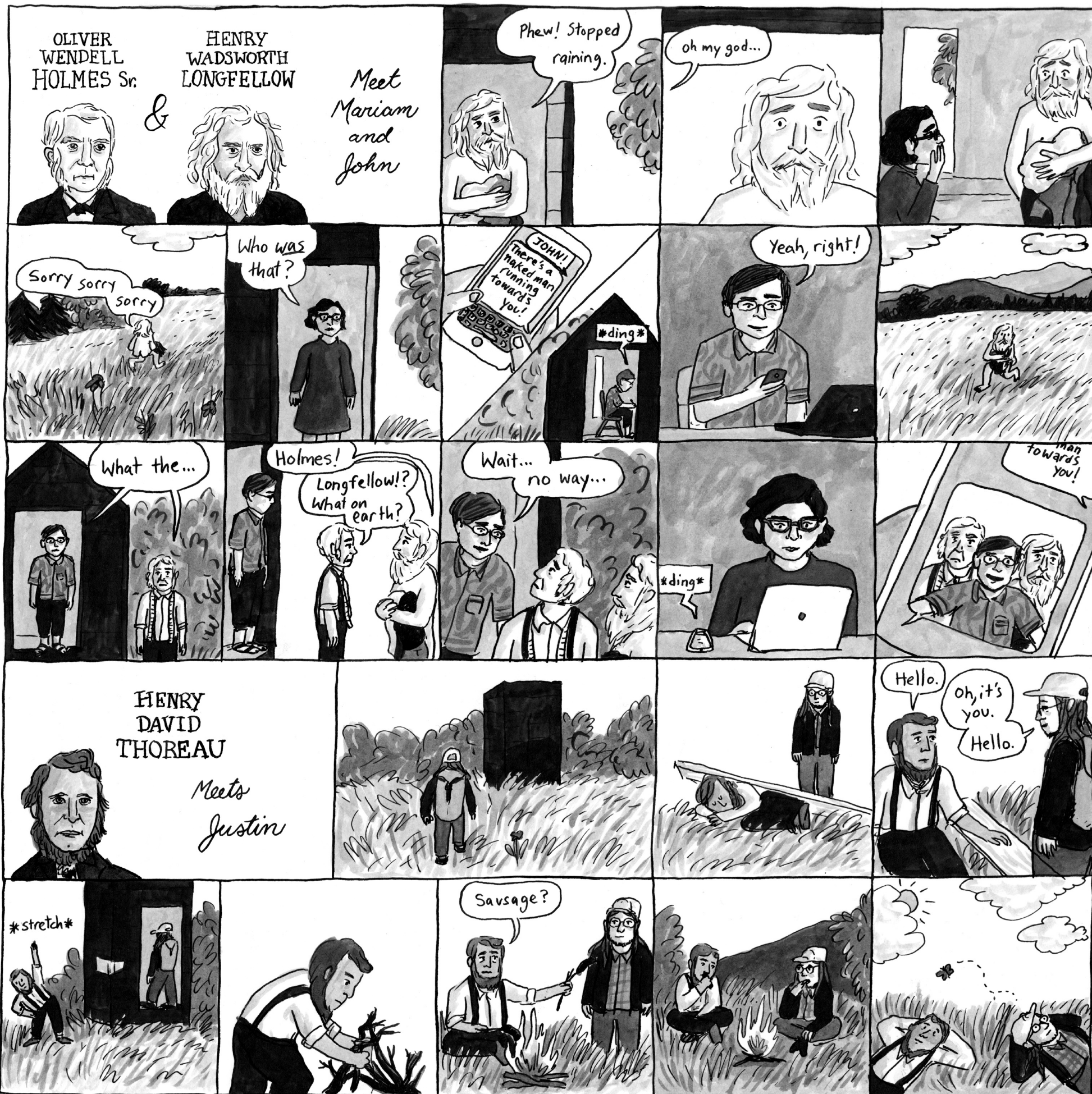
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Excerpt from the introduction to The Mastheads Reader, "The Past in the Present: Pittsfield's 19th-Century Literary Legacy" by Jeffrey Lawrence, Assistant Professor of English at Rutgers University and Director of Research for The Mastheads.

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 departure from Pittsfield in the early 1860s marked the end of an illustrious period in Berkshire's literary history. But the county, so fertile for the American literary imagination, continued to attract writers and intellectuals over the next century and a half. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Edith Wharton lived in Lenox for several years, and her 1911 novella *Ethan Frome* takes place in a fictional town in the Berkshires (Wharton's actual home, "The Mount," remains a popular tourist destination). The historian, novelist, and social theorist W.E.B. Du Bois grew up in Great Barrington in the late-nineteenth century, and James Weldon Johnson wrote his famed poetry collection *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* in the same town in 1927. Sinclair Lewis, Grace Metalious, Patricia Highsmith, and Norman Mailer are among the many celebrated American novelists who spent time in the Berkshires. The county has also made several cameos in major works of American fiction, including Thomas Pynchon's masterpiece *Gravity's Rainbow*, whose protagonist Tyrone Slothrop comes from a long line of Berkshire Slothrops that made their home in the (fictional) town of Mingeborough. In developing Slothrop's biography, America's most renowned postmodern author rendered sly homage to Hawthorne, who wrote in *The House of the Seven Gables* about Pynchon's real-life ancestors (the "Pyncheon family" from Salem). In a dizzying meeting of fiction and history, a mid-twentieth-century character recalls his family's Berkshire lineage to allude to a nineteenth-century Berkshire author whofictionalized that character's creator's own New England line. **Here's hoping that The Mastheads reader leads you onto a similarly adventurous path into Pittsfield: its history, its literature, and its present—which is to say, what all of us make of it today.**



**What's next?**  
The Mastheads studios will move to MASS MOCA through October 31 - book a visit!  
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