Covenant and Republic: Historical Romance and the Politics of Puritanism. Philip Gould (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 256 pp. $54.95)

In this thoughtful and impressively wide-ranging study of American literature and culture, Philip Gould investigates the cultural politics of historical memory in the early American republic, specifically the historical literature of Puritanism during "the time between the end of the American Revolution and the 1830s" (p. 7). By situating historical writings about Puritanism in the cultural forces of republicanism and liberalism, the study reconsiders the emergence of the historical romance in the 1820s, especially through the canonical works of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish* and *The History of King Philip's War,* as well as of "the era's most popular historical romances" (p. 63), Lydia Child's *Hobomok* (1824) and Catherine Sedwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827), and many other historical fictions by popular writers whose work has only recently been recovered. It should be noted that the genre of historical fiction emerged during the 1820s in the context of "an already thriving literary industry of historiography." At this period, for example, eighty-five percent of the "nation's best sellers" were "books of history" (p. 9). The reason behind such an impressive proliferation of written history was "the rise of public education" at this period and the need "to inculcate virtue in republic citizens." Hence, as Gould demonstrates, "historical fiction" indeed "instructed readers in republican behavior" (pp. 9–10). For, as Charles Goodrich claimed in his History of the United States, 1829, "the proper end of all reading is to make 'good men and good citizens'" (p. 91).

Through a sophisticated analysis of historical fiction in this period, the study greatly contributes to the recovery of this literary period by offering a persuasive new account of just what is at stake when one reads literature of and about the past. Claiming the historical romance "of the 1820s is the site of various intersections between literary and political cultures, a place where literary didacticism, historical memory, and post-Revolutionary politics converge" (p. 19), Gould's study clearly illuminates how "the 'nation' was engineered by bourgeois and aristocratic New Englanders through the agency of historical memory" (p. 14). And by positioning "the subject of Puritanism within the early republic's cultural politics of citizenship," the author indeed succeeded in demonstrating how much the "discourse of Puritanism" pervaded "the bourgeois and aristocratic ranks of the early republic" (p. 211).

Yet here lies a basic problem. For in spite of Gould's innovative use of a broad range of primary literary sources and his excellent command of secondary literature, his study may be understood in fact as a clear example of Puritan New England imperialism—the way in which American history as well as American literature, or the American historical romance, during the first decades of the nineteenth century came to be viewed as a regional history writ large. In such a way the author is indeed open to the serious charge of totalizing early national culture as the literal history of New England writ large.

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