



Monumental Anxieties: Homoerotic Desire and Feminine Influence in 19-th Century U.S. Literature

Scott S Derrick

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Scott Derrick has written an original book that contributes significantly to current revisions of the nineteenth-century American literary tradition's representation of gender and sexuality. His interpretation of feminist, lesbian-feminist, and gay issues in nineteenth-century American literature as complementary enlarges our historical understanding and helps build the coalition politics needed in these areas."-John Carlos Rowe, University of California, Irvine

Recent gender-based scholarship on nineteenth-century American literature has established male authors' crucial awareness of the competition from popular women writers. And critical work in gay studies and queer theory has stressed the importance in canonical American literature of homoerotic relations between men, even before "homosexuality" became codified at the end of the century. Scott Derrick draws on these insights to explore the ways in which male authors struggle to refigure literature-historically devalued as feminine-as a masculine and heterosexual enterprise. Derrick focuses on scenes of compositional crisis that reveal how male identity itself is at risk in the perils and possibilities of being a male author in a feminized literary marketplace.

He suggests that traditionally valued texts by Hawthorne, Poe, James, Sinclair, and Crane have at their core combustible four-sided conflicts between feminine identifications and masculine distancings, homoerotic longings and homophobic dreads, conflicts which are largely determined by domestic ideals of male and female roles within the nineteenth-century family. The negotiation of such conflicts is controlled by the nature of fiction writing, which both frees the imagination to explore forbidden fantasies and harnesses the imagination to public understandings of the proper form and content of fiction. Thus *Monumental Anxieties* also contributes to recent debates about the social shaping of contemporary homosexuality and to the history of American masculinity.

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