

Introduction

IN KEEPING with our best traditions, this issue contains two essays on Herman Melville, one by our newest editor Thomas L. Dumm, and the other by Sterling Stuckey, one of our earliest contributors whose work appears in Jules Chametzky and Sidney Kaplan's *Black and White in American Culture: An Anthology from the Massachusetts Review*, published by the University of Massachusetts Press in 1969. That questions of race still figure so prominently in the new essays should remind us that however the terms of discourse have evolved over the decades, the fundamental question of America's legacy of the Middle Passage remains unanswered. The "white event" that Tom Dumm mentions may be an encounter with a great albino whale, or it may be coterminous with the nation itself. America itself may be the "white event."

And it is no accident that this issue contains two poems by Brian Turner, the first veteran of the second Iraq War to be published here. For while one eye stares wonderingly at history, the second gazes at what that history has wrought: the continuing prosecution of the "white event" in that place I heard a National Guardsman, veteran of two tours of duty there, refer to as "The Sandbox." I have seen the faces of Americans at the gas pumps moan at rising prices as if they were the spiking temperatures of a fever. But this is no onset of a new infection; rather the debilitating effects of a chronic sickness. As Valerie Martin writes in *Property*, her great novel of race, "It was the lie at the center of everything, the great lie we all supported, tended, and worshipped as if our lives depended upon it, as if, should one person ever speak honestly, the world would crack open and send us all tumbling into a flaming pit."

David Lenson, for the editors