poets, Vendler's favorites seem to be Heaney and Graham; you will no sooner finish her essays about them than make your way to a bookstore.

And that may be the great achievement of all Vendler's criticism: its ease, assurance, and clarity, set in a bedrock of careful scholarship, persuade diffident readers to tease out the soul's sense beneath a poem's surface puzzle.

—*James Morris*

EMERSON AMONG THE ECCENTRICS:
A Group Portrait.
By Carlos Baker. Introduction and epilogue by James R. Mellow. Viking. 672 pp. $34.95

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a stern critic of preachers. After hearing Barzillai Frost, the junior associate of Ezra Ripley at the First Church at Concord, preach an interminable, abstract sermon during a snowstorm in March 1838, Emerson wrote in his journal: "He had no one word intimating that ever he had laughed or wept, was married or enamoured, had been cheated, or voted for, or chagrined. If he had ever lived or acted we were none the wiser for it." It was in response to the aptly named Reverend Frost that Emerson declared that "the true preacher deals out to the people his life,—life passed through the fire of thought." This was also Emerson's standard for the writer, the teacher, the scholar, and the politician. He expected the same immediacy and vividness from his intercourse with friends—even when it took the inspiriting form of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "hospitable silence."

In this posthumous biography, the late Carlos Baker, professor of English at Princeton University, brings the "fire of thought" to life through Emerson's pursuit of friendship. Despite an occasional cranky misanthropy and a persistent resistance to intimacy, Emerson over and over embraced friendship's risk and vulnerability as the necessary companion to solitude.

Emerson Among the Eccentrics (an unfortunate title that condescends to its subject) puts Emerson at the center of the lives of the prominent men and women of letters and ideas of the period 1830–80. Baker's potentially dreary decade-by-decade organization is relieved, at times brilliantly, by bringing Emerson's friends to the forefront. This is a biography of intertwined lives: Emerson and Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Bronson Alcott, Nathaniel and Sophie Hawthorne, Jones Very, Henry David Thoreau, Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, and, in the farther reaches of the circle, Walt Whitman, John Brown, and even Abraham Lincoln. These and other figures in the 19th-century pantheon maintain vital connections, if not always friendship, through thick and thin, agreement and disagreement, proximity and distance, joy and sorrow.

Baker's narrative shows how Emerson's presence and correspondence, those twin complements to his lectures and essays, held this informal congregation together. Reviewing Emerson's second book of essays for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, Margaret Fuller wrote: "History will inscribe his name as a father of his country, for he is one who pleads her cause against herself." As this tribute suggests, Emerson sought to discern the singular American nature of his fellow citizens' shared language and technology (the railroad is a theme running through this biography), as well as their ideals and compromises—whether personal, aesthetic, political, or moral. Emerson admired Lincoln as an apotheosis of the vernacular American, a man who "grew according to the need." Like Lincoln's, Emerson's struggle for union and unity was both private and public: toward the end of his life, when mind and memory were failing, the lecture platform was as much home to him as his study.

Carlos Baker died in 1987, before he could write an introduction pondering "Emerson's philosophy of friendship." According to James R. Mellow, a biographer in his own right and the author of the book's introduction and epilogue, death also prevented Baker from writing " 'Exuent Omnes,' presumably a summary closure to the lives of the remaining cast of characters." Notwithstanding Baker's origi-

nal slant on Emerson and his friends, there is a diminished quality about the book's waning chapters, all the more poignant because they describe Emerson's waning powers. The book also contains some regrettable errors: "Come live with me, and be my love" is Christopher Marlowe's line, not John Donne's. And the opening chapters on Emerson's family seem flat and out of kilter with the rest. A more active editorial hand, and a more ambitious epilogue, would have helped. Nonetheless, *Emerson Among the Eccentrics* will be an essential book. Its inspired reconfiguration of oft-quoted materials and anecdotes shows that friendship was the compost for the New England soil from which sprang Emerson's contribution to American life and letters.

—John F. Callahan

Contemporary Affairs

THE BAMBOO NETWORK:
How Expatriate Chinese Entrepreneurs Are Creating a New Economic Superpower in Asia.
By Murray Weidenbaum and Samuel Hughes. Free Press. 264 pp. $24

Numbering roughly 40 million, the ethnic Chinese of Asia who live outside China—in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia—produce some $600 billion in goods and services. This would be a respectable gross national product for a nation with that population. But the overseas Chinese are not a nation; they are a diverse diaspora. So their future role, both within the region and internationally, is bound to be complex. These ethnic Chinese are at ease neither in their countries of residence nor in China. To survive, they have adapted and yielded—like the proverbial bamboo, which "bends but does not break."

The authors of this study are specialists in business and economics: Weidenbaum (the first chairman of President Reagan's Council of Economic Advisors) is professor of economics and director of the Center for the Study of American Business at Washington University in St. Louis; Hughes is a research fellow at the center. So, not surprisingly, most of their attention is devoted to the overseas Chinese as economic actors. Histories of some of the great Chinese fortunes are presented in excellent profiles, from Li Kashing's Cheung Kong Group in Hong Kong to the Chia family's Charoen Pokphand in Thailand. The authors show how each group has acquired certain traits in response to the overseas environment: complex corporate structures that ensure secrecy and conceal assets, family dominance and close informal bonds of trust with other Chinese, and careful adjustment to political realities. The last includes cooperation with powerful non-Chinese—notably in Indonesia, where members of the military regularly front for Chinese entrepreneurs.

Now that mainland China is emerging as a field of economic activity, one might expect the overseas Chinese to have an easier time of it there. But, ironically, their adaptive skills are also needed in their "homeland." Most of the Asian states where they now live are far more advanced than China in constitutional government, rule of law, and sanctity of person (in China, extortions and kidnappings of overseas Chinese businessmen are not uncommon). In these respects, the environment of China is quite similar to that of the entrepreneurs' adopted countries 30 years ago.

Yet, by the same token, the experience of the overseas Chinese gives them an advantage over other would-be entrepreneurs now entering China. The overseas Chinese provide more than three-quarters of all foreign direct investment, not to mention skills, technologies, and access to financial and marketing networks. Some believe that the eventual result of these relationships will be the knitting together of an economic and cultural "Greater China" out of China proper plus Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The question is whether such economic integration can occur unhindered by the deep political divisions that cut through the Chinese world. After all, since the Qing dynasty, the overseas Chinese have introduced political trouble into Chinese regimes as often as they have introduced know-how and wealth. Weidenbaum and