

Introduction

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This volume places Hawthorne in a variety of cultural contexts of his time – and in the critical scholarly contexts of our time. It covers such important and complex areas as Hawthorne’s relationship to Puritanism and his Ha[w]thorne forebears, his views about the women’s movement, his political perspectives on slavery and the Civil War, his attitudes toward the scientific and the paranormal, his notions about utopian communities, his contribution to a unique US literature, his sense of global politics, and his encounters with European culture(s) through his travels abroad. As Millicent Bell proposed in her bicentennial collection of essays, Hawthorne should be viewed in the context of his historical time, especially in terms of the “pressing problems” of his day, problems of social reform, feminism, and slavery. But for Hawthorne, the past is also important, in terms of a personal or national history, and along with a sense of self, one’s conception of a psychic or national home also emerges as a significant factor; thus, for Hawthorne history and geographical place are deeply intertwined. Then there is the realm of the psychological, which Hawthorne, as romancer, passionately delved into, many years before Freud and Jung appeared. And long before existentialist philosophy came to be, Hawthorne was thinking about making sense in a world that makes no sense; hence, Hester Prynne’s advice to Pearl to “catch her own sunshine” and her own empowering life path as a self-sufficient woman who could give counsel to wayward women. This collection of essays seeks to contextualize Hawthorne as a writer who understood public events, personal trials, and national history – and who sought to connect the threads as surely as does Hester with her embroidery of the “scarlet letter.” As an artist too, Hawthorne could follow traditional paths, but he also forged ahead in new directions. The same is true of his critics, who are ever-changing. New contexts will always be emerging; twentieth-century reader-response criticism allows each generation to capture its own sense of Hawthorne and his work, to untangle and reweave the many threads of the letter “A.”

During Hawthorne's life, there were many reviewers who lauded but also criticized his writing. Those who were critical noted his pessimistic view of the Puritans or his morose temperament (Duyckinck, Hazewell, Whipple), though a few (e.g., Loring) appreciated his sense of humor in writings like "The Custom-House" introduction in *The Scarlet Letter*, and some praised him for his merging the allegorical with the real (e.g., Chorley). Others critiqued *The Scarlet Letter* for its sense of indecency or immorality or impropriety (Brownson, Coxe). Orestes Brownson, Transcendentalist turned Catholic, denounced Hawthorne's lax morals; although he admitted he does not "sympathize with those stern old Popery-haters [Puritans]" (146), he feels that Hawthorne's depiction of them is not just, and his morality is wrong: "We should commend where the author condemns, and condemns where he commends. Their treatment of the adulteress was far more Christian than his ridicule of it" (146). The more glowing reviews of Hawthorne illustrate how he can create an effect; reading *The Scarlet Letter*, according to Anne W. Abbott, is intoxicating: "The soul has been floating or flying between earth and heaven, with dim ideas of pain and pleasure strangely mingled, and all things earthly swimming dizzily and dreamily, yet most beautiful before the half shut eye" (129). Still, there is something disturbing in Abbott's remark that the final effect on the reader is as if he has been etherized: on closing the book, the reader "will feel very much like the giddy and bewildered patient who is just awaking from his first experiment of the effects of sulphuric ether" (129). Likewise, a well-intentioned reviewer of *The Blithedale Romance* extolled Hawthorne for his "genius" that has a "church-yard beauty about it, and revels amid graves, and executions, and all the sad leavings of mortality" ("The Blithedale Romance" 212); in a strange and dark crescendo of praise, this critic suggested he would like Hawthorne to create his epitaph: "we know no man whom we would sooner ask to write our epitaph. We feel assured that it would be poetical, and suitable in the highest degree" (212). Such critical renderings, though positive, are particularly ghoulish.

There were also various biographical persona created as nineteenth-century critics felt that they could read Hawthorne's personal integrity or sense of darkness. This assessment continued in the twentieth century. In an early biography of Hawthorne by Newton Arvin (1939), a nervous, frightened asocial Hawthorne emerges. Recent biographies (ever since Randall Stewart in the 1940s) have made Hawthorne more approachable, more human, more likable, more sociable, and ultimately more politically engaged. From the 1980s onward, more emphasis was placed on

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Hawthorne as a family man, a representative writer and thinker of his time, a traveler in the realms of the conscious and unconscious, a friend to many American artists and philosophers, a writer aware of political movements affecting the country at large (abolition, women's rights), and an author who enjoyed the liberating tropes of the Romantic tradition as he looked forward to and employed Realistic themes and styles. James Mellow's influential biography seeks to ground Hawthorne in the literary and political climate of his time. E. H. Miller's biography shows the early vulnerable Hawthorne in love and the later devastated by ill-health, the Civil War, and declining creative powers. T. Walter Herbert's biography covers the trials and tribulations of Hawthorne as a family man. Brenda Wineapple's biography presents Hawthorne as a man of his time, not an anachronistic throwback to Puritans; Wineapple also presents significant relationships Hawthorne had with both his family and his wife's, the intellectual and artistic Peabodys. She grapples with Hawthorne's politics but cannot finally make sense of Hawthorne's inconsistencies and loyalties. The most recent biographical excursion into Hawthorne's life, Robert Milder's *Hawthorne's Habitations: A Literary Life*, attempts to make sense of the various selves Hawthorne incorporated through his travels to Concord, Salem, the Berkshires, England, Italy, and back to Concord.

Reviews of Hawthorne in the nineteenth century focused on moral questions raised by Hawthorne's protagonists and on his historical connections to the past. Twentieth-century formalist critics focused on Hawthorne's style, literary forms, and themes. In the 1960s, the foremost critics were Frederick Crews, whose approach was Freudian; Hyatt Waggoner, whose rendition of Hawthorne included an old historicist approach employing Christian mythology; Roy Male, with his moralizing Christian approach regarding the Fortunate Fall and generalities about gender roles; Hugo McPherson, who emphasized the mythopoetic; John Caldwell Stubbs, who favored New Criticism; and Terence Martin, who employed psychoanalytic and "old" historicist approaches. The 1970s changed the face of literary criticism in general and of Hawthorne in particular – mainly due to the impact of the revolutionary 1960s on thinking about women's rights and African American history.

Nina Baym's ground-breaking work on Hawthorne's feminist attitudes toward and his empowering relationships with the women in his family brought about many changes to the way critics considered *The Scarlet Letter*, among other of his works. Hester Prynne became an iconic figure about whom critics speculated in terms of Hawthorne's misogyny or feminism. Critics like Leland Person and Monika Elbert continued the

discussion about Hawthorne's sensitivity to female values if not to feminist politics, while critics like Louise DeSalvo saw Hawthorne undercutting feminist sensibilities, and Jamie Barlowe showed how the voice of female critics (besides Baym's) was hushed. It is hard to deny, though, the significance of the women's rights movement embodied in married women's property acts and the Seneca Falls Convention (1848), on a national level, and, on a personal level, Hawthorne's acquaintance with strong female figures (his mother, sister Ebe, Margaret Fuller, sister-in-law Elizabeth Peabody, and wife Sophia Peabody). Patricia Valenti and Megan Marshall have shown the strong and beneficial influence of the Peabody sisters on Hawthorne. Melinda Ponder and John Idol's collection of essays offer early expressions of how Hawthorne's writings influenced women writers who followed him. From a discussion of feminist politics grew an analysis of gender in general, and of attitudes toward manhood, with seminal works emerging by David Leverenz, Leland Person, Robert Martin, and David Greven on the topic of damaged and vulnerable manhood in texts like *The Scarlet Letter* (with a focus on Dimmesdale) and *The Blithedale Romance* (with a focus on Coverdale). It is true that D. H. Lawrence had already damned the male characters in *The Scarlet Letter* as well as the "she-devil" Hester, but his view was purely subjective, which, though entertaining, left out historical detail and biographical accuracy. Building on the various gender approaches to Hawthorne's work, critics like Greven and Chris Castiglia adopted queer theory in their analysis of several of Hawthorne's male characters. And the burgeoning field of children's literature has been connected to Hawthorne studies through Laura Laffrado's pioneering study and more recently Derek Pacheco's work on education in the American Renaissance and Ken Parille's writing on Hawthorne's literature for boys.

New Historicism did not entirely supplant old historicist studies about Hawthorne. In terms of the Puritan influence on Hawthorne's work, Michael Colacurcio and Frederick Newberry have written the most authoritative studies. Critics like Sacvan Bercovitch and Larry Reynolds have bridged the gap between the seventeenth century (about which Hawthorne wrote) and the nineteenth century to show how certain political movements (Missouri Compromise, Fugitive Slave Act, slavery debates) appeared under the guise of events happening in the times of Hawthorne's Puritan forebears (persecution of Quakers, witchcraft craze). New Historicist critic Brook Thomas has explored the meaning of civic responsibility in Hawthorne's works; Marxist critics like Walter Benn

Michaels and Michael Gilmore have shown how Hawthorne as an author and Hawthorne's characters were motivated by a capitalist impulse to succeed in the marketplace; and Nicholas Bromell has shown the darker side of capitalist practices in Hawthorne's stories. Larry Reynolds has offered a conciliatory and the most measured view of Hawthorne's anti-slavery politics, while various critics (Jean Fagan Yellin, Brenda Wineapple) have presented a scathing critique of Hawthorne's politics on the issue of slavery. Along with Reynolds, Robert S. Levine has shown how fears of European insurrections in terms of socialist revolutions, conspiracy theories, and xenophobia emerge in Hawthorne's works. Luther S. Luedtke examines the romanticization of the people, places, and products of the Far East in Hawthorne's imagination and in the imagination of his fellow New Englanders. John Carlos Rowe reads *The Marble Faun* as exemplifying "the transnational ambitions of U.S. ideology at the beginning of the Civil War" (106). The most recent postcolonial reading of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* by Laura Doyle shows the violent repercussions of the Anglo-Atlantic tradition. She, along with Renée Bergland and Derek Pacheco, have focused on the vanishing Native American in Hawthorne's works.

Part I of the book, "Hawthorne and History," examines Hawthorne's renderings of an array of issues in America's past and in his own time. Although Hawthorne has been taken to task for not sufficiently opposing slavery, believing that it would end "in God's own time" because it was a wicked institution, he clearly opposed the institution itself. Initially against a split between North and South because he intuited the carnage that would ensue, once the Civil War started, he was an avid proponent of the Northern abolitionist stance. The work that spells out his views, often ironic, is "Chiefly about War-matters," written during the war following his on-site experiences in Washington, DC, and northern Virginia. Larry Reynolds shows in this volume and in previous writings that Hawthorne was more radical in his political views than previous critics have granted. Although not as knowledgeable as Thoreau about Native Americans, Hawthorne reveals an awareness of Native Americans in his *American Notebooks* and uses Indian characters in his short stories and in *The Scarlet Letter*. From tales that seems to pay no attention to Indians, he reflects in "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" and "Endicott and the Red Cross" that white people were misunderstanding and would overwhelm Indian culture. In "Main-street," he demonstrates that, almost from the beginning of European settlement, the Indian way of life in North American was doomed. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, he wrestles with the problem

of the Anglo-Americans' illegal seizure of Indian property. Hawthorne also was sensitive to the growing women's movement: his imagination and his relationships with strong women allowed him to focus on opportunities for women wrought by social movements culminating in such events as the Seneca Falls Convention (1848) and the married women's property acts, which permitted married women to own land. Hester Prynne can be seen as the model woman for Hawthorne, as she exemplifies maternal thinking and self-reliant ways, and certainly accords with Margaret Fuller's vision of the ideal woman in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Hawthorne privileges the heart over the head as he feels one can garner more sympathy to effect change by focusing not on religious institutions or political systems but on a higher consciousness. Like Margaret Fuller in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, he believed that laws would not change humanity but that inner transformation to a higher sense of self would bring about social change.

Part II of the book, "Popular Culture and Social Movements," examines popular and cultural events emerging in Hawthorne's works – with such pseudo-scientific movements as mesmerism and homeopathy, and with such popular causes as utopianism, urban development, and gender identity. This second part also explores Hawthorne's attitudes toward philosophy (including Transcendentalist utopian thinking), theater, and visual arts. From the start of his writing career, Hawthorne imagined a "better place" for himself and later for his children. He did not want his children to be stuck in the hellhole of Salem as he knew it. His time at the utopian Brook Farm community, during his engagement to Sophia, made him think of alternative living arrangements for his future family; this episode led to his writing *The Blithedale Romance*. Even though his brief experience at Brook Farm (April through fall 1841) was not as he had hoped it to be, and he left disappointed, and despite the fact that he was not a Transcendentalist, Hawthorne continued to imagine an alternative to the secular materialistic society around him. Even in his recreation of the ironic "City on the Hill" in his sketches about Puritan New England and in the Puritan setting of *The Scarlet Letter*, he entertained the possibility that there would be a better world elsewhere at some time. His fiction is filled with utopian hopes for the future, even when he condemns daydreamers and frauds, like the Millerites, who predicted the end of the world and the second coming in the early 1840s. Questions about gender identity are raised in alternative settings, like Brook Farm: Hawthorne created exceptional protagonists and fictional situations that show radical alternatives to

accepted middle-class gender roles and marriage. There are “bachelor” and “spinster” types who avoid marriage altogether, and there are same-sex relationships that show more intensity than conventional heterosexual relationships. This part demonstrates gender-bending possibilities that reveal the ways Hawthorne sometimes rebels against either cultural stereotypes or the status quo. The city as it was evolving in America and in Europe he depicts in several stories (“Wakefield”) and sketches (“Little Annie’s Rambles”), as well as in *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Marble Faun*. Problems and possibilities in the urban centers revolve around work, drinking, immigration, crime, prostitution, and isolation. Although there is not the flaneur of Poe’s or Baudelaire’s streets, there is a type of distanced observer who reflects on the newness and strangeness of the times.

The world of art and drama sometimes provided a refuge or inspiration for Hawthorne. Hawthorne’s burgeoning interest in art, as it applies to his own creative work, includes the art of daguerreotype, as it relates to *The House of the Seven Gables*. His literary work has been compared with the dark Romantic art of American painter Washington Allston, who had an early influence on Sophia Hawthorne. Although not a connoisseur of art, Hawthorne’s intense experience of art collections in Rome and Florence afforded him an appreciation of the European masters, like Titian, Botticelli, Raphael, Murillo, Corregio, Michelangelo, and Guido Reni. He was most impressed by the many images of Venus, Mary, and Mary Magdalene, perhaps because of his interest in them as types for his female protagonists. He makes use of melodramatic conventions in his renderings of female characters in *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Marble Faun* and in such stories as “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” Structurally, *The Scarlet Letter* can easily be rendered into a play of three acts, based on the scaffold scenes, and there have indeed been many dramatic renditions of the novel from the nineteenth century on. Several of his female protagonists are actresses (e.g. Zenobia in *Blithedale*), or they make melodramatic pronouncements in the denouement of stories (e.g., Georgiana in “The Birth-mark”). Hawthorne’s notebooks record visits to theaters and comments about the theater-goers as well as comments on actors, and they show his knowledge and use of dramatic principles, melodramatic effects, and dramatic appeal to an audience. The final essay in this second part considers Hawthorne’s later adoption by popular culture in both the theater and film.

Part III of the book, “Hawthorne and the Literary Marketplace,” focuses on Hawthorne’s knowledge of publishing arrangements with authors and

his efforts to find success as a writer in dealings with his various publishers. Hawthorne published his short stories and sketches between 1830 and 1852 in numerous magazines and gift books like the *Democratic Review*, *New-England Magazine*, and *The Token*. He also republished most of them in several collections, *Twice-told Tales* (1837, 1842, 1851), *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), and *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-told Tales* (1852). He published his novels with the publishing house of Ticknor and Fields. They reflect his awareness of what the public and publishers liked and disliked and thus the peril of publishing in opposition to what might sell. In 1836, Hawthorne served as editor of the encyclopedic *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*, and later he edited his friend Horatio Bridge's *Journal of an African Cruiser*. Hawthorne's fascination with everyday knowledge and his interest in newspapers stood him in good stead as a writer of sketches. Some of his earliest stories were published in the town newspaper, *The Salem Gazette*. He perfected the literary genre of the sketch, an art form appreciated in the nineteenth century, explored in great depth by Kristie Hamilton. In fact, many of his sketches were more often read than his stories in the nineteenth century. The quotidian elements of life that Hawthorne found so fascinating became the focus of his sketches, but his biographical sketches evince his interest in colonial and Revolutionary personages and places. He also wrote travel sketches during his journeyman years of writing and later in a collection of experiences in England titled *Our Old Home* (1863). Many nineteenth-century novelists also wrote fiction for children, as it was a lucrative market. Hawthorne published several books for children, including *Grandfather's Chair*, *Famous Old People*, *Liberty Tree* (1840–1841), *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851), and *Tanglewood Tales, for Girls and Boys; Being a Second Wonder Book* (1853). Although some of the themes of his adult stories can be detected in those for children, Hawthorne is clearly thinking about the child's imagination and the ways in which a child would best respond to mythological and historical tales.

The final chapters of "Hawthorne and the Literary Marketplace" consider Hawthorne as a romancer. He made a point of differentiating between a novel and what he called a romance, a genre that combined the fantastic and the probable, the imaginative and the realistic, the fictional and the historical. In his three New England romances, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), he reveals much about his preference for the

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historical romance. His final completed romance, *The Marble Faun* (1860), though ostensibly inspired by his own experience in Italy, tells us much about how Hawthorne envisioned the comparison between the United States and Europe in terms of art and history. Although his unfinished romances, the *Septimius Felton* manuscripts and *The Dolliver Romance*, penned near the end of his life, have often been considered second-rate and the product of a man psychologically weary, physically ill, and mourning the loss of his country during the Civil War, recent critics have tried to put these works in the artistic and historical contexts of his successful (and completed) romances.

Part IV of the book, “Hawthorne and Literary Traditions,” explores Hawthorne’s relationship with his contemporaries and the influence of earlier authors on his writing, including Sir Walter Scott, Washington Irving, and Charles Brockden Brown. Poe had mixed feelings about Hawthorne in his various reviews. They were originally positive but then they became critical and strident about Hawthorne’s “thrice told tales.” Some of the negativity resulted perhaps from Poe’s envy, but overall Poe expresses admiration for Hawthorne’s work. An interesting but tense and complex relationship emerged between Hawthorne and Melville – tense partly because the younger Melville was seeking a mentor in the very private Hawthorne. While temperamentally quite different, both authors were interested in such literary themes as individual freedom, brotherhood, and utopian possibilities. They met in the Berkshire mountains in western Massachusetts in 1850 and enjoyed a famous hike up Monument Mountain and then subsequently got together frequently. Melville’s laudatory review essay of Hawthorne’s *Mosses from an Old Manse*, “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850), expresses Melville’s esteem for Hawthorne as an American writer worthy to be mentioned with Shakespeare. That review and passionate correspondence from Melville to Hawthorne perhaps made Hawthorne uncomfortable. Recent critics have focused on this relationship and similar thematics, with a collection of essays by Leland Person and Jana Argersinger, and with a recent biography by Erik Hage.

Despite the fact that Hawthorne never considered himself a Transcendentalist, he did, by virtue of living in Concord and hobnobbing with several leading Transcendentalists, adopt some of their ideas, inadvertently or not. Self-reliance and communal belonging are two virtues he shared with them. He was most temperamentally similar to Thoreau, whom he admired for his knowledge of nature and of Native American culture. He

felt that Bronson Alcott was too eccentric and avoided him at all costs during his walks through Concord. He had respect for Emerson but like many people did not feel a warm friendship. With Margaret Fuller, he had several deep conversations that taught him much and perhaps inspired some of his strong but doomed female characters.

The fourth part continues with a focus on Hawthorne's unwitting relationship to women writers whose popularity he sometimes envied. Even though Hawthorne privately lashed out at the "damned mob of scribbling women" during a bitter moment of envy, he actually had much in common with successful women writers in the 1840s and 1850s. In terms of social and domestic themes and in terms of style, he shared more with sentimental women writers than with the hyper-masculine school of writers to which Melville belonged. Jane Tompkins liberated readers with this thought in her *Sensational Designs* (1985), and others have followed suit. Included in this part is Hawthorne's connection to a Gothic tradition – to Gothic writers of the past and those who followed him. The Gothic was a mainstay of Hawthorne's oeuvre. He was influenced by the British Gothic writer Horace Walpole, and he fine-tuned the genre to make it an original American modality. He often focuses on "the sins of the fathers," but in the American tradition of illegal seizure of property and abuse of power (as in *The House of the Seven Gables*). His Gothic concerns itself with American wrongdoings, going back to Puritan times and continuing with the atrocities leveled at Native Americans and African Americans. The ghosts of the past are never laid to rest in Hawthorne's sense of the past. The part continues with Hawthorne's connection to another popular genre, science fiction, of which Hawthorne, along with Poe, was an early master. The part ends with a discussion of Hawthorne's influence on future writers, most notably those of the magical Realist school.

Part V of the book, "Family and Place," focuses on the personal and psychological dimension of Hawthorne's development as it relates to familial and geographic connections. Also considered are various biographies written about Hawthorne, the shaping of the authorial person through a study of his biographers, and Hawthorne's own self-revelations in his *Notebooks*. His artistic talents would thrive as a result of close connections to family and friends. His wife Sophia had a strong influence on him as a man and as a writer: she was his kind and trusted reader. Indeed, he avowed *The Scarlet Letter* a success when, after reading the final act to her, she went to bed with a headache. But Sophia was an artist in her own right,