In *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Dana Brand traces the development of the English language tradition of the *flâneur*, a detached, casual, yet powerful urban spectator who regards the metropolis as an entertaining spectacle and text. Brand refutes the common assumption that the *flâneur* originated in Paris in the early nineteenth century and shows how the development of this quintessentially modern figure began in London at least as early as the seventeenth century. After discussing the evolution of the *flâneur* in relation to its social, cultural, and historical contexts, he goes on to suggest that the English tradition of the *flâneur* had a significant influence on American literature and urban culture in the nineteenth century. Examining the encounter between spectators and city life in the works of Poe, Hawthorne, and Whitman, Brand offers new readings of their work, as well as a new perspective on such issues as Poe’s invention of the detective story, Hawthorne’s complex fascination with cities and modern life, and Whitman’s effort to develop a new kind of urban poetry. Brand considers and compares the efforts of these authors to engage modernity and to develop new literary forms adequate to the representation of urban life. He suggests that, contrary to what is often assumed, American writers in the middle years of the nineteenth century were as concerned as their European contemporaries with the question of what the modern city might do to the imagination and what the imagination might in turn do with the modern city.
The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature
For Sheila
The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Dana Brand
Hofstra University
Contents

Acknowledgments  page vii
1  The Flaneur and Modernity  1
2  The Development of the Flaneur in England  14
3  The Flaneur in the Nineteenth Century  41
4  The Flaneur in America  64
5  From the Flaneur to the Detective: Interpreting the City of Poe  79
6  The Urban Spectator in Hawthorne's Sketches  106
7  The Blithedale Romance and the Culture of Modernity  122
8  “Immense Phantom Concource”: Whitman and the Urban Crowd  156
9  Conclusion  186

Notes  198
Works Cited  221
Index  233
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