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0521391423 - Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Contemporary Reviews

Edited by John L. Idol and Buford Jones

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FANSHAWE

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[Joseph T. Buckingham],
 “*Fanshawe*,”
New-England Galaxy,
 11, No. 577
 (31 October 1828), 3

Fanshawe. A love story with this title has just been published by Messrs Marsh & Capen. It has, like ten thousand others, a mystery, an elopement, a villain, a father, a tavern, almost a duel, a horrible death, and—Heaven save the mark!—an end.

[Sarah Josepha Hale],
 “*Fanshawe*,”
Ladies Magazine, 1
 (November 1828), 526–7

We intended giving a rather long notice of the above work, which has just been published in this city, and prove the correctness of our favorable opinion respecting it, by several extracts. But “time and space,” those things, which if they may be annihilated, cannot always be commanded, are denied at present. We must therefore briefly recommend the book to all those who wish to encourage the talents of our own writers. But do not depend on obtaining it for perusal from a circulating library, or from a friend. Purchase it, reader. There is but one volume, and trust me that is worth placing in your library.

The time has arrived when our American authors should have something besides empty praise from their countrymen. Not that we wish to see a race of mere book-worm authors fostered among us.

Our institutions and character, demand activity in business; the useful should be preferred before the ornamental; practical industry before speculative philosophy; reality before romance. But still the emanations of genius may be appreciated, and a refined taste cultivated among us, if our people would be as liberal in encouraging the merits of our own writers, if they would purchase the really excellent productions which depict our own country, scenes and character, as they do the vapid and worn-out descriptions of European manners, fashions and vices.

To display somewhat of our author’s style and habits of thought, we add one extract from the work, but shall give no analysis, nor any hint, except that it is worth buying and reading.

[Quotes last four paragraphs of chapter 2 (CE, III, pp. 350–1).]

“*Fanshawe*,”
 [Boston] *Daily Advertiser*,
 12 November 1828, p. 2

To those who are unacquainted with the pleasant perplexities which attend the management of the press, there would be something very ludicrous in a knowledge of the shifts to which its conductor is frequently reduced. Hamlet the Dane, his dear Ophelia and the ghost of his departed father, swallowing a hasty supper of sausages, between the acts of the play, would be a delightful spectacle, no doubt,—and hardly less so, is that of an editor, debating whether he can best afford to be gay or grave in his forthcoming sheet, and consulting the papers of the *Southern Mail* and the book of *Foreign Arrivals at Merchants’ Hall*, to ascertain whether he is to indulge in a grand display of heroic elo-

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[More information](#)

quence, show off his sharpness in a smart retort, rave through a bitter invective, or exhaust his vernacular, in an inflated panegyric. "How great a fire a little matter kindleth," do we involuntarily exclaim, when we behold the columns of a weekly print, filled, even to overflowing, with the outpourings of a patriotism, which, if the village mail-bag did not sometimes come in lean and lank, would probably slumber on in an eternal rest.

We have often compared an editor to the provider of a table d'hôte, who *must* supply his customers with a daily aliment, whether there be anything in store or not; whether the market is crowded with the abundance of good things, or there be a scarcity approaching to a famine. He is obliged to serve up a bountiful supply of plain, substantial food, for the matter-of-fact people who have no taste for "flummery," as they elegantly denominate whatever does not exactly suit their own palates; then there must be *entremets* and made-dishes for the fastidious inquirer after niceties, whipt-syllabubs and trifles for the ladies, and, perchance, a stock of sugar-plums and sweetmeats for the children. He must excite the palled, and try to gratify the disordered appetite, as well as afford satisfaction to the calls of real hunger. And he is also expected to furnish the sparkling champagne of wit, and to bring forward good humor, which shall communicate its blandness to the soul like generous old Madeira, and divers other qualities for which we can find no apt illustrations. And how often after all his exertions, is he in the condition of Falstaff with his ragged regiment, ashamed of what he is compelled to show to the world! "There's but a shirt and a half in all my company," says the fat knight. There's but the tithe of an idea in my whole paper, *may* often say the unhappy editor. Yet even in the depth of his distress there is one cheering thought. There are

others around him of the same trade, from whom he may borrow, or beg, if he may not steal. Sir John, whom we have quoted above, consoled his misery at the nakedness of his troops, with the reflection that they would "find linen enough on every hedge,"—the application of his idea to the matter we are discussing, is left to the sympathetic imaginations of our readers.

From what we have already said, it will be inferred that we greatly rejoice at the reception of a new book. Truly, we do. It gives an impulse to our thoughts. It affords us an opportunity of strutting in the character of a critic. We can talk "about it, goddess, and about it," until the patience of our readers is exhausted, and our requisite quantity of manuscript completed, and still leave something unsaid for the future time of need. But we are garrulous:—proceed we to our task.

The story of *Fanshawe* is, apparently, the first effort of a Collegian, and naturally enough, he has resorted to the neighborhood and history of his own Alma Mater for the scenery and incidents of the tale. "Our court shall be a little academy," is the motto of his first chapter, in which, under the fictitious name of Harley College, he has described the institution at Williamstown, Massachusetts. One of the first Presidents of that seminary is introduced as Dr. Melmoth, and his ward,—a girl of eighteen, beautiful, of course, as a houri, with eyes like those of Sappho, and a figure, by the side of which, Hebe's would be as a kitchen scullion's,—is the heroine of the novel. Two students, Fanshawe, and Edward Walcott, firm friends, and possessing equal claims to the regard of Ellen, are her rival lovers, and she is so entirely satisfied with them both, that, like the ass between two bundles of fragrant hay, (we beg the author's pardon for this unlucky simile—we mean no offense,) she is in a fair way of gaining neither, and in imagination, we begin to descry her fea-

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[More information](#)

tures, somewhat wrinkled to be sure, under the close cap of that reverend piece of antiquity, an Old Maid. In this dilemma, a stranger steps in, and by an artful contrivance induces her to elope with him,—she, laboring under the belief that she is hastening to afford comfort and relief to an unfortunate parent,—he, meaning to frighten her into a marriage with all possible despatch. Dr. Melmoth and the students pursue the fugitives. Fanshawe discovers their retreat, and is happy. The stranger is killed,—Ellen’s father appears, and eventually Fanshawe dies, and Walcott is happy. He, having no faith in that joy which cannot be shared with another, and having buried his best friend, takes Ellen to his bosom as a comforter in his distress—*id est*, he marries her.

This plot, which we have imperfectly and rather *rudely* sketched, we fear, has great merit. It is true to nature, and in no part does it shock us by a violation of probability. Indeed, wherever there is a falling off in the book, it is not in the design, but in the filling up—in the throwing in of light and shade to give effect to the picture. We attribute this, in some degree, to the author’s want of confidence in his own power. He is fearful of going too far, and does not proceed far enough. His reserve and diffidence have hindered him from throwing that spirit into his dialogues, which we believe is at his command. Hence we find that they are never sufficiently detailed. A practised writer would have made two or three large duodecimos from no more material than is contained in these 140 pages, and they would have been far more interesting than if he had left one half that amount to be supplied by the reader’s fancy.

The characters in *Fanshawe* are not wholly original. The prototype of the nominal hero, is the Wilfred of Scott’s *Rokeby*. Dr. Melmoth reminds us too forcibly of Dominie Sampson, and there are a

few touches in the nameless stranger,—who, by the way, is excellently drawn,—that are in the Dirk Hatteraick style. Ellen does not stand out quite so boldly as we could wish, but then there is something admirable in the management of Hugh Crombie, the red-nosed tavern-keeper. Edward Walcott is the master-spirit of the piece, and with a very few exceptions we like him, exceedingly. He drinks wine and breaks looking-glasses with all the grace of a modern Sophomore, and considering the distance of his residence from the city, he is really, quite *au fait* in all that pertains to the gentleman in high life.

To the elegance of language which frequently occurs in this volume, we are pleased to bear testimony. There are some beauties of more than an ordinary kind, and they give promise of better things hereafter. We shall take occasion to substantiate our opinion by one or two extracts, at the first convenient opportunity.

[William Leggett],
 “*Fanshawe*,”
Critic: A Weekly Review
of Literature, Fine
Arts, and the Drama,
 [1,] No. 4
 (22 November 1828),
 53–5

Who wrote this book? Yet what need is there to know the name of the author, in order to pronounce a decision? Be he whom he may, this is not his first attempt, and we hope it will not be his last. The mind that produced this little, interesting volume, is capable of making great and

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[More information](#)

rich additions to our native literature; and it will, or we shall be sadly mistaken. The author is a scholar, though he makes no ostentatious display of scholarship; he is a poet, though there are not two dozen metrical lines in the volume with which to substantiate the assertion; he is a gentleman, though the nearest approach to gentlemen in his pages, are two country college boys; and he possesses a heart alive to the beauties of nature, and the beauties of sentiment, and replete with all those kindly feelings which adorn and dignify human nature. His story is told in language, simple, chaste and appropriate; describing, so that the eye of the reader sees them, all the beautiful and varied traits of the landscape in which he has chosen to locate his narrative; describing the heavens in all their different aspects of storm and sunshine, in the gray twilight of morning, the sleepy splendour of noonday, and the gorgeous effulgence of sunset; and describing (a more difficult thing than all) the human heart, both as it lightly flutters in a young, pure, happy maiden's bosom, and as it heavily beats beneath the yellow and shrivelled skin of an octogenarian virago; both as it animates the dark recesses of a ruffian's breast, and the young, ardent, impetuous bosom of an honourable and thoughtless lad of eighteen. It takes a poet to do this. The delicacy of Fanshawe's attachment; the nice propriety of conduct which both he and his rival observe towards the object of their affection, and towards each other; the frankness with which one asked, and the refined and courteous manner in which the other granted, his forgiveness, after some harsh words had escaped between them—and a thousand other circumstances—are convincing proofs that the author is a gentleman; for none but a gentleman understands these things. There is no parade of manners, no mock sentiment, no stuff, about him; but there is sincerity, and ease,

and urbanity, and an ever wakeful regard for others' feelings, all of which he imparts to his characters, giving them an irresistible attraction. Though we do not exactly subscribe to the sentiment of Dr. Johnson's humourous parody, "Who drives fat oxen, should himself be fat;" yet we are fully persuaded that it takes a gentleman to describe a gentleman. Your common writers make such stiff, such tape and buckram creatures of them, that they are truly insupportable. That the author is a scholar, there is much evidence; though the reader does not every here and there meet with a Greek or a Latin, or a Hebrew quotation; an affectation of learning which an intolerable ignoramus may use, as well as one of real information. The true scholar shows his literary, as men ought to show their pecuniary wealth in their expenditures, not by sudden bursts of profusion, but by continual and salutary munificence. Such are the evidences of scholarship which we find in *Fanshawe*.

But the book has faults. The plot lacks probability; there is too much villainy in some of the characters; or rather, there are too many bad characters introduced; their number is disproportioned to that of the good ones. The flight of the heroine is without sufficient motive, especially as her nature was but little spiced with romance; her rescue is effected by improbable means; and finally, the gullibility and unsophisticatedness of the amiable principal of Harley College, is rather a caricature than a portrait.

We will not impair the interest of such of our readers as may intend perusing this delightful little volume, by giving a synopsis of its fable; for those who do not, could derive but little edification from such a proceeding, which is no more calculated to give a true idea of the merit of the story, than the argument to one of Milton's books of *Paradise Lost*, is like to create a proper estimate of the poem. But we will

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[More information](#)

extract one passage, that our remarks may be accompanied by proof that we have not eulogized without cause. It is a death-bed scene, at which the villain of the piece had been led to be present; the place is the cot in which he was born, and the dying female, his mother, whom he had forsaken in his youth, and never saw after, till the period described in the extract.

[Quotes from Chapter 8, “Ellen had no heart” to “conducted Ellen out of the cottage” (*CE*, III, pp. 432–6).]

We have quoted the most sombre scene in the volume. There is a great deal of gaiety and buoyancy of spirit evinced by the writer, in other parts; but when poor Fanshawe occupies the page, he will sometimes excite the reader’s tears in despite of himself. We love to read, and love to review a work like this, where one can conscientiously shake hands with the author, and bid him, All hail, and be sure on leaving him, that no unkindly feelings have been created, to rankle in his breast, mak-

ing both the critic and the criticised unhappy. Beside those already mentioned, we have no fault to find with the author of *Fanshawe*; but we shall have, if he does not ere long give us another opportunity of reading one of his productions. Is it not quite possible that [Nathaniel] Willis wrote this book? We merely *guess*.

Checklist of Additional Reviews

Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette, 6 November 1828, p. 358.

The Bower of Taste [Boston], 8 November 1828, p. 718.

Boston Advertiser, 12 November 1828, p. 2.

Fanshawe, *Boston Weekly Messenger*, 13 November 1828, p. 18.

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[More information](#)

Tales and Sketches in THE TOKEN and Other Annual or
Periodical Publications, 1831–1837

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[More information](#)

[James Hall],
 “*The Token and Atlantic
 Souvenir*
 for 1832,”
*Illinois Monthly
 Magazine*, 2, No. 14
 (1 November 1831), 56–8

The number of annuals which are sold in our country is so great, and this species of writing so popular, as to render it a question worthy of consideration, whether some pains should not be taken to elevate the character of these volumes. Those before us do not present, in our opinion, any favorable evidence of the state of our literature. They each contain articles written with elegance and with power, but they contain also a vast deal that is very insipid. There is a propensity for the melancholy and the horrible—for tales that, as the young ladies say, end badly, which, in our opinion, is the result of perverted judgment. A *Souvenir* is not made to give people the vapors, nor yet to leave the traces of melancholy thought upon the mind. It is marvellous to us, that any one should think of covering sorrowful tales, fit only for the nursery, under a beautiful exterior of embossed morocco! Yet a great portion of each of these volumes, is as direful as Monk Lewis’ tales of wonder, and as statefully as the Dutch Maiden in her stays! There is a want of originality, wit, and genius, which is hardly pardonable in those who profess to be able to command the best talents. These remarks do not apply to such articles as the “Dunce and the Genius,” by Paulding, or the “Mortgage,” by Godfrey Wallace. “The Wives of the Dead,” in the *Token*, though pathetic, has

a touch of nature about it which goes to the heart, and a spirit which awakens interest. “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” is well told. But the general character of the writing in both these volumes, is dull, stately, and artificial. The writers will not like us any the better for telling them so; but those most interested, the publishers, who know, by pleasant experience, that a dull work sells just as well as the brightest emanation of genius, will, we fancy, care but little about it.

“*The Token and Atlantic
 Souvenir*,”
New-England Magazine, 3
 (November 1832), 425–6

The union of the *Atlantic Souvenir* with *The Token* will be gratifying to at least one class of persons—namely, all editors of Periodicals whatsoever—since it will oblige us to read one book and write one paragraph less. Not that we have any objection to seeing and reading such beautiful books, but, in this book-making age, our labor is “never ending, still beginning,” and any thing is gratifying which lessens our toils.

The Token for 1833, viewing it externally, is as handsome a volume as we have seen for many a day. The binding is elegant, substantial, and tasteful. The paper and print are good, but apparently not better than those of the numbers of preceding years. Some of the engravings are good, and some are quite indifferent, though on this point, we speak with some diffidence, judging merely from what pleases us, and without any knowledge of the art. “Touchstone and Audrey” is capi-

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[More information](#)

tal. We never met with an illustration of Shakespeare so worthy of the text. The faces of the two originals are perfect gems—things to be remembered and dreamed of months after we have seen them. . . .

With regard to the literary portion it does not seem to be quite equal to what we have a right to expect, considering that there is a concentration, upon one volume, of the talent that was formerly divided between two. The poetry is of that unmarked character which almost any well-educated person might have written, and which the eye glides over without our having any impressions conveyed to the mind. There is none of it so bad as to be laughed at, nor so good as to awaken strong admiration. . . .

The prose, as in generally the case, is better than the poetry. There is a beautiful story, by Miss Sedgwick, which has all her purity of taste and delicacy of feeling. The “Seven Vagabonds” is good, and so is the “Canterbury Pilgrims.” The “Capture” and the “Cure for the Dyspepsia,” are also very fair. There are some excellent things in the “Bald Eagle;” but there is too much of caricature, and one gets pretty well tired before the end comes. There is much beauty in Mr. Pierpont’s “Autumnal Musings.” The “Stolen Match” is much too long. “Joan of Arc,” and “Sir William Pepperell,” seem to have been put in merely for the space they occupy.

To almost all the articles it may be urged in the way of criticism, that there is too much description,—too many words. Every feature in the face, every garment that is worn, every appearance in the earth, and every change in the sky, is described at most wearisome length. We cannot help feeling that the articles were written with a view to the “consideration,” and so made to cover as many pages as possible.

[Park Benjamin],
 “*The Token and Atlantic
 Souvenir*,”
New-England Magazine, 7
 (October 1834), 331–3

Beautifully printed, chastely bound, and liberally embellished; thus much we can say for this volume, at first sight, on taking it from the envelope. On running our eye over the table of contents, we meet with several names of some distinction in the lighter departments of literature,—Miss Sedgwick, the novelist,—Gulian C. Verplanck, the politician, and late representative from New-York,—Miss Leslie, author of *Pencil Sketches*,—F.W.P. Greenwood, one of the purest writers in the country, and one of the most popular pulpit orators of his sect,—and John Neal, novelist, lawyer, magazinist, historian, and poet. To these, we may add Miss Gould, Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Sigourney, and an anonymous writer of some of the most delicate and beautiful prose ever published this side of the Atlantic,—the author of “The Gentle Boy.” Nor would we forget to insert among the worthies, our friend, Mr. Stone of the *Commercial Advertiser*,—who tells a story with as good a grace in the *Token*, as he does in his own valuable journal.

[. . .]

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[More information](#)

[Henry Fothergill
Chorley],
“The Annuals for 1835,”
Athenaeum [England],
25 October 1834, p. 782

—This stranger, from over seas, seems to have followed the fashion of the other Annuals of the year—and stood still. There is good prose among its contents—but the tales are of Italian Castles, and Russian Princesses, and the French Court—when we desired to hear of the backwoods, the prairies, and the clearings, and the delicious legends of the old Dutch settlers, which have haunted us since the days of Washington Irving. It is of such that an American Annual should be composed, if it is to have a sale on this side the water; and we were disappointed at not finding anything of the kind. We can, however, speak well of some of the papers—“The Haunted Mind,” and “Children, what are they?” are both good of their kind—and Miss Leslie’s “Reading Parties,” is a pleasant caricature;—if it be not a caricature, why there are haughtier *aristocratesses* in America than in the “Old Country,” for we never encountered anything half so insolent and absurd as the great lady of the village of Tamerton.

[. . .]

[Park Benjamin],
“Critical Notices,”
New-England Magazine, 9
(October 1835), 294–8

[. . .]

So much for the articles in which the lines commence with capital letters. The stories are by Miss Sedgwick, by W. L. Stone, by the authors of “The Affianced One,” “Sights from a Steeple,” and “The Gentle Boy,”—by Miss Leslie, Grenville Mellen, and John Neal; besides those who have the grace to be anonymous. The author of “The Gentle Boy,” whom we regard as the most pleasing writer of fanciful prose, except Irving, in the country, and “John Neal,” have displayed their usual freshness and originality. “The Young Phrenologist,” by the latter, is very pretty, but slightly *innuendoish* (to adopt the author’s own fashion of coining words) and Anacreon Mooreish. “Dante’s Beatrice” commences with a significant truism, which the author—a lady, we doubt not—would do well to remember. “A title to immortal fame is usually acquired by women at a dangerous expense.”

The Token has one advantage—and we presume the only one—over the rest of the annuals. It has appeared first, and earlier this year than usual. Why a Christmas and New-year’s present should be published in the middle of September, we cannot guess. When the proper season shall arrive, will appear “The Magnolia,” (a splendid title) edited by H. W. Herbert, Esq., author of “The Brothers,” one of the editors of the *American Monthly Magazine*. The illustrations are, we are told, very beautiful; and if a name can be an assurance of merit, its literary character, under the surveillance of Mr. Herbert, will be very high.