“That One Congenial Friend:” Hawthorne’s Search for a Careful Reader

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Bio:

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Abstract:

In the prefaces to his novels and short stories, Nathaniel Hawthorne explores the conflicts that surface when political leaders use tyranny to force consensus in antebellum American states. His prefaces introduce these conflicts and act as guides on how to read what follows in the novels. Under threat of termination by his coworkers and representatives in government, he creates a writing style with an implicit message that can only be understood by a select audience. Hawthorne, I will argue, is determined to enlighten his readers to the hypocrisies and civil violations that occur in spite of the protections the constitution guarantees its citizens. He also takes issue with the growing power of political factions in the decade leading up to the American Civil War by taking a classical republican stance for civic virtue over private interests. In this way, he advocates a revision of the sociopolitical state of antebellum New England and indirectly promotes an agenda capable of bringing the faults of his country to light.

Introduction

“Persecution,” Strauss remarks in a collection of essays on the long-standing tradition of exoteric/esoteric writing is “the indispensable condition for the highest efficiency of what may be called *logica equina*” (23). That is, in a regime in which the political authorities have fostered a widely-held allegiance to the notion that philosophy—or, to take Strauss’ allusion to *Gulliver’s Travel*, the ability to say “the thing which is not”—is constantly at odds with said authorities, persecution is seldom absent (Swift 240). The authorities in such cases, Strauss intimates, act at least sensibly if not justifiably in order to protect the interests of the regime, so their rationale behind policies that include persecution is quite clear. Consensus, when in the favor of leaders, is perhaps the ultimate source of governing power. But how and, perhaps more importantly, when, are citizens convinced to conform to an anti-philosophical stance? Although not a philosopher in the Straussian sense, Nathaniel Hawthorne, I will argue, asks the same questions in his 1851 masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*.

Many critics have claimed, however, that the pursuit of an author’s intent is either an outdated or impossible task of literary criticism. The second is undoubtedly true, but only in the sense that, perhaps, nothing can ever really be understood completely from a perspective other than the author’s. “If there is such a thing as the interpretation of a text,” Rosen, a scholar of some erudition once remarked, “as opposed to the writing of a new text by the ostensible reader, then it is obvious that there is a core meaning in the text that has been placed there by the author, who expected it to be intelligible to perceptive readers without the aid of hermeneutical tools” (142). With this as a point of departure, I will attempt the impossible with the hope of, at least, a *more* complete understanding of Hawthorne’s work.

Themes and Contradictions in the Hawthorne’s Writing Style

The work of an early critic, Jessie Bier, approaches the prefaces by dealing mostly with Hawthorne's style. He begins by comparing various definitions of the "Romance" as they appear in the prefaces to "Rappaccini's Daughter," *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Marble Faun*. Bier concludes that the definitions consistently vie for the use of traditional romantic elements: flat characters, didactic morals, and the freedom of imagination that is restricted by the genre of the novel. He carefully makes the distinction between Hawthorne's non-realistic writing, which contains elements of reality intermingled seamlessly with those of the imagination, and his aversion to unrealistic writing, which deliberately delves into extreme abstractions (Bier 19). Confidently, he places morality at the top of Hawthorne's literary objectives and notes that "no one would seriously doubt" its significance to the stories (22). He is stricken by a curious passage from the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* in which Hawthorne argues the pointlessness of moral didacticism. The passage indicates that a "high truth...is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than the first," and due to its apparent contradiction of an explicitly stated moral earlier in that paragraph, Bier dismisses the quote as unserious, casting doubt on the argument about the meaning of the prefaces (24). Considering Hawthorne's meticulous writing style, why would he introduce unserious notions so haphazardly in so short a piece? In his manner of presentation, Bier's argument seems to fall from a cohesive analysis of Hawthorne's works into an exposition of his own frustrations with Hawthorne's style.

Dealing with similar issues to those of Bier, Dan McCall's article, entitled "Hawthorne's 'Familiar Kind of Preface,'" also hangs on Hawthorne's tendency to contradict himself. Quite harshly, he describes Hawthorne as an indecisive, unserious writer whose works fail to communicate any clear direction or to achieve the same elevated style of James or Stendhal. Yet,

as Bier argued, Hawthorne's ambition was to write in a precisely nonrealistic fashion; therefore, why should he be compared to Stendhal and James whose realist novels, Hawthorne comments, are too limited in their concerns (Hawthorne, "Preface," *Seven Gables* 244)? McCall explains how Hawthorne's deliberate separation of the "Allegorical" from the "Actual" is a problem in his approach although this separation does not necessarily denote a complete disconnection between the two (423). The aim of allegory is to relate, by comparison, the symbolic to the actual. This is exactly what Hawthorne does; he is not, however, explicit about it outside of his prefaces.

The prefaces provide a guide for how to understand the interconnectedness of the seemingly independent Romances, transforming them into "Allegorical" Romances which would have far less meaning without their link to the political dilemmas of Hawthorne's period. McCall, however, prefers to separate the fictional from the actual, focusing on what appear as inconsistencies. He points out that there are moments in Hawthorne's prefaces that seem insincere (McCall 425). Calling them poor writing rather than calculated rhetorical moves, he argues that Hawthorne's aim is to depict abstractions such as purity, corruption, faith, or morality, that are completely separate from the ideas and actions of the narrative and its sociopolitical implications (427). Yet, if this was Hawthorne's aim, why did he choose to write narratives rather than philosophy or poetry? When McCall reads Hawthorne, he sees a lack of realism, an underdeveloped style, and an apologetic reaction to waning readership. If more attention is paid to the complexities of the prefaces rather than the frequent perceptions of contradiction, then perhaps readers will be able to better understand Hawthorne's style.

In a compelling study of the personal and artistic relationships between Hawthorne and Melville, Joseph Moldenhauer taps into the former's broad spiritual and philosophical concerns that lie outside of his interest in Puritan America. He cites an 1851 journal entry which describes

a long conversation between the two rising stars of the American canon and introduces a side of Hawthorne that is altogether absent from the prefaces. His work, though he does not mention it, associates the two authors with transcendentalist thought; their conversations on the genius of Jesus, Shakespeare, and others harken back to Emerson's essay, "Self-Reliance." The article explains their musings on the benefits of philosophical and religious reflection as a key influence on their writing style. Melville, however, seems to lack faith in man's potential. Later, Moldenhauer makes the keen observation that "Hawthorne's major unifying theme in 'The Custom-House,' the persistence of the past into the present, also links the sketch to the romance which it introduces" (Moldenhauer Section 2, para. 21). But he, like Bier and McCall, neglects a discussion of the complicated moral implications. Of course, Hawthorne wanted his readers to make a connection between the prefaces and their respective works; however, Moldenhauer's article still leaves unanswered the questions of exactly what times and places Hawthorne means for us to think about while reading *The Scarlet Letter*.

Motivation and Hidden Intentions in Hawthorne's Prefaces

The prefaces to Hawthorne's romances are brief and yet intentionally complicated. They offer insights on his style, humor, and the underlying aims of each respective work. They communicate with each other and to a group of careful readers by providing corrections (or the appearance of corrections) that coax out another level of meaning from between the lines of his text. Beginning with the work of Jessie Bier, scholarship that addresses Hawthorne's prefaces has focused on his definition of the Romance, crucial information that any interpreter should account for prior to approaching the work itself. Yet, Hawthorne may have embedded hints in the prefaces of a preoccupation with a more pressing and less postured aim than, as Ben Robertson contends, "the creation, or at least the further development, of a uniquely American

literature” (8). While Hawthorne is clearly a key figure in the period that we now call the American Renaissance—which includes writers such as Emerson, Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman—his principal aim lies in an indirect critique of democracy throughout antebellum America that can be traced back to the nation's inception.

Few would disagree that *The Scarlet Letter* is an allegorical criticism of the Salem Customs House after reading the preface. Scholars have pointed out the depth of the connection that Hawthorne felt with his idea of the Boston Puritan Hester Prynne. Accordingly, critics like Edwin Miller are right to note that Hawthorne's preface, “The Custom House,” is “as much a romance as the tale that follows” (278). A cabinet of curiosities packed with caricatures, sketches of the Salem building that seem to come to life, and the fantastic myth of how the letter “A” came to inspire the story and its teller's sense of duty, the preface is clearly far from the reality of what happened to Hawthorne in his days as Surveyor of the custom house. Yet, the narrator tells us that the introduction was inspired by a curious and inexplicable “autobiographical impulse” (Hawthorne, “Custom House” 85). This, among other evidence from Hawthorne's prefaces and letters, seems to suggest that the author intended not just to write a compelling and iconic story, but that he sought to communicate his worldview to readers for generations to come. Although the commonly addressed themes of women and sexuality, Puritan Congregationalist society, symbolism, and questions of the corruptibility of the human soul are all very much present in *The Scarlet Letter*, I offer an interpretation of the work that focuses on authorial intent and how Hawthorne responded to the public's reaction that seeks to connect the cherished author with a conservative strain of American thinkers concerned with the growing power and abuses of centralized government in New England.

Leo Strauss, in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, makes a distinction between freedom of thought as it is perceived by philosophers and by non-philosophers. The latter group, he explains, perceives freedom as “what in what a large number of cases amounts to...the ability to choose between two of more different views presented by the small minority of people who are public speakers or writers” (23). This perspective on freedom of thought, Strauss suggests, is a limited one: freedom of choice. It relies on reason rather than what Emerson would call genius. Thus persecution, by Strauss's definition, means to suppress independent thought by the few capable of constructing philosophical thought for the protection of the regime and its *logica equina*. It fails though, at every turn, to achieve its goal because it can prevent neither independent thought nor the expression of independent thought by this minority (23). Instead, its principal effect is that it inspires a change in the art of writing. Through circumspection, figurative language, and allusion, writers are still able to write with relative safety about authoritatively unapproved subjects. Despite some differences between Strauss' descriptions of this kind of book which violate the *logica equina*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* includes a similar style and motivation.

Audience's Preliminary Reactions to Hawthorne's Works

The preface to Hawthorne's romance, “The Custom House,” is dominated by a series of sketches, according to Hawthorne's hint, faithful to the style of “P.P., Clerk of our Parish,” a short chapter from an obscure work of Alexander Pope called *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. This work, written by the witty and irreverent members of the Scriblerus Club in 18th Century London, was a scathing satire of Bishop Burnett and his “History of My Own Times.” Its significance is paramount to comprehending Hawthorne's tone. The chapter ridicules the droning, self-absorbed memoirs of supposedly pious men, not unlike the caricatures that

Hawthorne offers of the subordinates working under him during his Surveyorship at the Salem Custom House. Additionally, a key event in the chapter is the clerk's fathering of a prostitute's illegitimate child, a close analogy to Hawthorne's Reverend Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne's goal, I contend, was to father a similar metaphorical child—one that he knew would pose a threat to those in control—with the notion that the Whig political party under the direction of the current president, Zachary Taylor, supported a manner of political rule that threatened the future of the American Republic.

In order to communicate this message with minimal risk of retribution from his enemies, I argue, Hawthorne intended for *The Scarlet Letter* to have two separate audiences: the public and “the few who will understand him” (“Custom House” 85). This latter audience, he expected, would look past his caricatures of the lazy old men working at the port and the fantastic story of Hawthorne's discovery of the famed scarlet letter to find a deeper and more pressing critique of American society, whereas the general public tends to read for leisure or entertainment. In the preface to his last book, *The Marble Faun*, he denotes his preferred reader with the name “that one congenial friend” (Hawthorne, “Preface,” *Marble Faun* 589). In his definition of exoteric/esoteric writing, Strauss notes that it is a favorite stylistic choice for the protection of an author who wishes to present one message with levity to the public and another with gravity to the ears of “trustworthy and intelligent readers only” (25). One difference between Strauss' definition and the style that we see in “The Custom House” is the frankness of speech that the author uses. It seems as if Hawthorne, although he attempted to foresee the public's reaction to his work, did not take great pains to hide his message. This did not seem to be a relative issue to Hawthorne because, even with the relative transparency of his writing that we can interpret now, his readers did not seem to decode his message, and were, therefore, unable to criticize him for

it. In the preface to *The Marble Faun*, published nine years after *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne laments the absence of his careful reader, “that one congenial friend,” and decides that this friend may no longer exist. The public did, however, react to “The Custom House,” but on a personal level that Hawthorne may not have intended.

Readers of “The Custom-House” were not as happy to receive his words as he was to finally have attracted an audience to receive them. The reaction to Hawthorne's negative presentation of the Salem custom house was immediate. As Hawthorne predicted, Whigs, opposed to this exposition of his cruel treatment due to his allegiance to the Democratic Party, were outraged. To Hawthorne, this was a sign that they were oblivious to the point he was truly trying to convey. His ultimate objective was not to attack the people who lounged about in the customs house rather than do their civic duty or even those who lobbied to have him fired because of his political inclinations. Rather, Hawthorne chose to present an example for “that one congenial friend” in an attempt to diagnose a serious problem that he believed was eroding the Democracy at its foundations. In his own words on President Taylor's anti-Democrat policies: “There are few uglier traits of human nature than this tendency...to grow cruel, merely because they possessed the power of inflicting harm” (Hawthorne, “Custom House” 108). Despite the complexities of political disputes that were surfacing in the 1850's, Hawthorne seems to have been driven by his treatment at the Salem custom house, that factionalism was the most pressing issue for Americans.

Attempts to Please Audiences

In the preface to the second edition of *The Scarlet Letter*, published only a few months after the first edition, Hawthorne expresses what appears to be an apology for offending the public, stating that he did not expect his work to have such an inflammatory effect on its readers.

The adverse reaction to “The Custom-House” on the part of the conservative federal employees with whom Hawthorne had worked and of several of his acquaintances was a conclusion that could only be reached by a reader who missed the implicit message of valuing civic virtue over party allegiances. The setting here, as he repeats in a later preface to *The Blithedale Romance*, is merely “incidental to the main purpose,” a “theatre” for a drama to be played out (Hawthorne, “Preface,” *Blithedale Romance* 439). Hawthorne—generally non-confrontational and oftentimes reclusive in society—did not want to directly critique his colleagues at the Custom House, but he did have a specific target in mind. Rather than focusing on specific figures, Hawthorne’s aim seems to have been to expose the corruptions found in the democratic system and, as in many of his previous stories, the obvious contradictions it presented against itself. His readership, however, reacted to “The Custom House” with hostility. In response, Hawthorne wrote a second preface that has inspired as much debate as the first, despite its brevity.

Many interpretations of the piece take it at a literal level and seem to work under the assumption that Hawthorne was genuinely surprised by the public’s reaction. It is curious though, if the second preface to *The Scarlet Letter* is to be read as an apology, that the author chose to reprint “The Custom-house” along with it, unchanged in any way. Hawthorne mentions that he was “careful” in his review of the introductory letter and that, to his knowledge, it could not have contained a “livelier effect of truth” (Hawthorne, “Preface,” *Scarlet Letter* 84). Yet, how are we to take his comment that the book’s message to the public would have been lost even if “The Custom-House” had never appeared before the public? It seems that this may have been one of several attempts, in the second preface, to calm his angered readership so that they would be willing to give the book another chance or perhaps to put off their judgment until his next book was published. Either way, if Hawthorne felt as surprised as he seems to in the second

preface, then his reasoning for still including the original preface is unclear. Evidently he felt that the introduction contained key information beyond just an autobiographical impulse, information that those angered by "The Custom-House" were too emotionally compromised by their own personal offense to see.

The preface to Hawthorne's last (and worst received) romance, *The Marble Faun*, was published in 1860 as the forces leading to the Civil War reached critical pressures. In it, Hawthorne reiterates that he had deliberately divided his audience in his previous works. He implies that he is only willing to reveal this so openly because this is his final work whereas, in the past, he faced the constant risk that "unkindly eyes should skim over what was not meant for them" (Hawthorne, "Preface," *Marble Faun* 590). This clearly suggests that Hawthorne had, up to this point, been writing with the intention of excluding a certain kind of reader, who, rather than scrutinizing his words for the deeper meaning, would settle for being entertained by "the probable and ordinary course of man's experience" (Hawthorne, "Preface," *Seven Gables* 243). This popular audience—which he knew he needed to please if he hoped to maintain his career at the writing desk—Hawthorne generally calls "the Public."

Hawthorne makes sure "not to be deficient" of stimulating character arches, sturdy morals, and tragic events in order to please this audience, who he thought would either misread or underrate his romances (Hawthorne, "Preface," *Seven Gables* 243). He assures the public, in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, that his inspiration stems from the urge to restore the dignity of an ostracized woman and to show that past wrongdoings are inherited through blood; yet, this makes the preface seem rather redundant, since these same points are demonstrated quite clearly in the romance itself. Hawthorne is not, as McCall and Bier claim, "unserious" in the sense that his work was haphazard and contradictory; rather, he writes with levity in his representation of

morals because he does not see them as crucial to the work despite his belief in their authenticity. While these scholars were sensible in their skepticism of Hawthorne's seemingly contradictory statements, they seem unaware that he was writing for two opposing audiences; thus, their conclusions are somewhat limited. Hawthorne's work suggests that he believed, as Emerson did, that to be great was also to be largely misunderstood (Emerson 66).

Hawthorne's Hidden Critiques of Political and Social Tension in America

To the careful reader, the author presents a struggle between corrupt officials consumed by a cycle of lust for power that continues throughout the preface and the romance. A key skirmish, found in "The Custom-House," occurs between Uncle Sam and his loyal followers and the free-thinking public. These tensions are symbolized in Hawthorne's depiction of the federal eagle statue above the entrance to the Salem port office. His scathing speech, that arises whenever he writes about matters of the state, portends his fears of the terrible potential of symbols to be used to commit acts of symbolic violence capable of segregating society, perhaps beyond repair. Just as Hester was persecuted in her time, Hawthorne himself was branded a dangerous and disloyal "Locofoco" by the Taylor Administration in 1848. Even before the election, when his politics were supported by the Democratic Polk Administration, Hawthorne worked—literally and figuratively—beneath the eagle each day keenly aware of the "fierceness" and "truculency" that seemed to make the statue "apt to fling off her nestlings, with a scratch of her claw, a dab of her beak, or a rankling wound from her barbed arrows" (Hawthorne, "Custom House" 86). Hawthorne, who identified with the Locofoco movement—a conservative group that vied for laissez-faire government and state's rights and yet stood for workers' unions—seems to have seen this image as quite disturbing. The passage is a profound critique on the dangerous trend of growing power and partisanship in the federal government in the 1840's. The preface

makes a deliberate connection between the hypocrisies and tyrannies of early Puritan America and those of this time, illustrating Hawthorne's belief that there may be some fundamental flaw in the American experiment. However, his own involvement with a political party suggests that he thought the problem did not lie in factions but in the preference of party allegiances over civic virtue.

Hawthorne's critique of the political system continues in his portrayal of the workplace and employees at the Custom House. He mentions that, ironically, the flag of the republic flies over the Custom House "vertically, instead of horizontally, and thus indicating that a civil, and not a military post of Uncle Sam's government is here established," despite the number of former military officers working there (Hawthorne, "Custom House" 86). Both the Inspector and the Collector of the Custom House, who served in the Revolutionary War and expansion efforts, respectively, are described as fitting most appropriately with their jobs, and yet most radically different from Hawthorne himself (93-98). He praises these men in a manner akin to his affection for Salem, clearly associating them with corruption and idleness. Later in this section, he remarks that "neither the front nor the back entrance of the Custom House opens on the road to Paradise" (91). To Hawthorne, the building and all of the activities that occurred in and around it were somehow tainted by a history of violence and segregation. He notes that any officer who revealed his political beliefs while on the job found that "within a month after the exterminating angel had come up the Custom House steps" (91). His continual evocation of the guillotine also demonstrates his sensitivity to the consequences of the human corruption that he saw all around him, as well as alludes to the French Revolution and a time when many Americans watched in fear that France would prove the impossibility of modern republicanism. Eventually he describes this sensitivity in stating that "there are few uglier traits of human nature than this tendency...to

grow cruel, merely because they possessed the power of inflicting harm" (108). As a representative of the nation through his Custom House position, Hawthorne seems to display this tendency before his readers not to condemn the men that he speaks of, but rather to call upon the civic duty of the American citizen to live as a respectful companion to his peers, despite their intellectual dissimilarities.

Throughout the preface, the author takes issue not only with the pervasive presence of military authority in a civil institution but with the economic implications of being part of Uncle Sam's ventures. Hawthorne uses his experience with Custom House officers as an example, claiming that "the very nature of his business, which—though, I trust, an honest one—is of such a sort that he does not share in the united effort of mankind"; in other words, it leads to a life of privation and disregarding of morals (107). His contrasting of the lazy officers with the apostle Matthew further illustrates this point (87). He depicts these officers' lives as appearing to be dominated by slumber and useless gossip to such a degree that if they were called upon to act morally, unlike the disciple, they would simply lie back in their chairs and ignore the calling. These men, Hawthorne remarks, appear to have ignored their wisdom for a life of leisure and coin, which could only lead to further degradation; "Uncle Sam's gold has, in this respect, a quality of enchantment like that of the Devil's wages" (107). The atmosphere of stagnation and complacency that Hawthorne describes here does not, however, reflect merely on the men and women of Salem but, through his use of allegory, on the American people as a whole who, despite the relatively novel adoption of constitutional freedoms, chose to let contemplation of goodness, justice, and citizenship go by the wayside.

While Hawthorne questions his own spiritual devotion at times, Biblical imagery and concepts pervade his work. As with Jesus and his disciples, Hawthorne writes the prefaces as if

they were parables so that only those careful and serious readers are able to interpret his message in the way that he intended (*New International Version*, Mark 4:11-12). In the first paragraph of the same preface, he describes a type of author who, in order to bring the reader “into communion” with him, goes to great autobiographical lengths that reveal everything that the reader needs to interpret the work in the way he intends; Hawthorne, however, states that “It is scarcely decorous...to speak all, even where we speak impersonally” (“Custom House,” 85). Here we have evidence that he expects careful readers to be alert to his rhetorical style and to look for implicit meaning beyond merely noting what the author explicitly states. Of course, he wants to separate his fictional work from his actual experiences at the Custom House of Salem, but the ultimate goal is not to present the actual but rather to send a message to prevent his preferred readers from losing the meaning of the work by making the wrong connections between the work and actual events. Hawthorne had an eye for the bigger picture but was careful of showing this truth because of how it could be used against him.

Changes in Hawthorne's Character

As the frustration that developed in the scribbling Surveyor slowly took its toll, Hawthorne seemed to stand, like Melville's Ishmael, in desperate need of release from the monotony. The urgency appears quite evident when he remarks: “I endeavored to calculate how much longer I could stay in the Custom House, and yet go forth a man” (“Custom House,” 108). Somehow, Hawthorne seems to fear that he is in the shoes of his ancestors, reliving their sins and being challenged to remedy them. In this way, the author becomes a living, breathing allegory. Afraid that the blood on his hands would soak through to the bone, so that he could not be free of it until he also turned to dust, Hawthorne relates the election of Zachary Taylor to the office of the President, following his termination as surveyor, as evidence that “Providence had meditated

better things for me than I could possibly imagine for myself" (108). When the figurative guillotine came, it inspired outrage as it fell by virtue of the President's order to cut out all influences of the Democratic Party, but then it also proved inspirational. Despite silence about his politics, Hawthorne was forced out and yet he was happily freed from the corrosive life of mandatory allegiance to an authority with which he neither identified nor agreed.

Despite these connections that Hawthorne's narrator of "The Custom House" makes between the romance and the preface, and between it and Hawthorne's life, skeptical critics argue that the preface is merely rhetorical and not necessarily a reflection of the author's sentiments. His letters, however, seem to argue otherwise. Months before his termination from the real Salem custom house, Hawthorne had heard rumors of his fate and inquired judiciously in letters to a few influential friends on the proceedings against him: "I am informed that there is to be a strong effort among the politicians here to remove me from office, and that my successor is already marked out" (*The Letters* 263). Not only was this news surprising and unwarranted in Hawthorne's eyes, but the fact that the President had already chosen a successor was something he found plainly insulting. In a later letter to Hawthorne's close friend, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, he details the reasons behind his prospective ejection coupled with the same politically charged speech that can be found in the last half of "The Custom House":

I have been accused of a connection with the editorship of [the Salem Advertiser], and of writing political articles—of which I never did one single time in my life! I must confess, it stirs up a little of the devil within me, to find myself hunted by these political bloodhounds. If they succeed in getting me out of office, I will surely immolate one or two of them (*The Letters* 269).

This level of anger is uncharacteristic and demonstrates a moment of hypocrisy in which he finds himself driven to a state of cruel-mindedness that mirrors those he criticizes with *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne dwelt on the notion that those who sought to rid him of office had no respect for him because of his literary life, thinking it a weakness. In response to this, nearly a year preceding the publishing of the romance, he wrote: "If they will pay no reverence to the imaginative power when it causes herbs of grace and sweet-scented flowers to spring up along their pathway, then they should be taught what it can do in the way of producing nettles, skunk-cabbage, deadly night shade, wolf's bane, dog-wood" (*The Letters* 270). All of this is to say—to hearken back to Rosen's aforementioned statement concerning the author in the text—that the narrative persona that we encounter in the prefaces to Hawthorne's romances, though crafted for specific purposes, shares the concerns that the author wrote about for years before publishing his first book.

Hawthorne's Basic Desires for Balance in the Government

Thus far, I have shown that based on Hawthorne's prefaces, the claim made by Robertson that Hawthorne's aim in writing was to create a "uniquely American Literature" can hardly be the whole truth. Rather, Hawthorne sought to communicate the metaphorical fathering of what society would interpret as an antinomian idea—one against the established laws—just as his character Hester Prynne was punished for her illegitimate child, Pearl. In the same manner that Hester used her punishment to her advantage, Hawthorne composed *The Scarlet Letter* in order to unveil the hypocrisy that he saw all around him. His simple wish for steady employment was rejected by Taylor's political guillotine and yet society interpreted "The Custom House" as coming more from the mouth of a political party than from that of a singular man.

This problem resembles the same warnings about the dangers of factions that had been discussed before the American republic was founded and that were famously laid out in the constitutional treatises of the *Federalist Papers*. In particular, the ninth and tenth entries in this collection of essays, authored by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison respectively, deal with determining the best balance of civil liberty and centralization of the government. Both authors conclude that a confederacy of states would be the most effective and harmonious system of government. As a testament to its viability, Hamilton explains that “The utility of a confederacy, as well as to suppress faction, and to guard the internal tranquility of the states, as to increase their external force and security, is in reality not a new idea” (Hamilton 48). The founders often cited that a key element in the system’s effectiveness was its borrowing of the advantages of monarchy: power through layers of authority, checks, and balances. This system had been a part of the English government since the Magna Carta in 1215 and the Bill of Rights in 1689 and, thus, eventually the American consciousness as well. Madison in particular emphasizes that this system has the capacity to prevent both individuals and small groups from leading the kind of coups that had been successful in the history of European nations. He argues that “the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of political rivalries,” and thus factions cannot possibly be a marker of good citizenship (Madison 53). Of course, in order for this confederate system to work, each citizen must look to the public good and not merely to his or her own benefit. Without this concern for the union, Madison argues, any state is doomed to the constant partisan warfare of which Hawthorne himself was a victim. His audience, however, was unanimously more distracted by anger at Hawthorne’s portrayal of the custom house employees than inspired by his concern for good citizenship and the wellbeing of the Union.

When reading Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, one of Hawthorne's favorite books, the object is not to understand Christian or any of the various characters that he encounters along the road but to understand how they symbolically dramatize Biblical parables as part of a larger allegory of the journey of the Christian soul toward Heaven. In the same way, Hawthorne dramatizes the struggle of power hierarchies and community equality in Puritan New England and the antebellum period simultaneously; yet, his works may not give an answer as to which he thinks should survive. Hawthorne's experience at the Salem Custom House seems to have led him to develop a polemic stance against the Whig party, as he saw a powerful majority guilty of abusing the beliefs of the minority Democrats in them.

It is generally claimed that Hawthorne's aim in writing was to capture the moral, social, and psychological effects of Puritan congregationalism on 17th century Americans. McCall and Bier, early critics of Hawthorne's prefaces, focused on his definition of the romance and his eclectic style. Other studies of Hawthorne's prefaces, letters, and journals have uncovered some engagement with the political concerns of his present, but there is more work to be done (Zuckert 1980, 1981). It is odd that, as one of the greats of the American Renaissance, Hawthorne is mostly studied in the context of pre-Revolutionary America. This seems to define Nathaniel Hawthorne either as a kind of historian trying to preserve the customs of a bygone time or a philosopher concerned with penetrating into the stuff of eternal human nature. If the latter, why not examine the pressing existential issues that abounded, including the discussion of slavery and the growing imperialist forces of the westward expansion? Just as the characters in his romances experienced the consequences of allowing sinful traditions to fester, Hawthorne saw that America as a whole was doing the same.

Conclusion

Nathaniel Hawthorne did not live to see the Civil War, but his fears about the divided State leading up to it seem to call for a rethinking of the present and a remembrance of the dilemmas of the past which, Hawthorne consistently argues, pervades it unfalteringly. The Restoration, as a matter of necessity, called upon the State to come to a consensus once again on the interpretation of the will of the founders and the new direction of the Nation. Hawthorne had meant to use his experience to diagnosis the sicknesses of his country through literature: the voracious pursuit of power, land, and money that would eventually force American into civil war. Not surprisingly, his efforts to inspire a new political discussion that concerned itself with the public good went largely or entirely unnoticed by his contemporaries. Today, his works live on as testaments to his unmistakable talent as a writer, satirist, and citizen, making it all the more important for us to preserve and to continue to study his writing for the new insights they may reveal.

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