“That One Congenial Friend”

A Study of Hawthorne’s Aim and Audience

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On Great Thinkers: “Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe...is that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men, but what they thought.”
—Emerson in “Self-Reliance”
Two Audiences

- The Public
- The Careful Reader
- “The Custom-House”
- “Preface” to The Marble Faun

“…when he casts his leaves forth upon the wind, the author addresses, not the many who will fling aside his volume, to never take it up, but to the few who will understand him, better than most of his schoolmates or lifemates.” (85)
-Nathaniel Hawthorne from “The Custom-House”
Research Questions

- What provoked Hawthorne to decide that it was necessary to write to different audiences?

- What does he say to “that one congenial friend?”

- What does his work imply about how we should interact with political regimes today?
“How serious, in all Hawthorne’s prefaces, are the continuing complaints that the shades are too-retired and that he was only trying to write a fanciful story, evolving a thoughtful moral?” (McCall 425)
“The Prefaces are short in space, written in an amiable and quiet manner and in a tone altogether disarming to the critic, whose fear of pretension keeps him from the concentrated study that the prefaces deserve.” (Bier 17)

“No one would seriously doubt that moral truth was a prime purpose in Hawthorne’s whole career, least of all Hawthorne himself.” (Bier 22)
“With his public role or office of Surveyor Hawthorne associated, I suspect, the word ‘custom’ itself: the custom-house becomes a house of convention where the creative artist...suffers from the tyranny of custom and a working routine...that effectively excludes him from his true vocation.” (Moldenhauer 9)
“Persecution, then, gives rise to a particular technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines.” (Strauss 25)
Methodology

- Interpret Hawthorne from Hawthorne
- Classify Hawthorne’s Speech
- Progression of the Prefaces
- Interaction with the Public
Concern with Political Regimes in Every Era

Diagnosis of the Problems with the Enactment of Democracy in the Antebellum Period

Factionalism Leads to an Ineffective and Uncooperative Democracy Driven by Cruelty Rather than Citizenship


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