



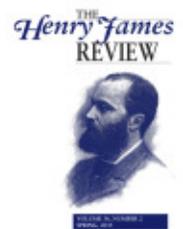
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The Anxiety of Audience: Economies of Readership in James's *Hawthorne*

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Recent criticism of Henry James's 1879 study *Hawthorne* has largely been dominated by the conception of influence Richard H. Brodhead promotes in *The School of Hawthorne*. For Brodhead, the James who writes Hawthorne's "critical biography" is a newly emerging journeyman novelist seeking to purge from his own psyche the authority of his primary literary precursor. Brodhead writes: "every move James makes to place Hawthorne historically functions simultaneously at another level, as part of an effort to put his predecessor at a disadvantage" (137). James here suffers from the anxiety of influence, as in Harold Bloom's famous construction, and tries to expunge his greatest literary forefather through direct, textual confrontation. And, while Bloom writes that the "anxiety" he envisions "may or may not be internalized" by the writer himself (xxiii), Brodhead seems to imagine a Henry James who *does* suffer from a kind of Freudian resentment.¹ More significantly, recent critics have leaned heavily on the Brodhead/Bloom model, even as their work seems to offer evidence that the influences acting on James in *Hawthorne* were more ambivalent and complex than that of a confrontation between father and son, master and apprentice.² In *Henry James, Gertrude Stein, and the Biographical Act*, Charles Caramello writes: "As most commentators now agree, James suffered a considerable anxiety of influence with respect to Hawthorne, and *Hawthorne*, as a result, reveals as much about its author as about its subject" (26–27). Willie Tolliver agrees, writing: "James is renouncing Hawthorne in order to transcend him. He is trying to rid his work of Hawthorne's influence, the way a son rebels against a father" (78). None of these critics, nor others who have relied on the vision of a father-son relationship between James and Hawthorne, denies the presence of other shaping forces. But most seem to treat these influences as ancillary.³

This vision is difficult to reconcile with the Henry James who, in 1879, had already enjoyed wide acclaim as the author of “Daisy Miller” (1878) and was about to embark on the masterpiece of his middle period, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). This reading also misses the ways in which James praised Hawthorne and his work, often holding the elder author up as an example—perhaps like James himself—of a writer who partly stands above and apart from his provincial origins. In *Hawthorne*, James writes that *The Scarlet Letter* is as “exquisite in quality” as anything written in Europe (88). Coming from Henry James, this is high praise indeed. James wrote *Hawthorne* for the Macmillan English Men of Letters series. And Hawthorne was, in fact, the only U.S. writer the British publisher saw fit to appear in the series (Anesko, “Friction” 63). Read in this context, James’s praise and criticism of Hawthorne can be seen not as an attempt to purge Hawthorne’s influence from James’s own psyche or work but as an attempt to establish for British readers the attributes of a great U.S. cosmopolitan writer. James’s analysis acknowledges Hawthorne’s “genius” (1–2) but leaves open a still greater position in the marketplace for a future U.S. writer to claim. The Hawthorne of James’s study is the greatest U.S. author to write for a transnational audience thus far but one who is still hampered by his provincial origins. *Hawthorne*, then, can be read as part of a complex economic transaction. The book becomes a means of establishing an archetypal U.S. man of letters, one with an international audience. It provides a model to which British readers can look as they judge the talent of a future cosmopolitan U.S. writer—namely, Henry James himself.

If James was primarily concerned with promoting particular aesthetic values among his British readers—values that would advance his own work—why then has a singular, Oedipal interpretation of James’s little book persisted? I think there are two important reasons. First, Brodhead’s conception is correct, although insufficient. James does, in fact, use *Hawthorne* to do battle with a literary precursor. But the battle, I suspect, is staged: James engages it with far more conscious intention than he has been given credit for in the past. Second and more important, the vision of a father-son relationship between James and Hawthorne persists because Bloom’s Freudian vision of influence is pervasive. Within Bloom’s critical apparatus, Brodhead, Caramello, Tolliver, and those who agree with them must read James’s attack on Hawthorne in essentially psychoanalytic, rather than economic, terms.⁴ And yet *Hawthorne*, as this essay will demonstrate, is a book deeply concerned with establishing the aesthetic values by which British readers will come to accept the next great U.S. transnational author. The Bloom model produces a vision of authorship nearly emptied of actual readers. For Bloom, the work itself matters most, and authors consciously or unconsciously wrestle with the work of earlier authors before a fixed readership. But, perhaps more than any other writer in English in the late-nineteenth century, James was forced to negotiate both U.S. and British readerships. As an address largely to British readers, *Hawthorne* represents an attempt to preempt fixed British notions of Hawthorne’s work and the work of U.S. authors generally. The book marks a crucial moment in James’s fashioning of himself as a cosmopolitan intellectual. He uses *Hawthorne* to negotiate his own position in a transatlantic financial and aesthetic economy and to stake a claim to transnational identity that no previous U.S. author—in the eyes of British readers, at least—could claim.

In an 1879 letter to Mrs. F. H. Hill, the wife of the London *Daily News* editor, James complained about his English audience (SL 159–62). James had moved to

London three years earlier and by 1879 had published *Daisy Miller and Other Stories* with Macmillan (Anesko, *Letters* 9–10). One of those other stories, “An International Episode,” had received a less-than-appreciative reception by several reviewers. Critics had been offended at the ways in which James, a foreigner, had sketched some of his British characters.⁵ Hill was one of these critics, and, in his response dated March 21, James writes:

The bother of being an American! Trollope, Thackeray, Dickens, even with their big authoritative talents, were free to draw all sorts of unflattering English pictures, by the thousand. But if I make a single one, I am forthwith in danger of being confronted with a criminal conclusion—and sinister rumors reach me as to what I think of English society. . . . Perhaps some day I shall take more pages, and attempt to tell some of these things. . . . Meanwhile I shall draw plenty of pictures of disagreeable Americans, as I have done already, and the friendly Briton will see no harm in that! (*SL* 161)

James—whose annoyance is palpable throughout the letter—is perhaps not serious when he tells Hill he will only write about disagreeable Americans. Yet the letter illustrates James's awareness of his position as an American addressing an English audience. And the date of the letter is significant. James had signed a contract to write *Hawthorne* for the English Men of Letters series in January 1879, but he delayed the actual writing (Anesko, “*Friction*” 63). He was obviously not enthusiastic about the project and had written to his father a year before that “one can't write a volume about H[awthorne]” (qtd. in Anesko, “*Friction*” 63). By March, when James wrote to Hill, he was still delaying as he watched negative reviews of “An International Episode” pour in: March 1, the *Athenaeum*; March 21, the *Daily News*; March 22, the *Academy*. Each of the reviews painted James as an American outsider unqualified to comment on the behaviors of British aristocrats.

When James finally began *Hawthorne*—“slowly, and laboriously” he writes (qtd. in Anesko, “*Friction*” 64)—he seemed to have written it, as critic Anne Margolis explains, “primarily if not exclusively [for] the British public” (39). Because James was a citizen, he technically held the copyright for *Hawthorne* in the United States. For this reason, Macmillan and Company, James's British publisher, offered him a choice: accept £100 in exchange for both British and U.S. rights or accept £75 for the British rights and a 10 percent royalty on U.S. sales. Anesko explains that the U.S. publisher for the series—Harper and Brothers—would have had to sell 1,200 copies of *Hawthorne* in order for James to break even in the royalty deal. Perhaps James thought the book would fail to reach this threshold, or, at the very least, would not reach the threshold quickly enough. He accepted the standard deal offered to British writers: a lump sum, in this case £100, in exchange for all publishing rights. Anesko observes that “from the first James seems to have been skeptical of the book's probable appeal in America” (“*Friction*” 63). To Frederick Macmillan, James would write that the possibility of profit was “uncertain” and that “I shall content myself with a disinterested observation of the sale, whatever it is, that the book may have in the Harpers' hands” (qtd. in Anesko, “*Friction*” 63–64). In financial terms, James was relying on a British publisher, a British system of payment to authors, and the expectation of a British readership. James seems to have thought that American readers

would either fail to materialize or else materialize very slowly. His U.S. citizenship gave him the opportunity to make the kind of calculation that would have been impossible for a British author: James had to decide whether he could reasonably expect to sell more than 1,200 U.S. copies of *Hawthorne*. He concluded, it seems, that this would be unlikely. When James's friend, *Atlantic Monthly* editor William Dean Howells, reviewed *Hawthorne*, he described James as "an American author writing of an American author for an English public" (282). Howells, at least, saw that James was still courting the English readers he had already spent three years trying to win over. It perhaps isn't surprising, then, that *Hawthorne* is full of disagreeable Americans and that it gingerly treats comparisons between England and its former colony. Hawthorne, the only American to qualify as an "English" man of letters, would have to be treated carefully if he were to receive entrée into the company of Hazlitt and Macaulay.

James uses the book in many ways to represent the United States to English readers. Preempting British criticisms of the cultural backwater, he offers a U.S. founded by a "handful of half-starved fanatics" but, in the next breath, cautions that it is a "mighty empire" (52). When writing about Hawthorne's *Life of Franklin Pierce* (1852), James seems compelled to explain American idiom. James explains that Pierce's "record, as they say in America, had been mainly that of a successful country lawyer" (111). And when Hawthorne, in a quotation, refers to an innkeeper as a "gentlewoman," a breach of protocol in Britain, James explains: "It was probable that she was substantially educated, and of reputable life, and it is certain that she was energetic. These qualities would make it natural for Hawthorne to speak of her as a gentlewoman; the natural tendency in societies where the sense of equality prevails" (38). Hawthorne here is no fool; rather, he is obeying a different standard of protocol, a peculiarly American one.

James also defends Hawthorne's work in the book—particularly work toward which English readers might feel skeptical. This is most visible when James addresses Hawthorne's *Our Old Home* (1863), a travelogue of his time in England. The defense is easy to miss: it begins as a kind of back-handed compliment. James quotes Hawthorne's own assessment of *Our Old Home*, writing: "It is not a good or weighty book" (118). Then, James partially agrees, writing that the book is not "weighty," although it is, in fact, "good." More important, though, James turns his acerbic criticism on his (and Hawthorne's) British audience. Some British readers might have taken issue with Hawthorne's sketches of Englishmen, James writes, but:

To say that it is an immeasurably more exquisite and sympathetic work than any of the numerous persons who have related their misadventures in the United States have seen fit to devote to that country, is to say but little, and I imagine that Hawthorne had in mind the array of English voyagers—Mrs. Trollope, Dickens, Marryat, Basil Hall, Miss Martineau, Mr. Grattan—when he reflected that everything is relative. . . . He professed, after the event, to have discovered that the English are sensitive, and as they say of the Americans, for whose advantage I believe the term was invented, thin skinned. (*HA* 119)

The criticism is biting, and it gives us a glimpse of a James who can empathize with Hawthorne's experience. Like the James who writes "An International Episode," Hawthorne had been accused of caricaturing the English. Hawthorne's experience, however, was far more dramatic and painful. A reviewer of *Our Old Home* for the *Athenaeum*, in 1863, excoriated Hawthorne for writing the book, calling the work "unpleasant" and "absolutely coarse" (Rev. of *Our Old Home* 428). The betrayal was made worse because, the *Athenaeum* review claims, England had favored Hawthorne by being first in "discerning his power and promise as an author, and setting him in his place as an imaginative writer of the first rank, years—many years—before he was looked for and listened to in his own country" (428). Much like James, Hawthorne was favored by the British, provided he didn't tell them about themselves.⁶

And, as James writes about the reception of *Our Old Home*, one can perceive the delicate balance he must strike throughout *Hawthorne*. The relatively young Henry James has not yet entirely won over his British audience, and here he expresses frustration that they are thin-skinned, that they can't seem to take criticism from an outsider, and that they allow other writers (again, we have Dickens, as well as Anthony Trollope's mother, Frances) liberties based solely on their nationality. James's defense of Hawthorne is, at moments, devastating. Hawthorne's work is "immeasurably more exquisite and sympathetic" to the English than any English writer has been toward Americans, he tells his readers. James ends his criticism of English readers with the following observation: "The idea of [Hawthorne's] hating the English was of course too puerile for discussion" (120). One can almost hear in this remark James's annoyance at Hill, who sees every English character as a representative of the author's idea of Englishness. Or, rather, one can hear James's observation, in a letter to Grace Norton in June 1879, that the English have a "certain number of great plump flourishing uglinesses and drearinesses which offer themselves irresistibly as *pin-cushions* to criticism and irony" (SL 164). Despite the wonders and glories of London society—and James waxes rhapsodic about these to Norton, as well—Londoners cannot seem to take a joke or bear the weight of any criticism. They are, in a word Hawthorne used several times to describe them, "pompous" (*Home* 264, 294, 364).

This isn't the only time James defends Hawthorne to an English audience. In examining *The Scarlet Letter*, James juxtaposes Hawthorne's text with a similar novel by the Scottish writer John Gibson Lockhart. Throughout much of the comparison, Lockhart's *Adam Blair* seems to come off the stronger. Despite James's early back-handed remark that Lockhart's novel was "an excellent second-rate one," the Scottish novelist gets a great deal of praise for the "warmth" of his story, the vigorous way his novel develops (HA 91). *The Scarlet Letter*, although it is a work as "exquisite in quality as anything that had been received" from Europe, is described as "cold" in comparison (88, 92).

But James here is being, in his own phrase, "supersubtle" (SL 161). After addressing the shortcomings of *The Scarlet Letter*, he stops himself: "But I am going too far; I am comparing simplicity with subtlety, the usual with the refined" (92). The message carries with it a classically Jamesian admonition to readers: *The Scarlet Letter* might be difficult to read, it might seem cold or remote, but it should be read. To read it is to read subtlety, refinement, and genius. A decade after *Hawthorne*, James would complain to his brother William that "The multitude, I am more than ever convinced, has absolutely no taste—none at least that a thinking man is bound to defer

to” (qtd. in Margolis 26). And, three years before *Hawthorne*, in 1876, James was writing letters to Howells complaining about the middlebrow American publications *Scribner’s* and the *Galaxy* (SL 122–23, 137). James did not take the popular audience as it came. Rather, as his career continued, he increasingly cultivated the cultivated, the kinds of readers who might understand how *The Scarlet Letter* compares favorably with *Adam Blair*. Presenting *The Scarlet Letter* in this way was training the English reader to appreciate a peculiarly American kind of refinement and training the reader of “excellent second-rate” works to appreciate the first-rate ones. “Even very intelligent readers,” James cautions, can be attracted to “a love-story told with the robust, synthetic pathos which served Lockhart so well” (HA 91). The subtext of that critique is clear: Hawthorne’s novel, which at first blush appears more cold or distant, is actually the superior work. The American, in this case, comes out on top. And particularly Jamesian values—the subtle, the ornate, the refined—become the features readers must learn to appreciate.

Despite James’s efforts to defend Hawthorne, however, there are a number of ways in which *Hawthorne* constitutes a diminishment of its subject. James’s prose seems to reduce both Hawthorne and the United States—a particularly jarring fact if we assume that this is James’s letter to an English readership.

A number of critics have noticed James’s tendency to diminish Hawthorne’s moral vision by referring to it merely as a stylistic device. This fact is frequently used as evidence of James’s attempt to usurp Hawthorne’s authority, to diminish the elder author in James’s own psyche. Brodhead writes that James’s version of “Hawthorne is not disturbed or haunted by innate depravity; black is merely his favorite pigment. Here as elsewhere the principal effect of James’s approach is to deny that Hawthorne’s writing is informed by a deeply felt and seriously entertained vision of human life” (136). Caramello has qualified this, arguing that the use of a painterly vocabulary was a mixed bag for James. But, Caramello writes, “James makes the term ‘picture,’ in fact, a pejorative when discussing Hawthorne’s longer works” (35).⁷ These critics have noticed what might very well be impossible to miss in *Hawthorne*: that James seems to reduce Hawthorne to a mere painter of moonlight and shadow. The most defining feature of Hawthorne’s work—a rendering of spiritual suffering—is absent from James’s book.

But the metaphor Brodhead uses here is interesting. “Black,” Brodhead writes, “is merely his favorite pigment.” The painting reference to which Brodhead refers comes from James’s chapter about Hawthorne’s early manhood. James is addressing the question of the “Puritan conscience,” and whether Hawthorne possessed it. James writes:

But his relation to it was only, as one may say, intellectual; it was not moral and theological. He played with it, and used it as a pigment; he treated it, as the metaphysicians say, objectively. He was not discomposed, disturbed, haunted by it, in the manner of its usual and regular victims. . . . He speaks of the dark disapproval with which his old ancestors, in the case of their coming to life, would see him trifling himself away as a story-teller. But how far more darkly would they have frowned could they have understood that he had converted the very principle of their own being into one of his toys! (46–47)

At first, this judgment does in fact seem to wrench Hawthorne from his historical context, to take from the elder author every measure of moral seriousness. But one must remember to whom James is speaking about both good writing and Puritanism. Hawthorne's deeply felt moral vision might strike British readers as foreign and Puritanical, just as it apparently struck James. Hawthorne's Puritan forefathers, after all, are not treated kindly in James's representation of America: they are alternately "straight-laced" (127), a "handful of half-starved fanatics" (52), or involved in "that deplorable episode of New England history, the persecution of the so-called Witches of Salem" (6). To say Hawthorne has reduced Puritan sensibility to a toy is very likely a measure of praise. Those possessed by the "Puritan conscience" are the "usual and regular victims" of that conscience. James is arguing that Hawthorne was far more cosmopolitan than his context, only not cosmopolitan enough. Hawthorne, then, could not possibly have embraced the morality of those "half-starved fanatics" of Massachusetts Bay.

Even more important, James is doing what he typically does when he means to address literary talent: he is referring to the visual arts. And, by doing so, he is establishing the measure by which the next great Anglo-American writer must be judged. Hawthorne, according to James, has used the history available to him as pigment. Earlier, James extends the pigment metaphor: "It is interesting to see how [Hawthorne's writing] borrowed a particular colour from the other faculties that lay near it—how the imagination, in this capital son of the old Puritans, reflected the hue of the more purely moral part" (45). Again, morality is a color to be mixed and used and Hawthorne is the painter qualified to use it.⁸ In "The Art of Fiction" (1884), James argues that "the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete" (504). Five years earlier, writing about Hawthorne, he obviously had this analogy in mind. When Hawthorne fails, he fails on visual terms. When he succeeds, it is also on those terms. James does not, however, judge Hawthorne's moral sense. Hawthorne need not use Puritan morality as anything more than a pigment—in fact, using his history as pigmentation constitutes his greatest triumph. Morality, James will write later in "The Art of Fiction," has nothing to do with creating good novels. Instead, "[a] novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression" (507). When we understand that this is the basis upon which James will critique Hawthorne's work, and the basis upon which he will expect his audience to judge him, we see just how much praise appears in *Hawthorne*.

The Scarlet Letter is a masterpiece, James writes, because its theme "cools off, as it were, hardens and stiffens, and, producing effects much more exquisite, leaves the reader with a sense of having handled a splendid piece of silversmith's work" (HA 92). Hawthorne's coolness and his lack of a moral belief constitute his artistic triumph. It is through coolness that the silver hardens into its final, fully realized shape. One can see this in the comparison to Lockhart, in the sentence immediately following, when James writes: "Lockhart, by means much more vulgar, produces at moments a greater illusion, and satisfies our inevitable desire for something . . . that shall be the same pitch and the same continuity with ourselves" (92). James is using the metaphor of the visual arts to educate those untutored readers—particularly British readers, who might be inclined to favor their "second-rate" countryman. While

the immediacy and passion of Lockhart's novel might seem superior, it is merely satisfying our desire to read predictable material. Hawthorne is doing something far greater, far more "exquisite."

References to the visual arts continue throughout *Hawthorne*, and it is in these references that Hawthorne appears most triumphant. Responding to French critic Émile Montégut, who argued—as Brodhead would more than a century later—that Hawthorne had a deep, and dark, moral vision, James returns to painterly language: "What pleased [Hawthorne] in such subjects was their picturesqueness, their rich duskiness of colour, their chiaroscuro; but they were not the expression of a hopeless, or even of a predominantly melancholy, feeling about the human soul" (*HA* 47). The vocabulary of the visual arts serves two important functions here. First, it establishes Hawthorne's command of style. Hawthorne, the painter of moonlight and shadow, has complete control of his brush. He is a master of the contrast between light and dark, of chiaroscuro. But, second and more important, Hawthorne does not have a moral agenda. In "The Art of Fiction," James would write that one cannot "paint a moral picture or carve a moral statue" any more than one can write a moral novel (519). He continues: "There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer" (520). James has invented a version of Hawthorne who recognizes this truth. Like painters, writers operate under a single moral injunction: to produce quality art. Hawthorne, the earlier master, produces literature unburdened by an irrelevant moral perspective.

But James does not merely use the language of visual arts to unburden Hawthorne of his troublesome morality. He also uses this language to reintroduce the American to an English audience. Addressing *Our Old Home*, James again invokes the language of painting. After quoting a Hawthornian description of English buildings, James writes: "There is Hawthorne, with his enjoyment of the picturesque, his relish of chiaroscuro, of local colour, of the deposit of time" (*HA* 123). Like a painter rendering an English village on canvas, Hawthorne has recognized the artistic possibilities in English antiquity and felicitously depicted them. James and Hawthorne see equally that old places make the best subjects, and those subjects must be "painted" in prose. But James's language does something else. It erases Hawthorne's criticism of England. In the quoted passage, Hawthorne doesn't merely say English architecture is picturesque. He also judges that living in it is virtually impossible. Hawthorne writes that the buildings "receive massive strength from their deep and immemorial foundations, though with such limitations and impediments as only an Englishman could endure" (qtd. in *HA* 122). James ignores this. And while he would briefly address Hawthorne's criticisms of the English earlier—explaining that they came from an American self-consciousness (121)—here he defends what Hawthorne writes by expressing admiration for how well he writes it. James's readers are instructed to ignore the criticism of their country's unlivable edifices and instead experience the ways "Hawthorne's charming diction lingers in the memory" (*HA* 123).

Finally, James uses the language of painting and drawing to express simple admiration for Hawthorne's virtuosity. James in many ways eschews his role as critic in these moments and writes with the admiration of one novelist for another, expressing his appreciation of discrete artistic successes. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, James writes, "Judge Pyncheon is an ironical portrait, very richly and broadly executed, very

sagaciously composed and rendered” and made up of “a hundred admirable touches” (HA 101–02). The language of portraiture is also used to express Hawthorne’s accomplishment in rendering Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*: “The portrait [of Zenobia] is full of alteration and embellishment; but it has a greater reality, a greater abundance of detail, than any of his other figures” (HA 63). Even Hawthorne’s most trifling prose—and here James especially singles out Hawthorne’s notebooks—represent something of artistic value. The notebooks, James explains, are essentially the sketchpads of a very accomplished artist. “It helps us to understand the Note-Books,” James writes, “if we regard them as a literary exercise” (95). He goes on: “he must often have said to himself that it was better practice to write about trifles, because it was a greater tax upon one’s skill to make them interesting. And his theory was just, for he has almost always made his trifles interesting” (96). Through the language of visual arts, James seems to be presenting an image of Hawthorne as an admittedly flawed author but, ultimately, a writer of genius.

As Caramello indicates, references to the visual arts do not always absolve Hawthorne of what James perceives as the earlier writer’s faults (35). Early in *Hawthorne*, James tells us that his subject’s “shadowy style of portraiture never suggests a rigid standard of accuracy” (4). Hawthorne has, in some ways, failed as a visual artist. Despite this, Hawthorne’s work constitutes the best portrait English readers will be able to get of New England. He writes: “Hawthorne’s work savours thoroughly of the local soil—it is redolent of the social system in which he had his being.” This is the paradox of artistic success, according to James. The artist must fully embody a particular place and yet cross borders, offering rootedness even as he offers an international, cosmopolitan perspective. James carves out for Hawthorne access to this paradox—his work, accessible to a British reading public, “savors thoroughly of the local soil” of New England. And this, ultimately, is how James positions himself as Hawthorne’s successor in the eyes of British readers. James, like Hawthorne, grew up in an American backwater. And one might expect him, like Hawthorne, to fail in fully embodying a cosmopolitan literary identity. Nonetheless, *Hawthorne* indicates that James is more thoroughly cosmopolitan than the earlier writer.

The greatest novelists, James implies, express their culture fully. Hawthorne’s ability to represent place allows him to stand in the company of—although not entirely shoulder-to-shoulder with—the most accomplished Europeans: “I am not fanciful in saying [Hawthorne] testifies to the sentiments of the society in which he flourished almost as pertinently (proportions observed) as Balzac and some of his descendants—MM. Flaubert and Zola—testify to the manners and morals of the French people” (HA 3). One must of course deal with James’s caveat: Hawthorne is as representative—“proportions observed”—as Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola. And yet those proportions are not merely the proportions of Hawthorne’s work. They are also the proportions of the American landscape. James’s entire book operates on the premise that “it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature” and that “the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep” (2). Hawthorne’s work, in this view, suffered because the author did not have access to a rich history. It’s an idea essentially borrowed from Hawthorne himself, who, in his preface to *The Marble Faun* laments the difficulty of writing a romance about a country “where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but the common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the

case with my dear native land” (3). Late in his career, Hawthorne is cataloguing the problems America presents as a subject of literature. Without a picturesque past, writers are hampered in creating the artwork of the future. James echoes this notion in what is very likely the most quoted and most excoriated passage of *Hawthorne*. James observes that the America of Hawthorne’s day was a place with:

No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class—no Epsom nor Ascot! (34)

The list seems hyperbolic, even for a Henry James just coming into his own as an Anglophile. This is especially true when one considers that, only a few months before, in his letter to Grace Norton, he describes the “drearinesses” of the English character, the “flourishing uglinesses” waiting to be stuck with the pins of criticism and irony (*SL* 164). In this context, one might want to say James is improvising on Hawthorne’s *Marble Faun* theme. This is very likely true, but only in part. The passage also appears almost verbatim in a notebook entry James made in February 1879 (*CN* 12).⁹ But the notebook presents the list in a different context. There, the passage begins: “In a story, some one says—‘Oh yes, the United States—a country without a sovereign. . . .’” The list then continues almost exactly as printed in *Hawthorne*. James seems to have originally conceived of the passage as being spoken by a (presumably European, possibly British) character. Tolliver writes: “That the passage was originally intended for a work of fiction explains its conspicuous rhetorical style and why James’s position thus seems overemphatic” (58). But whether the passage is written with a patina of European affectedness or not, in both the notebook and in *Hawthorne*, the criticism is in some ways displaced. In the notebook, a potential Jamesian character—not James—seems to think this is what America is like today. In *Hawthorne*, the list describes the conditions of the subject’s upbringing: antebellum America, an America separated from James by a generation. When James tries to express his own position—as a contemporary American in relation to the world of English letters—the conditions of his homeland are far different.

Perhaps ironically, this notion of America is also borrowed from Hawthorne. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* in July 1862, Hawthorne would repeat his claim that America is too underdeveloped to produce great literature. This time, the implications would be more dramatic. Upon looking out at ruined fortifications in the battlefields of Virginia, Hawthorne sees that future generations in America will have a richer, more poetic history:

The fortifications, so numerous in all this region, and now so unsightly with their bare, precipitous sides, will remain as historic monuments, grass-grown and picturesque memorials of an epoch of terror and suffering; they will serve to make our country dearer and more interesting to us, and afford fit soil for poetry to root itself in: for this is a plant which thrives best in spots where blood has been spilt long ago. (“Chiefly” 49)

As Hawthorne illustrates his country's need for a richer history, he obliquely criticizes his own work in precisely the way James will. Only a nation with a rich past can realize a rich artistic future. The U.S. will one day have that history, but not until Hawthorne himself is long gone, not until Hawthorne's time constitutes "an[other] epoch." Even more important, James echoes almost precisely Hawthorne's language in describing the need for a rich past. For Hawthorne, the past provides "soil for poetry to root itself in: for this is a plant which thrives best in spots where blood has been spilt long ago." For James, "the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep" (*HA* 2).

Both authors seem to agree that only after the Civil War will a U.S. writer truly work on an international scale. James argues that:

the Civil War marks an era in the history of the American mind. It introduced into the national consciousness a certain sense of proportion and relation, of the world being a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed, the future more treacherous, success more difficult. At the rate at which things are going, it is obvious that . . . the good American, in days to come, will be a more critical person than his complacent and confident grandfather. (*HA* 114)

Writing from opposite sides of the Civil War, both Hawthorne and James seem to give James the upper hand. Provided the two men possess equal genius, the thinking here goes, James will transcend his "complacent and confident grandfather." But this transcendence is staged. James is presenting an image of American authorship to a British reading public. James has preemptively agreed to a number of British criticisms of Hawthorne's America. It had "no Oxford, nor Eton" (*HA* 34), and it was founded by "half-starved fanatics" (52). Most of its greatest authors are easily dismissed: Thoreau was "worse than provincial—he was parochial" (76) and Margaret Fuller was defined by her "vivacity of desire and poverty of knowledge" (56). Even Hawthorne himself—the "genius" (47), the master of chiaroscuro—is severely constrained by his provincialism. By taking possession of these criticisms, James positions himself to deliver the final *coup*—to establish the contemporary, post-bellum U.S. as a place prepared to launch a literary genius of international proportions.¹⁰ Yes, James agrees with a hypothetical British audience, Americans were once provincial, but the Civil War changed that. Yes, Hawthorne's development was hampered by geography, but American authors will no longer face these problems in such large measure.¹¹

This can perhaps be seen most fully when James narrates Hawthorne's time in Italy. "The plastic sense," James explains, "was not strong in Hawthorne; there can be no better proof of it than in his curious aversion to the representation of the nude in sculpture . . . his jealousy of undressed images strikes the reader as a strange, vague, long-dormant heritage of his straight-laced Puritan ancestry" (*HA* 127). For the first time—and oddly at the end of his career—Hawthorne is utterly without artistic sense. Earlier in James's criticism, Hawthorne had suffered minor artistic failures: his "portraits" of characters had sometimes missed the mark. But here, Hawthorne is utterly unable to appreciate a basic element of artistic representation. James's Hawthorne, confronted with classical art, is baffled. Luckily for the reader, James is there to explain Hawthorne's failure. His "straight-laced Puritan ancestry" has thwarted his "genius." James is setting us up for a final pronouncement on Hawthorne, which

will be connected to an analysis of *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne's novel set in Italy and, according to James, an artistic failure. James tells us that Hawthorne is the "last specimen of the more primitive type of man of letters," and this is why he fails in his attempt to write a novel set in a foreign land (128, 131). Belonging to the earlier generation of American writers—the generation of Emerson, Thoreau, Longfellow, Fuller, and Poe—Hawthorne is unable to escape the provincialism of a remote backwater. But the American mind has changed, James has already told his British readers. The new American is more "critical," more worldly. It shouldn't go unnoticed that, even as James composed *Hawthorne*, Macmillan released *Roderick Hudson*—James's own novel set in Italy—to English readers. When the book was released in the United States years earlier, a British reviewer of the novel observed dryly that "Hawthorne still occupies the highest place among American novelists" (Owen 143). But James was having slightly better luck with the three-volume Macmillan edition of 1879. The *Athenaeum*, the periodical that had criticized "An International Episode," called *Roderick Hudson* "the best novel by Mr. James that we have seen" ("Novels" 13). James—in his own conception and, finally, in that of reviewers—is an American capable of writing about Italy. Hawthorne, at least according to James, is not. James is the international American, representative of the fully developed, post-bellum mind. Hawthorne is his "complacent and confident grandfather" (HA 114). James's international success begins, then, where Hawthorne's necessarily ends: in the context of Renaissance art in Italy. Hawthorne, the genius of the provincial U.S., falls short where James, the transnational genius from the U.S., succeeds.

Throughout *Hawthorne*, James authors himself as a figure of authority able to explain the author's American identity to British readers. When introducing the Brook Farm commune, James writes that he himself "has a memory of a certain number of persons who had been intimately connected, as Hawthorne was not, with the agitations of that interesting time" (66). James knows more about Hawthorne's environment than Hawthorne himself and, seemingly, would be able to explain "that interesting time" even to the elder author. When writing about *The Scarlet Letter*, James narrates his own childhood encounters with the book. He writes that when "[I] first read the novel, I seemed to myself to have read it before, and to be familiar with its two strange heroines" (88). Literally, James means he had heard the premise of the novel discussed by adults. But James's odd ability to foresee the novel's plot also grants him special status—he knows the content of the book even before reading it. He is the legitimate heir to the text and to its author's legacy. Even more important, James implies that Americans like himself are more able to bridge the Atlantic today than they were in Hawthorne's time. He writes: "What I mean is that an American of equal value with Hawthorne, an American of equal genius, imagination, and, as our forefathers said, sensibility, would at present inevitably accommodate himself more easily to the idiosyncrasies of foreign lands" (128). James is just that American. He is Hawthorne's equal in "genius, imagination, and . . . sensibility" and can, unlike the earlier writer, reach English readers. The author of *Hawthorne* seems to recognize that British readers might soon be ready to accept a transatlantic American writer, a cosmopolitan figure able to bridge the gap between literary marketplaces.

The Henry James who writes *Hawthorne* has not yet written what he and others will later regard as his masterpieces—*The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Golden Bowl*, *The Wings of the Dove*. Writing in Britain to a British audience not fully persuaded of his

talents, James must deal preemptively with complaints about American authorship. He must deal with British critic F. M. Owen's observation, in a review of James's work, that "it is strange that American novels should not be better than they are" (142). He is aware of the sense of betrayal British critics felt toward Hawthorne—a well-received American writer who, in *Our Old Home*, seems to mock the English. James, finally, must strike a balance between acknowledging British complaints about Hawthorne and defending the elder author, between acknowledging American provincialism and arguing that it has evolved, between promoting Hawthorne and leaving space for himself. And, finally, James must promote his particular vision of artistic success—a vision divorced from moral judgment and connected instead with portraiture, with sketch, with rendering contrasts in the "pigments" of history, theology, and culture.

To treat James's *Hawthorne* as an aberration—a moment in which James's subconscious, or semi-conscious, resentment of a father figure drives him to erase that figure—is ultimately to do both James and his highly conscious act of authorship a disservice. *Hawthorne* functions by offering its English audience a new, more "critical," more worldly U.S. author in the form of Henry James himself. This writer is able to explain the greatest American writers of the past to a British audience—to explain both their successes and their shortcomings. And, writing as he is after the U.S. has come of age through the Civil War, this writer is positioned to take up a prominent position in the transatlantic marketplace of letters. Brodhead writes that "*Hawthorne* is the work of a recently emerged author bent on putting the tutors of his youth behind him" (138), but I argue instead that it is the work of a savvy journeyman writer attempting to shape a marketplace that has been unwilling to fully embrace him. As James told Howells in January 1880: "The little book was a tolerably deliberate & meditated performance" (qtd. in Anesko, *Letters* 146).

NOTES

¹In his notes, Brodhead frequently acknowledges his debt to Bloom and those whose work built on Bloom (see 218 n. 8, 234 n. 1, 236 n. 31, and 238 n. 17). For Brodhead, James's primary goal in *Hawthorne* is to wrestle, and defeat, his subject.

²While this reliance on Bloom's concept of influence didn't begin with Brodhead, Brodhead canonized it in many ways. For more on the Oedipal relationship between James and Hawthorne, see Rowe "Thunder" 81–119 and *Theoretical* 49). See also McCall (10).

³Anesko, it is important to point out, has been a powerful voice of dissent in this movement. In *Letters, Fictions, Lives*, he writes: "Citing the complex James/Hawthorne relation to exemplify theories of literary influence has become almost conventional among modern critics, few of whom notice that James's anxieties were hardly confined to his forebears. Indeed, the American past, as James viewed it, presented him with almost nothing to be anxious about" (16). For Anesko, James's anxieties and influences were closer to home: the work of William Dean Howells, the tight-fistedness of publishers, and the work of an international cast of critics like Matthew Arnold and Émile Montégut. For this, see esp. "James's Hawthorne" and "*Friction*" (61–77).

⁴I am certainly not the first to reject Bloom's Freudian vision of influence. Douglas-Fairhurst sees literary influence as a network of inter-animating forces—ubiquitous, shifting, and difficult to trace (see, in particular, 34).

⁵When "An International Episode" appeared in *Cornhill*, a reviewer in the *Academy* responded: "We should want a better authority than Mr. James to convince us that when talking to ladies [English lords] interlard their conversation with such polite expressions as 'filth' and 'beastly'" ("Magazines" 52). When the story appeared in book form, Saintsbury observed: "The character of Lord Lambeth, moreover, in 'An International Episode' is obviously drawn rather after Thackeray's originals than from observation of any living Englishman" (256). In the *Athenaeum*, the criticism leveled at these stories would be even more devastating, sounding a great deal like the kind of back-handed compliments James would employ in *Hawthorne*: "[James] has almost acquired a manner. But, after all, his stories lack substance" ("Novels" 276).

⁶Hawthorne's betrayal stung so much it appeared in his obituary in *Gentleman's Magazine*: "His last production, entitled *Our Old Home*, contains many charming descriptions of interesting spots in

England, but is marred by the most offensive remarks on the English people, which took his admirers by surprise, from their contrast to the general tone of his other writings, and seem to have sprung from political causes" ("Nathaniel" 246).

⁷McCall has notably disagreed, writing, "We find what Henry James frequently does when he talks about literary excellence—especially when it deeply moves him—he speaks of writing as if it were painting" (7).

⁸It is noteworthy that Howells actually shared James's vision of a spiritually empty Hawthorne. In his review of *Hawthorne*, Howells writes, "The black problem of evil, with which his Puritan ancestors wrestled concretely, in groans and despair, and which darkens with its portentous shadow nearly everything that Hawthorne wrote, has become his literary material" (284).

⁹Several critics have observed other possible sources for the famous list. See Caramello (35–37) and Tolliver (57–58).

¹⁰This interpretation would, according to James, color critical readings of Hawthorne throughout Europe. In a letter to Henry James Sr. dated 24 Feb. 1881, after the publication of *Hawthorne*, James recounts a conversation with a French professor of English literature who "repeated whole passages" of James's critical study from memory. The French professor, M. Guillaume Guizot, tells James: "Il sortait de toute espèce de petit trous—de Boston, de—comment appelez-vous ça?—de Salem, etc!" (HJL 345). In English, this means literally: "He [Hawthorne] came out of all species of little nooks—out of Boston, out of—how do you say it?—out of Salem, etc." The word "nook" here—alternatively, "gap" or "pocket"—carries a quaint or provincial connotation, while "comes out of" seems to imply that he comes from, or issues from, Boston and Salem in an artistic sense. Hawthorne, then, is a creature of his provincial origins—influenced by them, unable to transcend them as the cosmopolitan James, whose work is fit for memorization, clearly can. I would like to extend my gratitude to my colleague Patrick Lawrence of the University of Connecticut for his analysis of the French quotation.

¹¹After *Hawthorne*, James will backpedal slightly. In a letter to Howells he will write that he doesn't believe America has yet accumulated enough cultural material at home to produce a novelist "in the family of Balzac & Thackeray" (qtd. in Anesko, *Letters* 147). This does not conflict seriously with his narrative of American development in *Hawthorne*, however. In his critical biography, James makes the case that the post-bellum American thinker is of the "world," he is a cosmopolitan (HA 114). A French writer can afford to be provincial but the coming American knows his nation must produce worldly writers. The implication, then, is that James is the writer able to realize America's developing literary importance. A writer like Howells, who largely stayed in the United States, is not.

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