The French Faces of Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Anesko, Michael and N. Christine Brookes.
The French Faces of Nathaniel Hawthorne: Monsieur de l'Aubepine and His Second Empire Critics.
The Ohio State University Press, 2011.
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Little in their inherited understanding of America prepared these later critics for Hawthorne, whose works seemed to defy the sweeping generalizations advanced by Chasles and Tocqueville when they considered “the literary aspect of democratic centuries.” If, as Tocqueville insisted, “democracy inspires in men a kind of instinctive distaste for all that is old” (DA 555), how to explain Hawthorne’s retreat into the historical annals of New England for the source of so many of his works? If productions by earlier American writers—Brockden Brown, Irving, and Cooper—betrayed all the signs of what Forgues calls the “strange yoke” of postcolonial imitation (seen by Chasles and Tocqueville as inevitable), Hawthorne’s fiction (like Emerson’s philosophy) refuted their logic of restriction. Both Forgues and Montégut would agree that Poe’s stories might confirm Tocqueville’s prediction that literary style in the New World would “frequently seem bizarre, incorrect, exaggerated, or flaccid and almost always seem brazen and vehement” (DA 542). But both also recognized that Hawthorne, by contrast, was “more a master of his own mind, more strongly inspired by studies and thoughts of a higher order, swept away much less frequently by pure caprice or beguiled by vagabond fantasy.” Hawthorne’s psychological penetration of human nature was profound, his characters “true discoveries, native-born, and drawn with such sharply delineated individuality” that they seemed to appear in the world of fiction for the first time. In Poe’s stories, on the other hand, these critics (Baudelaire notwithstanding) found “more bottles and laboratory
apparatus . . . than men or women.” To their way of thinking, Hawthorne was more genuinely American and more usefully representative of a nascent literary tradition.

No foolish consistency would be the hobgoblin of their critical minds, not least because these three men occupied different positions on the political spectrum. Their reactions to Hawthorne were not governed solely by ideology, but their country’s disappointing experiments with republican institutions affected the inferences they drew from the American romancer’s work. Even though Forgues had but a single occasion to comment on Hawthorne, it would seem as if he imagined him a kindred spirit in an ideal republic of letters. Much bruised by French political infighting (his own liberal aspirations having been “blighted” by Louis Napoléon’s coup d’état in 1851), Forgues was immediately captivated by Hawthorne’s self-deprecating prefaces: “without them,” he avers, “we might not have read a single one of his novels or tales.” Learning from the “Custom-House” Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* of Hawthorne’s own political misfortunes, Forgues could only admire the American’s determination to shake off disappointment and to resume his literary career. (The parallel with his own vocational situation must have seemed uncanny.) No less remarkable was the fact that Hawthorne represented the loss of his patronage job as if, metaphorically, he had been condemned to the guillotine, a figure of speech that was bound to strike a French imagination with particular force. Thus, Forgues takes inspiration from Hawthorne’s dignified example of humble resignation. “All noble instincts are in him,” he testifies: “Christian indulgence and graciousness, resistance to oppression, a thirst for what is right and truthful in all things.” Forgues must have felt that he and his subject were comrades in the true party of humanity.

As the first to introduce Hawthorne to France, Forgues necessarily incorporates some lengthy passages in translation for the benefit of their new audience. The author’s various prefaces—so genial and charming—were ideal for this purpose because they seemed to reveal Hawthorne’s character and personal history in the absence of other biographical sources. Accordingly, Forgues offers substantial extracts from “The Old Manse” and “The Custom-House” to illustrate not just the felicities of Hawthorne’s style but the republican virtue of his character, since they afford ample proof “of his unshakeable good-nature, of his philosophical moderation (allied nevertheless to deep-seated conviction), of that nobility of soul that we always want to believe is a privilege of intellectual superiority.” Unlike other writers’ “odious” prefaces—testaments of self-conceit—Hawthorne’s beguile him with their modesty and balanced humor. In all the author’s works, Forgues
happily discovers an ethical imperative. Even the writer’s most innocuous fables, ostensibly meant for children, convey deeper moral meanings. Forgues reads “The Snow-Image,” for example, as an allegory of ideological intransigence, a powerful critique of bourgeois “common sense.” “Hawthorne does not tell tales to tell tales,” Forgues insists, “but rather to give material form to useful ideas, to popularize them, to make them sink in to distracted or rebellious minds.” He is “a preacher to suit our frivolous temperaments, our limited spans of attention, our futile preoccupations, our aversion to serious things. He does not stand in the pulpit with an austere exterior or stiff-necked severity: to the contrary, his insinuating, pleasant, occasionally sarcastic chatter, his inoffensive and cautious taunting, his great gift for picturesque expression, his art of awakening curiosity and keeping it out of breath—all these combine supremely to disturb the imagination, to wrest it from its daily habits, to make it fly its highest flight, to take it to the land of chimeras.”

What Forgues recognized as Hawthorne’s essentially comic spirit was much less apparent to his French contemporaries. For Montégut, especially, the dark shadow of the Puritan past cast a pall over almost everything that came from Hawthorne’s pen, and no nineteenth-century affectations—liberal democracy, socialism, or reforming zeal—could suppress it. “I do not know who could so blindly confuse the qualities of human genius and so completely lose the appreciation of nuance to say that Hawthorne is a humorist,” he declares. “Hawthorne has wit and imagination; but to no degree does he possess that joyous opening up of the heart, that intellectual cordiality, that unexpected expansion of sympathy, the amicable jokes or complex fusion of high spirits and choler to which the English have awarded the name humor.” Following a train of logic curiously akin to that of “Hawthorne and His Mosses” (1850), in which Melville (though perfectly aware of “the Indian-summer sunlight on the hither side of Hawthorne’s soul”) invites his readers to consider the other side (“shrouded in a blackness, ten times black”), Montégut quickly shifts the focus to the author’s intellectual and moral genealogy. “Only a descendant of the Puritans would be capable of devoting himself to the perpetual examination of conscience that one finds in Hawthorne’s work,” he recognizes. Only an artist who had inherited the Puritans’ morbid instincts “would be capable of excavating the recesses of the soul to discover not treasure, but rather the repressed evidence of human frailty, finding subjects of horror, sleeping reptiles, witnesses to forgotten crimes.” Somewhat more caustically, Étienne also attributes a want of humor in Hawthorne to his stubbornly dour ancestors. “The American storyteller would have refuted his Puritan filiation,” he asserts, “if gay or even sweet or
laughing apparitions ever appeared in his work. Puck, Ariel, Titania—gracious creations—are foreign to him. How could mid-summer nights’ dreams be transplanted to the home of Reformed religion, the bivouac of Calvinism, on the borders of those immense forests where they thought they could hear the witches’ sabbath every night?” Like most of Étienne’s other insights, this one, too, exaggerates (or oversteps) the evidence on which it is based; yet there is a lurking rightness in the claim advanced, a sarcasm that teases out a latent truth.

The most thorough student of Hawthorne’s French critics has suggested that their “most conspicuous misunderstanding” of the author stems directly from their skewed appreciation of the Puritan temperament and their exaggerated sense of the legacy it bestowed on him. More recent investigations of Hawthorne’s debts to his forbears help to redress this claim and should encourage us to reevaluate the cogency of earlier arguments. Michael Colacurcio, for example, compares Hawthorne to no less a figure than the great Harvard historian Perry Miller, whose erudite reconstruction of “the New England mind” reshaped modern understanding of America’s seventeenth-century intellectual landscape. Not least because they were (even if nominal) adherents to the Catholic faith, Forgues, Montégut, and Étienne were immediately struck by Puritanism’s pervasive force in Hawthorne’s writing—something again that only Melville seems to have appreciated with equal depth. “In spite of his fondness for tolerance, progress, and democracy, the old Puritan nature lives on in him,” Montégut stubbornly asserts. “Hawthorne’s talent marvelously explains the persistence of ancestral values that are perpetuated over time—the ‘music of the blood,’ as Calderón says, that (especially in provincial society) repeats in successive generations the same melody but with different variations.” Like Miller himself, Montégut also had a shrewd insight into the significance of the Puritans’ removal to a wilderness setting, where the competing historical forces with which the Reformation in Europe had to contend were largely absent. “Do you not feel—you, children of the Latin race and of Catholic civilization—what a large gulf separates you from the society for which these tales were written?” Montégut ponders, as he tries to educate his French readers about Hawthorne’s provincial milieu.

It is a very peculiar world to which you have almost no connection and in which your disoriented imagination strays like a foreigner in an unknown land. Obviously, in the same way that you have none of the preoccupations of the author, he has never known any of yours. This kind of originality—where, if you will, singularities of thought and feeling are marked by such
excess—is such that our own European Protestant civilization can scarcely furnish us the means to understand it. We feel the presence of an incomparable moral element—exclusive and tyrannical, wholly unencumbered by the obstacles that restrained it in Europe—but there (in America) able to saturate the heart and soul of man.

Montégut may have been sitting on the quays of the Seine when he was inspired to this insight—while Miller, more exotically, discovered it atop oil drums on the banks of the Congo—but they share a deeply felt impulse to come to terms with American literature historically and comparatively. Montégut’s most useful insights into the significance of Hawthorne’s Puritan legacy evolve from his appreciation of the author’s fixation on internal states of mind—what Henry James would call the “deeper psychology.” Hawthorne possesses, Montégut intuits, “an unparalleled feeling for impalpable things: fear, solitude, terror of annihilation—above all, the apprehension of those monstrous fancies that are spontaneously and unpredictably born in even the most moral and spotless minds.” “After reading his work, we tremble to examine ourselves for fear of finding some latent madness,” the critic maintains—“some thought of crime, some unsuspected depravity.” Even though he himself lacks the precise vocabulary by which to express it, Montégut anticipates a remarkably modern psychological model of selfhood to describe the impact of his subject’s work upon the reader. “Hawthorne’s tales have made a bizarre vision pass before my eyes,” he confides: “I see myself multiplied a hundred times in miniature, and everyone of me has just been caught in the filaments of a delicate web, at the center of which yet another me sits watching all the rest!” Instinctively responding to (in F. O. Matthiessen’s words) “the device of multiple choice” that Hawthorne employs to enrich the psychological complexity and dramatic intensity of his narrative situations, Montégut finds himself, like Dimmesdale, caught in a mental maze of (almost) his own making. Hawthorne’s fearful capacity to portray the mind in conflict with itself may trace its origins to the theological terrors of the seventeenth century, but its implications—to Montégut—are mercilessly up-to-date.

Just as remarkable is Hawthorne’s uncanny power for delving into the mysterious recesses of the soul. “His eyes are as piercing as those of a lynx,” Montégut affirms. “He can apprehend lurking evil. He can discover the devil in his many disguises, even those that appear honorable.” As Montégut insists, only a true son of the Puritans could penetrate so deftly the shell of hypocrisy and pride behind which fallen Nature seeks to defend itself. “That subtle and profound analytical ability to see beneath exterior and visible
motives, to perceive the heart of the root of evil, descends in a straight line from the pitiless scrutiny that the Puritans exercised upon themselves, that rigorous examination of conscience (interrupted only for prayer), that saintly espionage to which their souls subjected every action and thought.” Even though he has abandoned his forebears’ theological convictions, Hawthorne perpetuates their habits of mind. Taking his cue from “Sunday at Home,” Montégut divines that Hawthorne “rarely goes to church,” but, nonetheless (domestically sequestered), “the hymns of the faithful and the exhortations of the minister” reach his ears. His alienation from formal creeds and doctrinal observances is really superficial; a (not so little) lower layer of common feeling and temper runs deeper. “He no longer believes and lives the way” his ancestors did, Montégut alleges, “but he does have their intellectual outlook. He may no longer have their soul, but he does have their spirit. He follows their practice of strict investigation and pitiless analysis.” That practice, in turn, profoundly affects the formal aesthetics of Hawthorne’s work.

Long before Yvor Winters analyzed the Puritans’ affinity for allegory, Montégut understood that symbolic mode as a generic extension of Reforming zeal, an “irresistible consequence,” as he says, “of their examinations of conscience.” His imaginative reconstruction of their frame of mind, if somewhat lurid, still suggestively illuminates the process of formal genesis, the compelling fusion of theology and aesthetics, that determined their preference:

After long days of black reveries and painful interior confessions, those souls—starved for justice and vengeance, hardened by the persecution that they underwent and that likewise they inflicted—suddenly would see their solitude come alive and begin to converse with other strange characters: Sin, Death, Damnation, Grace, Salvation. These phantoms were not vain abstractions; they had recognizable human faces; they fated living creatures to death, to persecution, to hate, to love. Hallucination built a bridge between the abstract world of the soul and the concrete world of reality, and the Puritan passed from one to the other in a state of pious and terrifying somnambulism. For the Puritans, dream and reality formed a singularly close alliance, and from this came the tendency to express themselves through allegory.

Forgues had found Hawthorne’s use of allegory “flagrant” (but “appealing”); Montégut’s appreciation of the form is much richer and more nuanced. So different from its crude medieval antecedents (which “so baldly designate the symbol to be perceived and the dream to be discerned”), Puritan allegory,
by contrast, “obscures the symbol altogether and just barely permits us to unravel the dream,” because metaphysical abstractions assume more familiar guise and speak to us in voices we intimately recognize, the better to seduce or provoke us. “This gift for allegory,” Montégut rightly insists, Hawthorne possesses “to the highest degree”; indeed, it “is an indispensable complement of his force of vision and psychological subtlety.” “He knew how to animate and shed merciless light upon the hidden desires of the soul,” Montégut continues, and how “to make the shadows of guilty thoughts tremble; he conversed with the facts of conscience as easily as we converse with real people; he knew how to create a body for the formless, a language for the mute; interior and moral history is played out in his pages with a lucidity and a precision that more than one historian of the exterior and concrete world might envy.”

We should not be surprised, then, to discover that later criticism was obliged to consult ‘historians of the exterior and concrete world’ in order to perceive (as Winters was among the first to argue) that “the Puritan view of life was allegorical,” and that “the allegorical vision” was “strongly impressed upon the New England literary mind.” At the same time that Perry Miller was delving much deeper into the intellectual underpinnings of Puritan theology (delineating its heretofore unrecognized indebtedness to the dualistic logic of Petrus Ramus), Winters redacted its literary implications from other historical sources to arrive at a parallel conclusion. “Puritan theology,” he summarized,

rested primarily upon the doctrine of predestination and the inefficaciousness of good works; it separated men sharply and certainly into two groups, the saved and the damned, and, technically, at least, was not concerned with any subtler shadings. This in itself represents a long step toward the allegorization of experience, for a very broad abstraction is substituted for the patient study of the minutiae of moral behavior long encouraged by Catholic tradition.

Precisely because they were educated in that Catholic tradition—and also schooled in the Republican reaction against it—Montégut and the other French critics more quickly could discern the relevance of the Puritan past to Hawthorne’s mind and art. Their comparative frame of reference, though sometimes inviting embarrassing distortions, nevertheless gave them a vantage point to see Hawthorne’s descent from the seventeenth-century founders without the trappings of Anglo-American literary nationalism, a strain that overwhelms so much other contemporaneous criticism.
Whatever Hawthorne’s genius for employing allegorical technique, his characters still seemed somewhat contrived and abstract to Montégut. “They are too metaphysical,” he complains; “they have no blood, no entrails, no muscles—they rarely even have tears.” The fault is not entirely theirs, he continues, because the author’s detached relationship to his characters renders them “intellectual types” rather than fully realized human representations. Some contemporaneous English and American reviewers also spoke of this tendency in Hawthorne’s works, but few supersede the French in pursuing its implications. There is something too dispassionate about Hawthorne’s psychological analysis, according to Montégut; his attitude is too cold and remote, as if (like Ethan Brand) he looked at his figures as subjects of an experiment, converting them into puppets and “pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study.” Their effect, then, on the reader is powerful, but partial. “Our minds shudder,” Montégut shrewdly senses, “but not our entire being—when we contemplate these dramas that seem to take place between two or three ideas in one of the regions of the human brain.” Finding numerous examples of the pitiless observer in Hawthorne’s fiction (especially Holgrave in *The House of the Seven Gables* and Coverdale in *The Blithedale Romance*), Étienne arrives at a similar conclusion. Humorously suggesting that the novelist wears a pair of spectacles with the power of a microscope, Étienne notes that “by directing his magnifying glass at the fleeting expressions of the face, the mysterious relations of our physical attitude and our moral state, the timbre of our voice and the music of our soul, the storyteller comes to grasp the birth and torment of feelings, much as the biologist examines microbes in a drop of water.” Hawthorne, to Étienne, “has all the curiosity of a physiognomist and all the patience of a psychologist,” but his method is “too experimental not to cast a chilling pall over the drama.” In this, perhaps Montégut and Étienne were simply taking a cue from Hawthorne himself (he says much the same thing in his self-deprecating 1851 Preface to Ticknor & Fields’s edition of *Twice-told Tales*). But it is just as likely that they arrived at their inferences independently, since earlier British piracies of *Twice-told Tales* (lacking the Preface) circulated widely.

When Montégut, at last, considers the overall effect of Hawthorne’s technique, he describes the author’s works as inducing a kind of moral paralysis in the reader, no less irresistible for being lethal. “One marvels,” he confesses, at the tranquility with which he experiments with the soul’s moral poisons—the poison of poverty, the poison of pride, the poison of regret—and the almost scientific precision with which he notes their progress. All the
great sentiments—love, hope, friendship, faith—waste away and trudge under watch like those touched by consumption. The effect is overwhelming, like witnessing a murder that justice is powerless to prevent or a gradual suicide that we cannot arrest.

For all its technical virtuosity—the cool precision of which Montégut speaks—Hawthorne’s art seems almost perilously enticing, almost as if his stories were designed to entrap the reader, to seduce him with uncertainty, to undermine moral verities. Such qualities frankly worry Montégut (who sometimes sounds like a French Starbuck, desperately trying to cling to the remnants of a superannuated faith); but they also lead him to judgments that anticipate much more modern assessments. Even in his first essay, after surveying the author’s shorter works, Montégut feels obliged to confess that Hawthorne likes “to play with a number of dangerous things.” His social and political viewpoints seem ambiguous; he displays “a predilection for suspect notions”; here and there in his stories we might even perceive “the passing shadow of the taboo.” These elements insinuate themselves into the reader’s mind and cannot easily be dislodged. “Essentially,” Montégut pregnantly concludes, “there is something unhealthy in his work that at first we do not discern, but that in the long run acts upon us like a very weak and very slow poison.” The implicit conflation of Monsieur de l’Aubépine and Signor Giacomo Rappaccini suggested by Montégut’s descriptive analysis is hardly accidental. Even though in the body of his criticism he addresses that tale only once (and then somewhat cursorily), the story’s (im)moral implications seem to have permeated the critic’s understanding of the author. From the start—consciously or not—Montégut employs imagery from “Rappaccini’s Daughter” to characterize Hawthorne’s oeuvre, a body of literature in which, he says, “the funereal dominates.” Summarizing his first impression of the shorter fiction, Montégut suggests that while reading Hawthorne, “an odor similar to that which surrounds mortuary preparations—the pall, the boxwood branch that is placed in holy water, and the smell of those sadly everlasting flowers—rises to your nostrils and makes your head spin.” Revisiting Hawthorne six years later, Montégut also resurrects the imagery, but now embellishes it with an even more emphatic Rappaccini touch. Observing that, previously, he had “examined with a fearful, antipathetic, yet real curiosity those funereal flowers” with which Hawthorne “loves to compose his literary bouquets,” renewed acquaintance with them has only confirmed (and even intensified) his first impression. Again “inhaling their strange aroma,” he feels “the same curiosity of mind, the same antipathy of heart, the same shudders of the soul, in front of these bizarre flowers, not
one of which does not contain a hungry worm or a poisoned perfume.” Only now they are even “more pungent, more acrid, more penetrating.” One would almost think that Hawthorne had penned *Les fleurs du mal*, a work that, significantly, appeared just a few years before Montégut’s second essay.

By suggestively describing Hawthorne’s fictions as flowers of evil, Montégut was deliberately appropriating Baudelaire’s central motif and, by reassigning it to the American writer, favorably associating the two artists. Given that poet’s valorization of Edgar Allan Poe, whose works Baudelaire had begun to translate and champion, Montégut may also have been making rival claims, in a friendly way, for the American writer he felt was preeminent. As we have seen, Étienne pursued the association more aggressively, since he opens his first essay on Hawthorne with a caustic allusion to Baudelaire (and in the same year that *Les fleurs du mal* was published). Not surprisingly, when Étienne continued his series “Les conteurs américains” with an essay on Poe (just two months later), he derided that writer’s grotesque horrors and mysteries as the detritus of a diseased Romantic sensibility. “Poe’s stories are the Chinese puzzles of literature,” he jibed. “We do not fear the contagion of these difficult inanities in our country; we consider them very odd little exotic monsters.” Given the ultimate triumph of Baudelaire’s campaign—possibly even aided by the reactionary responses of the French critical establishment—these backhanded compliments to Hawthorne might seem awkward gestures of endorsement. But at the time they first appeared, the contest was far from over—in fact, was just beginning; that Poe eventually would throw Hawthorne into relative eclipse in France should not prevent us from appreciating these early critical responses. As one recent literary historian has acknowledged, what Baudelaire saw in Poe was exactly what Montégut saw in Hawthorne: one of the most remarkable writers that America had yet produced.

When Henry James had occasion to discuss the two writers in tandem, he played a subtle trick in Hawthorne’s favor. “A good way to embrace Baudelaire at a glance,” James suggested, “is to say that he was, in his treatment of evil, exactly what Hawthorne was not—Hawthorne, who felt the thing at its source, deep in the human consciousness. Baudelaire’s infinitely slighter volume of genius apart, he was a sort of Hawthorne reversed.” In an analogous way, by seizing upon the principal topos of *Les fleurs du mal*, Montégut was suggesting that Hawthorne was a sort of Baudelaire reversed, and he certainly would have agreed that the American writer’s apprehension of Evil originated deep within the recesses of the soul. For proof of that, one need only consider Hawthorne’s earliest work, his youthful tales, in which one might have expected to find tender emblems of hopeful aspiration and
love. After considering “The Wedding Knell,” “The Minister’s Black Veil,” and other early sketches, Montégut marvels at their utter difference “from the romantic allegories with which we are so familiar, from hearts pierced by Cupid’s arrows and souls held captive by martyred paramours for whom they will never die!” Instead we find a “long procession of people clothed in black, all mourning someone or something, come to tell us their invariably lugubrious stories, and, what is most poignant, perhaps, their eyes are dry as they confess. Hawthorne loves to speak for them when they have exhausted the wellspring of tears, when a surplus of misery has destroyed the magnetism of human sympathy.” Characteristically, Étienne arrives at a similar conclusion, but even more stridently. In a passage (previously quoted) that vigorously echoes Melville’s famous insight that Hawthorne’s “great power of blackness . . . derives its force from its appeals to [a] Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin,” Étienne describes the weary burden of “Calvinist melancholy” that the American artist’s imagination must bear.21 No longer a Puritan by faith, Hawthorne “is still one in his heart and his imagination. Laws inscribed on tablets of stone are less durable than that those inscribed upon the fleshy tablet of the human heart, where they are written not with ink, but with the essence of the soul.” Is it any wonder that Étienne thought Baudelaire should have been born in the United States?

As Patrick Quinn has demonstrated, the success of Baudelaire’s translations of Poe owed much to the poet’s complete identification with his subject and his typical willingness to accept Poe’s language with almost literal frankness. By comparison, Hawthorne was never so well served in France. Unlike Poe, who had Baudelaire to render his prose into French with ardor and sympathy, Hawthorne “never found an alter ego who identified himself wholly with his works.”22 In Forgues’ translation La lettre rouge A (1853), for example, the “richer dimensions of the romance” were “scrapped,” according to one scholar, “reducing the masterpiece to a sentimental tale.”23 (Rather inexplicably, the same Preface [“The Custom-House”] that Forgues so much admired was omitted, perhaps for reasons of economy.) In 1854 the New York Times reported that a proposed translation of The Blithedale Romance had been abandoned because the “genius of the French tongue is opposed to the intelligent rendering of the style that Mr. Hawthorne has made his own.”24 Yet it is certainly worth noting that, imperfect as they were, Forgues’ translations of The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables (1865) ran through numerous editions in the nineteenth century. Throughout the 1850s, a range of French periodicals—Le moniteur universel, Illustration, Mousquetaire, L’Athenaum français—published translations of some of Hawthorne’s best tales (including “Young Goodman Brown” and “The
Birth-Mark”).25 The Marble Faun appeared serially (under the title Miriam) in the Revue contemporaine (1865); two editions of Contes étranges (Strange Stories [selections from Twice-told Tales and Mosses from an Old Manse], with Montégut’s 1864 essay as an Introduction) were called for within a decade (1866–76); and a later popular edition of Contes racontés deux fois (Twice-told Tales) in 1888—priced at a mere 10 centimes—proudly announced that Hawthorne was “enjoying a great vogue” and “his writings today are viewed with keen interest.”26 At least one of the writer’s early biographers acknowledged this,27 but few scholars since have explored the subject seriously. The work of the men who created an audience for Hawthorne in France has been undeservedly shunted.

Important socioeconomic developments in France may also have contributed to Hawthorne’s “vogue.” The second half of the nineteenth-century saw the growth and diversification of the French literary market due to advancements in printing techniques and an ever-increasing French readership. Publishers such as Hachette and Hetzel were some of the most successful in this rapidly changing field. They recognized the need for new types of titles as they turned their attention to new modes of reading (as with Hachette’s new series for train travel, the Bibliothèque des chemins de fer) and newly recognized genres, such as children’s literature (for example, Jules Verne’s popular Voyages extraordinaires series with Hetzel). At a time when international copyright was either nonexistent or unenforceable, foreign literatures in translation became an important part of these new product lines. Ivan Turgenev, Charles Dickens, and Nathaniel Hawthorne were just some of the foreign authors who were introduced via Hachette’s Meilleurs romans étrangers and the children’s series La Bibliothèque rose/La Bibliothèque rose illustrée. Just as important, through these new venues not only were Hawthorne’s works more widely available to French readers, but they were also cheap: his Trois contes (Three Stories [“Dr. Higginbotham’s Catastrophe,” “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” and “David Swan”], 1853) was priced at 50 centimes in Hachette’s railway library. The two-volume set of Le livre des merveilles (A Wonderbook for Boys and Girls, Bibliothèque rose illustrée) was somewhat more expensive because it was illustrated; still it cost but 4 francs.28

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s French critics also acted as his translators. Montégut, Forgues, and Étienne all rendered the American romancer’s prose with varying translational strategies and degrees of skill. Not only do their choices tell us about their respective command of English: they also subtly reveal their critical predispositions. Were these translators faithful to Hawthorne’s language and intention? Or did they purposefully change or suppress ele-
ments of the original work for a new, foreign audience? To what extent do their efforts at translation become implied acts of critical response?

Enterprising journalist that he was, Forgues (who was the first to tackle Hawthorne) seems always to have worked in great haste. Not surprisingly, then, his translations betray signs of carelessness, despite his obvious affinity for the American’s writing. At first glance, Forgues seems to handle basic translation with skill, occasionally changing Hawthorne’s syntax but retaining much of his original imagery intact. Compare the following passage from the Preface to The Snow-Image:

I sat down by the wayside of life, like a man under enchantment, and a shrubbery sprung up around me, and the bushes grew to be saplings, and the saplings became trees, until no exit appeared possible, through the entangling depths of my obscurity. And there, perhaps, I should be sitting at this moment, with the moss on the imprisoning tree-trunks, and the yellow leaves of more than a score of autumns piled above me, if it had not been for you.

[J’étais, comme un personnage enchanté, assis au bord du sentier de la vie, tout autour de moi grandissaient des centaines d’arbrisseaux, buissons d’abord, taillis ensuite, arbres enfin qui m’enveloppaient, me fermaient toute issue, m’entouraient de ténèbres inextricables. Ces arbres se seraient couverts de mousses, les feuilles sèches de vingt automnes m’auraient peu à peu enseveli, si vous ne fussiez venu à mon aide.]

Here, with slight modification of the order of Hawthorne’s phrasing, Forgues has preserved the general sense of the passage he has excerpted. He translates “shrubbery” (“arbrisseaux” and “buissons”) and “saplings” (“taillis”) with accuracy into French. He skillfully handles the predicate “until no exit appeared,” turning it into the French “me fermaient toute issue”—or, “closed off any exit to me.” He also maintains the conditional sentence at the end of the passage. Upon closer inspection, however, we can see that Hawthorne’s rather poetic English sentence becomes much duller in French, notably because of the use of the adjective “enseveli” (“shrouded” or “covered”) in place of the original English notion of the author “sitting” and then slowly being covered up by the forest’s detritus.

Other examples betray the same tendency to gloss over details and flatten the English original. For instance, Forgues reduces a richly nuanced passage from the “Custom-House” Introduction to The Scarlet Letter to very basic French.
But, all this while, I was giving myself very unnecessary alarm. Providence
had meditated better things for me than I could possibly imagine for myself.
devait pourvoir à mon avenir.

Another example from the Preface to *Twice-told Tales* illustrates the same
sort of problem. Whereas Hawthorne confesses to the detachment of his
method, acknowledging that “we have allegory, not always so warmly dressed
in its habiliments of flesh and blood,” Forgues erases the sartorial metaphor
by writing that “nous y retrouvons l’allégorie si froidement incarnée” (*we
meet allegory there so coldly incarnated*). He gets the temperature right, but
sacrifices the original’s modifying detail.

Forgues also makes some rather significant errors. He calls “blue-berries”
“baies bleues” instead of the more appropriate “myrtilles.” While Hawthorne
describes a grave “marked by a small, moss-grown fragment of stone at the
head and another at the foot,” in Forgues’ words the tomb is “marked by
two big rocks, one at the head, the other at the feet” (“C’est le tombeau,—
marqué par deux grosses pierres, l’une à la tête, l’autre aux pieds”). Not only
does he change the size of the rocks, but he also omits the allusion to the
passage of time—“moss-grown”—in the French. A more egregious (even
comic) error can be found in his apparent confusion about adherents of
Shakerism, whom he equates with (or mistakes for) Quakers. After a note
describing Mother Ann, founder of the Shaker sect, he notes that Father
Ephraim in “The Shaker Bridal” was “conquis au fanatisme des premiers
quakers.” Forgues does seem aware of the cultural pitfalls of translation, and
sometimes we can see him doing his best to approximate cultural equivalents
(“steel pens,” for example, become more recognizable for his French readers
by the inclusion of a brand-name: “plumes Perry”). But one has to admit
that, all in all, Forgues seems rather clumsy and inconsistent in moving from
the English to French.

Not so for Émile Montégut. Just eight months after Forgues wrote his
premiere article on Hawthorne, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* also published
Montégut’s “A Socialist Novel in America,” in which were included sub-
stantial extracts from *The Blithedale Romance*. Compared to Forgues, Mon-
tégut displays much more agility and precision in translating Hawthorne’s
English. (Already, we recall, he had worked through a considerable swath of
Emerson’s highly idiosyncratic prose; and he would go on to translate the
complete works of Shakespeare [1868–73], a monumental task that earned him acclaim from the Académie française toward the end of his career.) In his first article dedicated to the new American writer, Montégut renders whole passages of The Blithedale Romance into French. More often than not, his method (more patient than Forgues’) results in faithful, word-for-word transcription. Hawthorne’s broad description of his modern arcadia—“It was gentility in tatters”—becomes “Nous étions une noblesse en haillons” (We were a nobility in tatters) in Montégut’s French. To provide his readers with a better context for understanding Hawthorne, Montégut recalls the author’s imaginary conversation with his ancestors in “The Custom-House” (and their presumed disdain for his artistic calling):

Such are the compliments bandied between my great grandsires and myself, 

Tels sont les compliments échangés entre mes ancêtres et ma personne 

across the gulf of time! 

à travers le gouffre du temps! 

across the gulf of time!

Very little changes here; even the syntax remains the same in French. Montégut would follow this habit in his later work. Even Emerson’s assessment of Hawthorne—“Hawthorne rides well his horse of night” (which, in Montégut’s 1864 essay, he left for readers in the original English)—becomes “Hawthorne chevauche bien son cheval nocturne” (Hawthorne rides well his nocturnal horse). Such deliberate juxtaposition of the two languages must have helped assure Montégut’s audience that his reading knowledge of English was consistently reliable.

Wanting to be faithful to Hawthorne’s text, Montégut also tries to be conscientious about more idiosyncratic cultural details. For French readers unfamiliar with the phrase, he accurately defines “Grub Street” in a note: “A name that applies generally to poor writers—hacks—who eke out their living in garrets” (designation qu’on appliqué généralement aux auteurs pauvres et vivant dans des greniers). A more localized geographical detail trips him up just a bit, although he freely confesses a degree of uncertainty in his explanation. When Coverdale sneeringly alludes to “State Street” as an unlikely source of investment capital for Hollingsworth’s model penitentiary, Montégut suggests (again in a footnote) that “undoubtedly” the author is referring to “a rich neighborhood in Boston,” although more precisely the reference is to that city’s financial district. Not surprisingly, other, more col-
loquial, expressions also prove difficult, and his instinct for the literal falls somewhat flat. When Hawthorne’s characters forsake their town clothes for garments made of “homespun and linsey-woolsey,” the best Montégut can do is to render the phrase as “éttoffes de laine et de fil” (woolen and woven fabrics). He is still faithful to detail, but the French cannot capture the humble connotation of Hawthorne’s words. We find another example in the passage from “The Masqueraders” in which a costumed Indian chief shouts, “Me take his scalp!” Montégut correctly uses the exact verb scalper, but he silently improves upon the diction of Hawthorne’s cigar-store stereotype by permitting him the nominative case: “Je vais scalper sa chevelure” (I am going to scalp him). When Montégut recognizes that French has no worthy equivalent, he retains certain English words verbatim, perhaps assuming that his seasoned audience already will recognize them. Across the range of his three essays, certain linguistic peculiarities appear simply in italic font: humbug and tomahawk, for example, but also gentlewoman, Yankees, lady, and the phrase at home. The notion of informal domestic visitation could only be foreign to the French imagination.

All in all, this critic stays as closely as he can to the text. But when he does take liberties, he subtly reveals much about his qualities as a translator and as a critic of Hawthorne. In the following passage from “The Custom-House” Introduction to The Scarlet Letter, in which Hawthorne rather humorously describes his alienation from the unreality of his former Transcendentalist neighbors in Concord, Montégut more aggressively demonizes them by expanding upon the writer’s use of the adjective “fastidious”:

```
after growing  fastidious
après avoir fini par rendre  mon goût littéraire  extrêmement difficile et dédaigneux
[after having made]  my literary taste  extremely difficult and disdainful
by sympathy  with the classic refinement of Hillard’s culture
à force de sympathie  pour la culture classique et raffinée d’Hillard
by force of sympathy  with Hillard’s classic and refined culture
```

Likewise, when Hawthorne tartly concludes by saying that “Even the old Inspector [at the Custom-House] was desirable, as a change of diet, to a man who had known Alcott,” Montégut sharpens the criticism by saying that the change the author experienced was not just of diet but “comme changement d’hygiène intellectuelle.” Probably because he firmly believes Coverdale to be a stand-in for the author in Blithedale, Montégut is obliged to add
weight to Hawthorne’s rationale for distancing himself from his erstwhile companions. Conservative that he is, Montégut endorses what he takes to be Coverdale/Hawthorne’s rational retreat from the corrupting influences of Hollingsworth and Zenobia/the more radical Transcendental reformers. In a passage from “A Village-Hall” in which Coverdale relates the perversions to which the practice of animal magnetism is prone, he cites as an example the possibility that “a mother with her babe’s milk in her bosom,” subject to such influence, “would thrust away her child.” Montégut’s translation melodramatically amplifies this affront against nature—“La mère qui serrait avec tendresse son enfant sur son sein et l’abreuvait de son lait était capable de l’abandonner” (**The mother who tenderly held her child to her breast and nursed with her milk was capable of abandoning him**)—making more powerful the suggestion of mesmerism’s evil. Least surprisingly, perhaps, in a passage from Hawthorne that touches on the socialist philosopher Charles Fourier, Montégut can hardly disguise his acrimonious contempt for his radical com-patriot. Hollingsworth’s exclamation is severe enough, but Montégut literally turns up the heat:

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[L]et him make a Paradise, if he can, of Gehenna, where,
Laissons Fourier faire son paradis, s’il veut, de la géhenna, où
[Let us let Fourier make his Paradise, if he wants, of Gehenna, where dán ce moment, je l’espère bien, il rôtit et se démène
right now, I truly hope, he is roasting and struggling.]
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One can almost see Montégut stoking the coals under this hellish rotisserie!

Invariably, the same kind of inflection surfaces when Montégut wrestles with the questions of religious faith and morality that Hawthorne’s texts invite. When, in “The Custom-House,” Hawthorne imagines the disapproval his ancestors would feel for his choice of vocation, he employs the verb *scorn:* “[L]et them scorn me as they will. . . .” Instead of using a French equivalent for “scorn” (such as “rejeter” or “mépriser”), Montégut chooses instead the verb “maudire,” or “to damn,” a predicate that connotes a much sterner rejection of Hawthorne’s career as a writer. With this verb, the already sinister judgment by Hawthorne’s spectral ancestors almost becomes an eschatological condemnation.29 At another point, when Montégut is describing the characteristic mental habits of Hawthorne’s characters, among them is a tendency “to dream lugubriously”—“réver lugubrement”—used as a synonym for “brood” (an expression he leaves in English within parentheses).
In this instance, Montégut could have chosen a more neutral verb such as “ruminer”; instead, his preference makes even more ominous their representative mental state. Because of choices such as these, the universe in which Hawthorne’s characters live, a world of Puritan exigencies and swift verdicts, becomes even more Manichean as Montégut represents it.

Louis Étienne, the one critic about whom almost nothing is known, still has left us with enough material in his two articles on Hawthorne to assess his qualities as a translator. This critic who pens such cavalier statements in his native tongue seems to approach transcribing Hawthorne’s English into French with equal relish. Such bravado, as one might surmise, does not always do complete justice to the American originals.

As with the other critics, Étienne often chooses the path of least resistance and prefers to translate literally. Perhaps because the critic snipes chauvinistically about Zenobia’s bas-bleusisme, he is only too happy to yield the floor to her tirade here:

“It is my belief [Zenobia says]—yes, and my prophecy,

“Ma conviction, dit Zenobia, ‘oui, ma prophétie,

[‘My belief,” says Zenobia, “yes, my prophecy.

should I die before it happens —that, when my sex
si je dois mourir avant de le voir, c’est que le jour où notre sexe
if I should die before seeing it, is that the day when our sex

shall achieve its rights, there will be ten eloquent women, where there is now
entrera en possession de ses droits, il y aura dix femmes éloquentes pour
shall gain possession of its rights, there will be ten eloquent women for

one eloquent man. Thus far, no woman in the world
un homme éloquent. Jusqu’ici, pas une femme au monde
one eloquent man. Thus far, not a single woman in the world

has ever once spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind.”
n’a jamais donné le dernier mot de son cœur et de son intelligence.”
has ever given the last word of her heart and her mind.”

With respect to Coverdale, his literalism is rather a sign of sympathy for the point of view that Hawthorne’s nonchalant character expresses:
I do not wish in any way to die; yet if there any cause, in this whole chaos of human struggle, that deserved a sane man's dying for, and which my death would benefit, then —provided, however,—the effort did not involve an unreasonable amount of trouble,—methinks I might be bold to offer up my life.

Montégut and Étienne occasionally incorporate the same passages from Hawthorne into their analyses. Comparing them might suggest that the latter was quite familiar with his rival's work in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Consider this excerpt from *The Blithedale Romance*:
Part 1: Historical Introduction

H: we looked rather like a gang of beggars or banditti, than
M: nous ressemblions plutôt à une bande de brigands ou de bandits qu’
E: nous ressemblions plutôt à une troupe de mendiants ou de bandits, qu’

we resembled more a band of brigands or bandits than
we resembled more a troop of beggars or bandits, than

H: either a company of honest laboring men, or a conclave
M: à une compagnie d’honnêtes travailleurs ou à un conclave
E: à une compagnie d’honnêtes travailleurs ou à un conclave

we resembled more a company of honest working men or a conclave

H: of philosophers. Whatever might be our points of difference,
M: de philosophes. Quelles que fussent les différences qui nous séparent,
E: de philosophes. Quelques différentes que fussent nos vues personnelles,

of philosophers. Whatever might be the differences that separate us,
of philosophers. However different our personal views might be,

M: il y avait un point qui nous était commun à tous:
there was one point that was common to us all:

H: we all of us seemed to have come to Blithedale
M: nous sembions tous être venus à Blithedale
E: Nous semblions être venus à Blithedale

we seemed all to have come to Blithedale

H: with the one thrifty and laudable idea of
M: dans la louable et économique idée d’
in the laudable and economical idea of
E: avec l’idée utile et louable d’
with the idea useful and laudable of

H: wearing out our old clothes.
M: user nos vieux habits.
E: user nos vieux vêtements.

wearing out our old clothes.

wearing out our old clothes.]
As one can see here, Étienne’s version mostly runs parallel to Montégut’s. In some cases, Étienne keeps the same easy wording as Montégut (“nous ressemblions plutôt à une compagnie d’honnêtes travailleurs ou à un conclave de philosophes”) or makes only minor changes (Montégut’s slightly dusty “vieux habits” versus Étienne’s more common “vieux vêtements”). While Étienne may have consulted the earlier translation, no one can accuse him of slavish copying; he is careful to stake his own ground. He avoids Montégut’s glib additions to the original (“il y avait un point qui nous était commun à tous”). He more precisely uses the term “mendiants” for Hawthorne’s “beggars” instead of Montégut’s looser word, “brigands.” Shortly after the passage cited, he is careful to include Coverdale’s comic description of the banditti’s clothing (ridiculously fashioned “with the waist at every point between the hip and arm-pit”)—a detail that Montégut silently omits. In these particulars, at least, Étienne improves upon Montégut’s translation.

Over all, though, Montégut’s command of the translation enterprise still seems superior, not least because he is more inclined to be both faithful to Hawthorne’s texts and also more patient in explaining his idioms and allusions. In the remainder of the paragraph that begins with the passage cited above, for example, Étienne makes no effort to gloss Hawthorne’s use of “Grub Street,” whereas Montégut does. Étienne also elides Hawthorne’s telling allusion to Henry IV (“We might have been sworn comrades to Falstaff’s ragged regiment”), something that the other critic—and Shakespeare translator—does not. In discussing The Scarlet Letter, Étienne silently omits significant phrases from Dimmesdale’s imaginary confession to his faithful congregants:

“I, whom you behold in these black garments of the priesthood,—I, who ascend the sacred desk, [and turn my pale face heavenward,] taking upon myself to hold communion, in your behalf, with the Most High Omniscience

prêtre,  moi qui monte à cette tribune sacrée,
a priest,  I who climb to that sacred platform,

—I, in whose daily life you discern the sanctity of Enoch,

moi qui, dans ma vie journalière, vous parais aussi saint que le patriarche Enoch;

I who,  in my daily life, seem to you as saintly as Enoch the patriarch;
—I, whose footsteps, as you suppose, leave a gleam
moi dont les pas vous semblent laisser un rayon lumineux
I whose footsteps seem to you to leave a luminous ray

Along my earthly track, [whereby the pilgrims that shall come after me may be guided to the regions of the blest.]—I, who have laid the hand of baptism upon your children

sur la route de la terre au ciel, moi qui ai donné le baptême à vos enfants,
along the route from the earth to the sky, I who have given baptism to your children,

—I, who have breathed the parting prayer over your dying friends, [to whom the Amen sounded faintly from a world which they had quitted]
moi, qui ai exhorté les âmes de vos parents sur le seuil de l’éternité,
I, who have pleaded for the souls of your relatives on eternity’s doorstep

—I, your pastor, whom you so reverence and trust, am utterly a pollution and a lie!”
Moi votre Pasteur, l’objet de votre respect et de votre confiance, je ne suis que souillure et mensonge!”
a lie!”

One doubts that Montégut, with his neo-Protestant sensibility and genuine regard for Hawthorne’s Puritan heritage, would have silenced the author so recklessly. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, where Hawthorne darkly catalogues the hidden legacy of Colonel Pyncheon (a legacy that includes “a strange form of death, dark suspicion, unspeakable disgrace”) Étienne collapses the suggestive appositives and renders this simply as “morts étranges” (*strange deaths*). The meaning and impact of Hawthorne’s lugubrious enumeration are lost to the French reader. When Hawthorne elaborates the pathos Kenyon feels as he listens to Donatello’s plaintive melody in *The Marble Faun*, he describes not only the sculptor’s tears but the remarkable form of ecstasy they provoke in him: “They welled up slowly from his heart, which was thrilling with an emotion more delightful than he had often felt before, but which he forbore to analyze, lest, if he seized it, it should at once perish in his grasp.” In Étienne’s flatly abridged version, “They fell slowly from his heart, [which was] penetrated by one of the sweetest emotions he had known” (Elles [les larmes] tombaient lentement de son coeur, pénétrée d’une de plus douces émotions qu’il eût connues). When Donatello loses his mysterious capacity for communicating with creatures of the
forest, he laments the fact as a sign that, through him, Nature now recognizes “death.” In Étienne’s translation, however, that recognition is more pointedly criminal: “Murder, murder!” (Le meurtre! C’est le meurtre!), Donatello sobs.

We can justly see such casual disregard for Hawthorne’s nuances as an extension of Étienne’s caustic attitude toward America in general. Even with their occasionally erroneous idioms (even their possibly deliberate misreadings), Forgues and Montégut better grasp Hawthorne’s subtleties when they render the American’s delicate prose into French. Étienne, by comparison, displays little suppleness or patience for the intricacies of the task. Given his aggressive style as a critic, these lapses in translation should come as no surprise.

With varying degrees of emphasis, all of these French critics explore Hawthorne’s affinities with Emerson, whose leading role in the vanguard of New England Transcendentalism they take for granted. Whenever they catch the note of moral Idealism in Hawthorne’s work, his ties to the Concord sage seem most evident. Accordingly, what might be called Hawthorne’s democratic fables of Republican virtue—“The Great Stone Face,” for example, or “The Threefold Destiny”—give dramatic form (in their view) to Emerson’s fundamental principle of self-reliance. Since Montégut was instrumental in bringing Emerson to his countrymen’s awareness, having published the first French translations of the most important early essays in 1851, he advances these claims most confidently. In various tales, he suggests, Hawthorne “has made numerous applications of Emerson’s philosophical counsels and has rendered his abstractions into concrete, dramatic, and animated form.” In both writers Forgues hears a voice of liberal prophecy railing against the petty materialism of the age. Étienne sees Transformation (the title by which the French knew The Marble Faun) as a fictional embodiment of the philosophical doctrine of Correspondence; he frankly labels Hawthorne Emerson’s “disciple.” “He does not write novels to spread philosophy,” Étienne says of Hawthorne, “but he quarries philosophical ideas that give life and inspiration to his novels.” Without Montégut’s 1851 translations in hand, Étienne never would have arrived at that conclusion. The germ of Hawthorne’s novel, he attests, “was hatched in one of the most abstruse and shadowy corners of Emerson’s Essays” (and he shows convincingly which one).

Significantly, though, over time the clouds of history overshadow the tone of breezy optimism that we occasionally find in the first French readings of Hawthorne. By the 1860s, when the United States seemed to be disuniting itself in bloody catastrophe and France seemed absentely complacent under Napoleon III, a tinge of nostalgia (if not desperation) creeps into Montégut’s assessments of these same stories. Cleaving to his own tattered hopes for a
meritocratic society, Montégut now declares that “The Great Stone Face” represents “the most noble page ever penned by Hawthorne.” All of the author’s philosophical allegories bring us back, he wistfully writes, “to those happy days, the happiest the American republic has ever known (Halcyon Days, in poetical English)—the period from the “liberation” of Texas in 1836 to the outbreak of the Mexican-American War (1846–48). Harking back to the Revolution of 1848, when France looked across the Atlantic for inspiration and support, Montégut remembers that the confidence of the American republic in its destiny then was so great, and “so candid was its pride, that its illusions won other peoples who turned their attention to it as they would to a promised land where the redemption of humanity would be fulfilled.” Even his choice of words betrays the conflation of American and French democratic aspirations. “Les bons temps à venir—‘good times to come’”: that was a motto shared by his countrymen and the “savants” of Massachusetts.

Such a climate of hope fostered utopian dreams in both countries, but America proved a more fertile laboratory for social experiment. In the three decades preceding the Civil War, the reform spirit unleashed by both the evangelical resurgence of the Second Great Awakening and the upwelling of Jacksonian democracy encouraged a bewildering array of communitarian enterprises and perfectionist schemes across the United States. Among the most famous of them was Brook Farm, at Roxbury, Massachusetts, in which Hawthorne invested one thousand dollars and about eight months of his life in 1841. Modeled upon the socialist theories of Charles Fourier (especially as they were more popularly formulated in works such as Albert Brisbane’s The Social Destiny of Man [1840]), the “Association” was, in Montégut’s opinion, “the only place in our times where a group of men has sought to live according to the philosophical doctrines they profess and to practice what they preach.”31 Less charitably—but with an almost deadly acumen—Étienne observes that in no other country but America are “projects for the renovation of the human race more frequent or less durable.” The “group of empty dreamers” who surrounded Emerson “like moths around a flame” could not sustain their utopian enthusiasm because they could not be weaned from the bourgeois comforts they pretended to renounce. As is often the case, the sting of Étienne’s sarcasm still serves as a vehicle for meaningful insight. “Attempts at communism in the Old World have had a different bearing,” he notes, establishing an important contrast:

Those who flirt with communism generally have had nothing to lose, and think that they have everything to gain. The masses are brought to it by
poverty and irresistible ambition. Those American communists were of a
different order. They left their carpeted offices . . . forsook their tables cov-
ered with books and periodicals, their offices with their poems or articles
just begun. They deprived themselves of capacious sideboards, covered with
entrées, their entertainments, their teas. And why? To hoe, to reap, to sweat,
and to tire themselves out. To serve as chambermaids to a pair of bulls and
a dozen cows.

Long before Lionel Trilling began exploring the latent contradictions of the
liberal imagination, Étienne was mapping them out with prophetic precision.
The ideological conflict between what he terms the “Old” American Ethos—
grounded in the covenant theology of the Puritans—and the “New”—based
squarely on material self-interest—is a rather lopsided contest. “Competition
is the life of modern peoples,” he admits, “but to the American, it is the
soul of his life, the blood of his heart, the marrow of his bones. One cannot
know the meaning of ruthlessness unless one knows America.” Contemplat-
ing the ruins of Blithedale, Étienne almost ruefully concludes, “The Yankees
certainly got their revenge.”

Etienne’s reactionary instincts inspire him to bristling—sometimes outra-
geous—social commentary, but more often than not his criticism strikes a
vulnerable spot and sounds a curiously modern note. If, on the one hand,
hé crudely dismisses the incipient feminism of Margaret Fuller (whom he
identifies as Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance) as so much “petticoat char-
latanism,” his anxious thoughts on the disappearance of private life are not
merely chauvinistic and can hardly be refuted in an age of ubiquitous “real-
ity” TV programming and “communication” overload. In American society,
he tellingly observes,

public life invades everything: all citizens live under each other’s eyes; no one
hesitates to call attention to himself or his family. All aspects of private life
are broadcast—even domestic matters of the hearth and table. They clamor
for public notoriety by every means. . . . Every house is open to the public,
invited by those who live in them: not even the birth chamber is off limits.

If the critic here is simply amplifying a concern implied by Hawthorne in his
novel—especially at the moment when Hollingsworth rescues “The Veiled
Lady” (Priscilla) from Westervelt’s enslavement and public exploitation of
her on the stage—Étienne’s penchant for broad generalization is not radia-
cally misplaced. Like Tocqueville, he understood the “enormous power” of
the press—and publicity—in America; its eyes are never shut, as that canny
traveler reported: “ever vigilant, it regularly lays bare the secret springs of politics”; and, as the principal vehicle of public opinion, it already had begun to exercise unprecedented control over others (DA 212, 491).

Montégut’s 1852 assessment of *Blithedale* also owes a debt to *Democracy in America*, because the critic prefers to see socialism in the United States as a form of resistance to the tyranny of the majority. “If you want to know which class sports the greatest number of socialists,” he taunts, “the rich and educated would be a good bet.”32 Paradoxically, egalitarian ideals are advocated especially by the intellectual elite, “who grow weary more quickly than others of the multitude’s yoke.” For Montégut, however, the appeal of socialism also has a literary dimension, since he likens its doctrines to other forms of the fantastic, a genre to which Americans are particularly susceptible. Precisely because the vast majority of those living in the United States are “positive, practical, serious people, little disposed to reverie,” American writers have no other recourse than to idealize and romanticize the most vulgar elements that surround them and to pander to an “appetite for the marvelous” that such starved imaginations crave. “Socialism,” in Montégut’s view, “has all the characteristics of the marvelous”: the promise of “passionate attractions, a human race made for happiness, the prospect of joys without end, a new heaven and earth evoked by all-powerful formulas, the transformation of men into Olympian gods.” No wonder, then, that writers of fiction should succumb to its allure. As Tocqueville had suggested, authors in democratic societies “will seek to astonish rather than to please and to engage the passions rather than beguile taste” (DA 542–43).

But Hawthorne, as Montégut knew quite well, was not just any author, and *The Blithedale Romance* was not really what he called it (a “socialist” novel). Certainly that adjective would catch the attention of French readers whose memories of the events of 1848 were still fresh; but, as the critic admits in his opening paragraphs, his real concern is the “moral malady” of ideological coercion, a theme he correctly finds at the center in Hawthorne’s book. If *The Blithedale Romance* is not “socialist,” neither is it even a “novel” in Montégut’s eyes because the story privileges psychological analysis rather than the more overt drama of narrative action. Rather cleverly, he suggests that “Hawthorne has orchestrated a philosophico-humanitarian ballet, danced by four main characters.” Coverdale, Hollingsworth, Priscilla, and Zenobia “make socialist entrechats and logical faux pas; and their footwork is not always confident. They cannot keep time with their system’s music.” The metaphor seems enchantingly apt to describe *Blithedale*, with its Arcadian masqueraders whirling through the woods to a fiddler’s tune and leaving the stage in shambles.
Irresistibly drawn to the likelihood that *Blithedale* is a *roman à clef* (drawn from the author’s experiences at Brook Farm), Montégut is tempted to read the novel as a chapter in the intellectual history of the United States: a cool dissection of Transcendental enthusiasm and reforming zeal. We should not be surprised to discover that in Miles Coverdale (the dilettante man of letters) Montégut finds a stand-in for the author—and even, for that matter, the voice of his own conservative temperament. Coverdale, he says, is the least “eccentric” of the four principal figures, “the one who does his best to keep his moral health intact and who fears losing it the most.” The same touch of paranoia he discerns in Hawthorne’s protagonist is almost embarrassingly evident in certain stretches of Montégut’s essay, which awkwardly insists that a serious work of art have an overarching (and preferably Christian) moral intention. Hawthorne, he fears, is too detached, too skeptical, too agnostic: too much, that is, like Coverdale. Hardly an impediment, Montégut’s inconsistencies, his vacillations of feeling, work to fuel his curiosity. Despite his rather flat-footed strictures, he allows his imagination to see and reach beyond them. Sensing that “there is something unhealthy” in Hawthorne’s fiction, the critic still cannot put it down, even though it begins to affect him “like a very weak and very slow poison.” He compares the American’s work to “a spider’s web, a seine that surprises a fish, a snare that holds a bird captive.” To read him is “to be caught in a trap.” Yet Montégut seems a willing victim.

Because of his need (and desire) to see Coverdale/Hawthorne sympathetically, Montégut occasionally is obliged to tinker with his extensive quotations from the novel in order to mute the author’s broader satire, which in the original does not altogether exempt the first-person narrator. In a very long exchange between Coverdale and Hollingsworth, which Montégut includes to demonstrate the instinctive independence of the former’s nature, by omitting the indirect transcription of the narrator’s thoughts, he insulates Coverdale from the suggestions of prurience and jealousy that Hawthorne’s text invites. Coverdale, we know, has good reason to resist Hollingsworth’s monomaniacal scheme for the reformation of criminals. But when, during their conversation, his thoughts revert to Zenobia, he senses that Hollingsworth has appropriated her wealth to further his ambitions and cannot help wondering “on what conditions was it to be had? Did she fling it into the scheme with the uncalculating generosity that characterizes a woman when it is her impulse to be generous at all? And did she fling herself along with it?” Eliding these questions, Montégut enhances the impeccability of Coverdale’s virtue. Likewise, when Coverdale later resolves to leave the Association in order to recover his mental balance, Montégut awards him full credit for his instinct to withdraw. “No sagacious man,” he quotes,
will long retain his sagacity, if he live exclusively among reformers and progressive people, without periodically returning into the settled system of things, to correct himself by a new observation from that old standpoint. It was now time for me, therefore, to go and hold a little talk with the conservatives, the writers of “The North American Review,” the merchants, the politicians, the Cambridge men.

As represented by Montégut, Coverdale’s choice is an indubitably sane alternative. But the last sentence that Hawthorne wrote goes on to qualify the conservative point of view by adding to the list an extended appositive—“all those respectable old blockheads who still, in this intangibility and mistiness of affairs, kept a death-grip on one or two ideas which had not come into vogue since yesterday morning.” Silencing the comic tenor of the original disproportionately amplifies Coverdale’s dignity.

These minor acts of misreading are understandable, given Montégut’s impulse to identify with Hawthorne and his narrator. After quoting at length Coverdale’s jeremiad at the village hall, a scene in which he inveighs against the “humbug” of contemporary culture and the degradation of orthodox religious sentiment, Montégut frankly says, “I share Hawthorne’s opinion entirely,” adding that “his book’s characters are the clearest evidence of the fears he expresses.” In his second (1860) essay on the American author, Montégut confesses that of all of Hawthorne’s novels, *Blithedale* is his favorite, even though he feared that the book was too difficult to win enduring fame. “The audience for such a book necessarily must be limited,” he regrets.

*The Blithedale Romance* is made to be understood and felt only by a hundred or so people among the generation currently alive. It is a diamond, but a diamond whose value even lapidaries and connoisseurs of precious gems themselves cannot completely comprehend, and that is destined to be hidden again under a thick layer of oblivion in about twenty or so years.

A better critic than prophet, Montégut still has much of importance to say, and we should not be sidetracked by his more capricious judgments or idiosyncratic foibles. Anyone familiar with zealous reformers, he says more soundly, “will recognize the hand of a master in the portraits of Hollingsworth, Zenobia, and Miles Coverdale. There they are—just as you have met them—dreamers without poetry, philanthropists without love, politicians without a mind for innovation: all agitated, yet passionless hearts and cowering intellects. They have been captured and described with the artful finesse and suppleness of a truly admirable talent.”
Étienne prefers to see *Blithedale* as an illustration of the larger cultural contest he sees at war in the United States between an older, communal ethos and the ascendant mercantile spirit of laissez-faire capitalism. With his characteristic brio, he conjectures an imaginary Republic in a remote wilderness of the Golden Age—a “Platonopolis,” full of “dreams and poetry”—whose virtuous citizens, enticed by the prospect of a “Goldrush of drachmas,” are corrupted by dreams of avarice. The analogy to modern America is comic but apt, and Étienne easily skewers the bourgeois Transcendentalists whose delusions lure them to the countryside—a dozen Yankees, he quips, playing at Arcadia. Unlike Montégut, who more perceptively gauges the interest of *Blithedale* to be altogether psychological, Étienne has no interest in the book’s plot or characters; for him the romance is a political parable, perhaps even a kind of Conservative Manifesto. Certainly a chauvinist one, as he recoils from a social sphere in which women enjoy “all the virile liberties that decency will tolerate.” Zenobia’s fate, if tragic, is to him welcome because it has the advantage of shutting her up. “Eloquence—or, rather, let us say slickness,” he savagely writes, “is the dominant character of the people of the United States. The gift of the nation is the gift of gab.” How could women not be jealous of “the privilege of masculine loquacity?” If only (he laments) they had something to say. But Étienne is hardly eager to hear declamations from a “land of Bloomerism,” a false utopia of “petticoat charlatanism and pedantry.” Happily, he sides with Coverdale (or Hawthorne, whom he sees hiding behind that character’s mask), whose removal from the community and rejection of reforming zeal he can only applaud. In Coverdale’s closing confession, Étienne hears “the words of a democrat, but a democrat who needs some rest.” “As with so many today,” he acknowledges, “his faith is tepid, almost nonchalant.” One senses that this Coverdale would make a perfect citizen of the Second Empire.

Differences of opinion make these critics worth reading, because their conflicting estimates of Hawthorne’s value illuminate so many dimensions of his work. Drawn to (what he imagined were) Hawthorne’s Locofoco politics, Forgues finds *The House of the Seven Gables* if not the author’s best work then “at the very least the one in which he makes the best use of what constitutes his particular originality”: affecting the reader powerfully through the exercise of his imagination. (We should remember that Hawthorne himself preferred the *Seven Gables* to all his other stories: another confirmation of Forgues’ instinctive affinity.) Montégut, however, can “dismiss” this book “without regret.” Only the opening chapters of the novel, recording Hepzibah’s petty transformation from aristocratic gentlewoman to hucksteress
of a cent-shop, affect him deeply, because in them he feels that Hawthorne is altogether in his proper element: “unhappiness and destitution.” “How Hawthorne's mind is at ease, at home, in the company of these painful sentiments!” Montégut exclaims, and with what “voluptuous and cruel curiosity” he traces the movements of this poor creature crushed under the burden of her misfortune. As soon as Phoebe’s arrival “brings a glimmer of youth and Spring into the old house,” he complains, “interest starts to wane, and the disappointed imagination of the reader would gladly say to the writer: ‘Snuff out this sunbeam, chase away the Spring, give us solitude, and speak to us again of the tremors and terrors that grip the souls of the destitute!’” Many other critics also have regretted Phoebe’s redemptive (and chronic) cheerfulness, but seldom for the same reasons. As Frederic Carpenter famously quipped, “Puritans preferred blondes”—and so, even against his innermost desire, did Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Montégut does not want to be reminded—as the Seven Gables undeniably insists—that an invidious politics of class can permeate a social order presumably based upon egalitarian principles. He addresses this contradiction in his final essay on Hawthorne, confessing that the theme of declension he sees in the author's second romance comes as a painful shock. “It would seem that such a sentiment ought properly to belong to our own older civilization,” he admits,

much as ivy inseparably clings to ruins—and that it should be particularly painful in countries where gross inequities of condition transform all reversals of fortune into catastrophes, and where feudal family traditions implicate everyone in their consequences. In America, where that strict solidarity of the family and where inequities of condition do not exist, we have trouble understanding how such a sentiment has seen the light of day.

Whenever he faces this kind of problem, Montégut characteristically takes refuge in the comfortable abstractions of moral verity—or Tocqueville (equally convenient)—or both. Why should America be a stranger to class distinctions when “our psychological anatomy discovers in itself the roots of good and evil, a double harvest together, where hereditary virtues and the spirits of caste and inequality also sprout? In America, no more so than elsewhere,” he continues, “man cannot escape this fate of his nature, both happy and sad at once, that pushes him to find stability in a world where all is fleeting, and to yearn for immortality in a world where nothing lasts.”

Borrowing from Tocqueville’s analysis instead of the catechism gives his own discussion perhaps more cogency. “It is a very interesting fact that
equality renders all decline more painful,” Montégut also claims, “because it leaves no resources to pride.” In aristocratic countries, by contrast,

condition is determined by moral realities that nothing can alter; it accompanies their possessor in ruin and unhappiness, is inseparable from that person and cannot even be undone by death. A ruined gentleman himself stays intact, and, except in the case of dishonor, decline affects only those circumstances external and contingent to his existence. But it is not so in democratic countries, because there rank and condition are determined only by riches. There, whoever loses his fortune loses his rank and condition, even his honor.

As Tocqueville shrewdly had observed, the most shameful smirch to a man’s reputation in the United States was idleness; not even the wealthiest American democrat could escape its tarring brush. “Do you see this opulent citizen?” Tocqueville posits. “There is not a nobleman anywhere in Europe who is more exclusive in his pleasures than this man or more jealous of the least advantages conferred by a privileged position. Yet this same man leaves home to go work in a dusty hole in the business district downtown, where anyone is free to call on him” (DA 204). As Tocqueville understood so well, democratic institutions awakened a passion for equality that they could never entirely satisfy; but the majority would never demand the surrender of a rich man’s wealth—only his pride (DA 593).

That excruciating psychological dimension of The House of the Seven Gables appealed most to Montégut. Comparing Hawthorne’s romance to Sir Walter Scott’s The Bride of Lammermoor (1819) allows him to make a key distinction. In Scott’s historical romance, “decadence of nobility gives rise to nothing but savage despair and a proud taciturnity” among the Ravenswood clan. But “bourgeois decadence” for the Pyncheons “engenders the worst infirmity that can afflict the human soul: timidity.” Hawthorne conducts his patient (and rather pitiless) analysis of Hepzibah’s inner torture on the day she is obliged to stand behind the counter of her cent-shop with “lacerating delicacy.” And his representations of the even more grievous afflictions of her deranged brother Clifford are similarly masterful. Unafraid of extravagance, Montégut describes Clifford as “a tortured soul in the manner of Torquato Tasso—a Torquato Tasso of the American middle class”—who, for that very reason, has none of the Italian’s poetic gifts. If Hawthorne had confined himself to the dissection of their pain, Montégut would have been satisfied. Instead, he finds The House of the Seven Gables “long-winded,” proof positive that Hawthorne’s talent was better represented by his shorter tales.
Étienne, too, remarks upon the paucity of incident in Hawthorne’s work and his seemingly natural bent for the short story. “Even his novels are tales,” the critic pointedly says; “when celebrity and the assurance of having a readership permitted him broader scope,” the author’s imagination, “accustomed to this mold, did not want to change.” (Years later, Hawthorne’s American publisher, James T. Fields, famously confirmed this supposition when he related how strenuously he had had to push the author to transform *The Scarlet Letter* into a full-fledged novel, instead of just another contribution to a new volume of tales.) Later critics—beginning with Henry James—would suggest that the meagerness of Hawthorne’s cultural milieu, the thinness and provinciality of American society, necessarily worked to confine him to briefer narrative forms or, as a corollary, impelled him in his longer fictions to stray into domains of romantic and psychological abstraction. The novel—as the literary vehicle best suited for representing a dense and complex social field—could hardly prosper in a culture without one, as antebellum America was imagined to be. The “crude and simple society” that Hawthorne knew, in James’s phrase, could only be detrimental to the development of a serious novelist. Somewhat more generously, Montégut sees the short story as the vehicle best suited to describe the feelings of which Hawthorne is fondest—“solitude, destitution, meditative ennui”—because to indulge and explore these sentiments, his characters must protect themselves by the “barrier that sadness erects between those it has touched and the rest of men.” Hawthorne’s world, Montégut intuits, is the reverse of social: his “drama is entirely interior and remains, as it were, invisible. It cannot be translated by exterior acts, by passionate deeds, by adventures.” Perhaps it is fitting that it would be James who could best fuse the two realms and transform the history of the novel in the process.

As we have seen, Montégut tended to discount the importance of *The House of the Seven Gables*; but for Étienne, that romance affords him the most crucial evidence to support his sweeping generalizations about the sorry triumph of the mercantile spirit in the United States. Consequently, he offers the most detailed French commentary on this novel and even proclaims it Hawthorne’s best. Judge Pyncheon, of course, incarnates the Yankee fetish for busy-ness and money-making, and Étienne delights in tallying all the petty details that Hawthorne gives us about his overcrowded (and always self-serving) itinerary. Despite the wellspring of avarice from which his actions originate, his public carriage and credentials are impecable; his social eminence is roundly accepted by church and state (as Hawthorne writes); his hypocrisies, if sometimes whispered about, are never exposed (except when Holgrave’s daguerreotype brings to the surface the
Judge’s latent affinity with his blood-stained ancestors). In all this he perfectly embodies a sentiment that Tocqueville first discerned among what he called the “vestiges of the aristocratic party” in America. Beneath their “conventional enthusiasm” and beyond their “obsequious politeness toward the dominant power,” Tocqueville sensed that “the rich feel a deep disgust with their country’s democratic institutions. The people are a power they fear and despise” (DA 204). Hawthorne powerfully captures this ugly dimension of the Judge’s character, so carefully concealed behind the mask of civility he customarily displays. His smile becomes a metonym for his false public posture, and Étienne clearly relishes Hawthorne’s satiric portrait of this “tyrannical hypocrite.”

Like Montégut, Étienne recognizes the importance of Hawthorne’s “psychological method,” and his analysis of it richly complements that of his rival at the Revue des Deux Mondes. He appreciates the extent to which the author “does not simply disclose the private ruminations of his hero, but (what is more) how he perceives them.” Appropriately, he likens the novelist to a scientist equipped with a powerful magnifier, intent upon examining “the fleeting expressions of the face, the mysterious relations of our physical attitude and our moral state, the timbre of our voice and the music of our soul”; by such means, he “comes to grasp the birth and torment of feelings.” As does Montégut, Étienne feels that the artist “yields to commiseration less than to curiosity” and takes pleasure “in evoking touching dramas and looking on with a cold heart.” But while Montégut worries about the moral ambiguities that Hawthorne’s detached attitude suggests, Étienne focuses more on the aesthetic problems that it raises. Psychological scrutiny may be the author’s forte, but as a consequence “the pace of the narrative slows to a crawl; every topic invites digression; the illusion of reality is suspended at every moment.” Hawthorne is masterful in creating these psychological tableaux, but Étienne doubts that a well-constructed novel can be made up of a series of them: the critic compares the author to “a poet who conceives a drama in one act and then wants to spread it into three.” His method invites a kind of narrative sprawl. (James would echo this criticism by saying that The House of the Seven Gables “has a sort of expansive quality which never wholly fructifies”; to him it remained “a magnificent fragment.”) 37 The French analyst was more specific. Tabulating at most “two or three” incidents in the book (“just enough to construct a short story”), Étienne remarks that “by superadding philosophy, feeling, and humor, Hawthorne has made a novel out of it.”

The psychological afflictions of Clifford affect Étienne profoundly. He sees the House of the Seven Gables weighing upon the half-crazed man
“like one of those capes of lead that Dante placed upon the shoulders” of the damned in the Eighth Circle of Hell. The critic’s imagination reaches out in sympathy to this character whose “whole life is a relentless study of the secret of suffering”; and he strongly suggests that, far from being a ridiculous aberration, Clifford’s malady ominously reflects the dislocations of contemporary life. “Have you not met the man we have been describing?” he solemnly asks his readers; “do you not see all around you . . . (even, perhaps, in your own person) people who find only unhappiness and suffering in what, for others, would be a source of happiness and peace? They are forever fighting against the current: in whatever broad social channel fate has thrown them, inevitably they cannot go with the flow and the torrent passes over their body.” Étienne even manages to perform an Emersonian somersault by denominating Clifford “the Representative Man of all souls devoted to unhappiness.” He values in Hawthorne’s narrative plan exactly what Montégut dismissed—the arrival of Phoebe and the gradual regeneration of Clifford’s more fully human qualities.

Unlike so many other works of English and American fiction that obliged a French critic to discount their seriousness, in *The House of the Seven Gables* Étienne discovers what the others lack: “the expression of a society, the faithful mirror of a country, an epoch, and a people.” Those desiderata are best conveyed by the character of Holgrave, in whom Étienne sees “the modern American type, the Representative Man of generations who will call themselves tomorrow the Republic of the United States.” With all his robust energy and elastic aptitude for enterprises of all kinds, Holgrave embodies the democratic spirit with a vengeance. But this is precisely what Étienne mistrusts. His headstrong confidence in his own destiny (so like America’s) is woefully misplaced. Holgrave’s “mistake” (as Étienne calls it) “is to think that the time in which he is living is destined, by a flattering privilege, to strip off Antiquity’s rags and to furnish itself in a brand new outfit, instead of replacing its garments (as our fathers did, bit by bit) by means of mending.” Naturally, then, Étienne pricked up his ears at Holgrave’s radical denunciation of the Past, his Jeffersonian appeal for the regeneration of society every twenty years, his regret that public buildings are made of stone and brick instead of materials that periodically might crumble to ruin. But after translating Holgrave’s Jacobin fulminations at length, Étienne slyly undercuts them—in one terse paragraph—by revealing that, in the end, “the rich democrat becomes conservative” and yearns for a house built of masonry and mortar. His politics are just as pretentious as his claims to intellectual superiority. He is nothing more than a “Gil Blas in a Puritan and democratic country.”
Forgues’ personal admiration for Hawthorne encouraged him to take the author at his word: “he is a democrat,” he affirms, “an incorrigible democrat,” opposed to all the “accomplices of political tyranny.” If feelings of loyalty blinded Forgues to the American author’s contradictory politics, Montégut and Étienne were more sensitive to the ideological implications of Hawthorne’s textual maneuvers. As we have seen, Montégut believed that Hawthorne’s liberalism was at best a veneer that overlay a deeper Puritan residue from the past. Hawthorne’s ancestors may have been “capable of burning witches,” he jibes, “but they never would have joined the communal experiment at Roxbury.” Even though Montégut’s knowledge of American colonial history is forgivably imprecise, his instincts—and style—are (occasionally) razor sharp. More than a century before Jonathan Arac posited an ideological link between The Life of Franklin Pierce and Hawthorne’s fiction, Étienne warned his readers that the question of slavery—“the Sphinx of American politics”—occupied a place “at the center of the Republic at a crossroads where all paths end,” a path that Hawthorne, too, was treading. Étienne’s conclusion—and the evidence upon which it is based—prefigures Arac’s almost word for word. Calling attention to the same notorious passage in the Pierce biography (in which Hawthorne defers the question of abolition to the hands of Providence) that Arac uses to launch his critique, Étienne can only express the hope that slavery “will not be for the United States what the hereditary curse is in The House of the Seven Gables, an incurable evil to which the Puritan ethos resigns itself perhaps too easily.” But the prospect of inaction was imminent, as Étienne well knew. “All in good time, Hawthorne urges; but would it not be wise and human to clear the path? Do not the partisans of the Compromise and all the other laws protecting slavery make the work of Providence that much more difficult?” Étienne had no difficulty linking the pattern of narrative “resolution” in Hawthorne’s fiction with his political leanings. His transatlantic perspective allowed him insights that Anglophone criticism has needed much more time to uncover.

As political consensus in the United States fatefully degenerated in the 1850s, a corresponding sense of malaise and disillusion surfaced in French criticism of American literature during the first decade of the Second Empire. Even Forgues, who found the political themes of Hawthorne’s historical sketches so bracing, could not help glancing at the prospect. “Such a singular temperament, the American temperament!” he gladly reports, after surveying a series of tales (“The Legends of the Province-House”) in which the historical agents of British tyranny are venomously remembered. “We can better understand how these uncouth citizens have remained free,”
he then goes on to say, “though we should refrain from asking how they might cease being so.” Montégut and Étienne were neither so discreet nor so obliging. Alternately fascinated and repelled by popular democracy, they were more persuaded by Tocqueville’s grimmer assessment of majoritarian tyranny and the social discord it might engender. Montégut’s critique of “Earth’s Holocaust” provides the best evidence for this, because he assigns a specific date to the events of Hawthorne’s dystopian fable: the Fourth of August, the date in 1789 on which the French Constituent Assembly, successor to the legislative body formed in revolt against the meeting of the Estates General in Paris in May 1789, declared an end to long-held class privileges as a response to mob violence that had spread from Paris to the countryside in July of that same year. The literally inflamed imaginations of Hawthorne’s spectators come to believe that the bonfire they have lit has consumed all the sources of evil and vice known to man, that they have purified the world in the name of Progress. But Hawthorne’s cynical irony undercuts the illusion with a cold violence that leaves Montégut appalled:

These men believed that they were obeying divine inspiration, the poor fools! Did they not see that they were playthings of the devil, who felt the need to renew his engines of damnation? The old machines of moral destruction were out of service—they clanked and were rusted—and what better occasion to renew the materiel of hell? All the equipment could now be replaced with the latest models, and, undoubtedly, all would go better. “Amen!” Hawthorne calmly replies in a tone that seems to say, “Just what I expected.” You understand now the sort of dread—verging on terror—that Hawthorne’s writings inspire, a dread all the more remarkable because the reader feels it without being able to do anything about it; it acts on him with a sort of displeasing fascination.

As Montégut (mis)reads it, the story seems to mock all aspirations for human betterment, and his conflation of it with a signal date in French history suggests the extent to which he has discovered in Hawthorne a resonant voice for his pessimistic disappointment with the course of events in his own country.Étienne’s more conservative hauteur encourages him to read Hawthorne’s “pessimism” as mere common sense, a rational instinct that he applauds. He is not surprised that the author’s experience at Brook Farm “has soured him on utopias.” How could it not? Without attribution, Étienne essentially rewrites “Earth’s Holocaust” in his denunciation of Transcendental fallacies, reinscribing the fable with a more specifically American inflection.
In Concord, the group of empty dreamers who surrounded Emerson, like moths around a flame, alienated Hawthorne from philosophical and humanitarian speculation. We can see that rabble of bizarre men, with their dubious looks, their motley dress, who believe themselves, each and every one, called to regenerate the world—true nightmares to thought and common sense. Such has been the unfortunate influence of that original thinker: those who live too close to him have been besotted by his breath and saturated by false originality. Truth goes to their head like wine. Such is the vulgarity of innovation, the originality of bad taste that would make a man abhor all ideas that predate his own century.

With such a temperament, Étienne naturally would be attracted to Hawthorne’s neo-orthodox satire, “The Celestial Railroad,” patterned after Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. For the French critic, the declension of Calvinist rigor is even suggested by the circumstances that spawned these two narratives. Bunyan (as Étienne reminds us) “lived twelve-and-a-half years in Bedford prison with no other companions besides the Bible and Foxe’s Book of Martyrs,” forging “iron fetters by which to live by writing books of piety in which he scattered treasures of imagination and fanaticism.” Hawthorne, on the other hand, “wrote ‘The Celestial Railroad’ in his Old Manse in Concord, in between a transcendental conversation with Emerson and a boat outing with the poet Ellery Channing.” This comic contrast inspires Étienne to a brilliant redaction of Hawthorne’s tale, from which he derives an appropriate moral: “Going to Hell,” he concludes, “is so much harder than attaining salvation!” Sounding very much like a precursor to Ann Douglas, Étienne bemoans if not the feminization of American culture then the pitiful dilution of its first principles. “Oh, Bunyan, Foxe, Bellingham, Endicott!” he facetiously cries, “where are you? Persecutors and persecuted, what has happened to your great grandsons? Some, most of them, are lukewarm and sensual. Not only do they flee the straight and narrow path, but they also insist that it be convenient. They no longer want to go by foot, even to Heaven.” Even the small remnant of true believers nowadays comfort themselves with sentimental reforms—instead of scourging themselves, they join philanthropic leagues and temperance societies. Only a man who defies the stupid majority and flouts public opinion can win a martyr’s honors in the relaxed times of today.

The climate, of course, was different in the seventeenth century, and all the French critics show a grim respect for Hawthorne’s representation of that period in The Scarlet Letter. By 1852, Forgues seems already to take for granted French awareness of the novel, even though his own abridged translation of it would not appear for another year. Surprised by the title’s
popularity with Anglo-American readers (who typically have spurned any chronicle of marital infidelity or sexual license and reprimanded its author), Forgues welcomes *The Scarlet Letter* as “a true literary phenomenon, a sign of the times.” For Montégut the book was a sign of something else—the epitome of Hawthorne’s psychological method—for in it the “drama is entirely interior and remains, as it were, invisible.” Because Hawthorne condemns Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth to exist in such radical isolation from each other and from their community, Montégut sees them performing the rituals of a kind of living death; irresistibly, the novel reveals “the slow destruction of three hearts, all differently, but all equally wounded.” The spectacle, he avers, is “completely black, without precedent even in the somber literature of England.” Henry James would borrow this opinion when he described the romance as “densely dark” and prophesied that it would “probably long remain the most consistently gloomy of English novels of the first order.” In this, too, he took a cue from Montégut, who assured his readers that there was “no second *Scarlet Letter* in all of literature” and, therefore, no “risk of encountering again such a distillation of misery.” Étienne also recognized the singular significance of Hawthorne’s first novel, for in his view its great success testified to “the vivacious power of Puritan thought.” More profoundly than Forgues (who also invited the comparison between Hawthorne’s work and that of George Sand), Étienne understood that to think of *The Scarlet Letter* as a novel of passion would be a gross mistake. “We might say that *The Scarlet Letter* is *Indiana*, that it is *Lélia,*” he quips. But he immediately insists upon a key distinction: “here (in its French incarnations) we have novels that reject human corruption, and there, one that exaggerates it. Here, vice does not exist; there, it is irreparable. Here, we flatter all that is in man; there, he is damned without mercy.” Étienne’s insistent logic of contrast illuminates the diabolical duplicity of *The Scarlet Letter* with a clarity unmatched until (at least) D. H. Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923).

Étienne shares Montégut’s conviction that Hawthorne’s great power as a novelist derives from his implacable “vision of Evil” and his keenness for discerning “the ineffaceable shadow of sin.” Already anticipating Montégut’s assessment of Hawthorne’s “pessimism,” Étienne knew that if the author was no longer a Puritan by faith, he was still one “in his heart and imagination” and that his characters could not escape their enslavement to the corruptions of the soul. “They are born under evil stars,” he writes, “predestinated by their passions, and the author resembles an astrologer who looks for proof in men’s lives to justify his horoscopes.” In France, where the Revolution had
brought down not just the Monarchy but also the influence of the Church and its doctrines, writers conceived of human nature differently. “They can be fatalistic,” Étienne admits, “but only by suppressing, as it were, the evil of human nature, and by displacing it on circumstances, on fate, on society.” Hawthorne’s fatalism inheres in the very nature of his art. Like D. H. Lawrence, Étienne knew that “you must look through the surface of American art, and see the inner diabolism of the symbolic meaning.” His telling gloss of Dimmesdale’s mental scourge plumbs beneath that surface, and the paradoxical appositive he uses to describe the minister—“Prometheus’ vulture” (but a vulture who gnaws at his own entrails)—brilliantly explains the clergymen’s self-inflicted torture.

Étienne yearned to see Dimmesdale’s anguish portrayed upon the stage, and Montégut apprehended the dramatic power of The Scarlet Letter in similar terms. “Only a lyric drama could furnish appropriate comparisons to express the intensity of pain contained within this book,” he urges. The novel’s lachrymose poetry would defy the talent of Gounod or Bizet. “Despite the resources of musical art,” Montégut writes, “the most dramatic opera could not match the lugubrious trio that Hawthorne makes us hear.” The book is a marvel of suffering: “it has no limits,” by Étienne’s measure, “but those of the human soul.”

Even though he can appreciate the “Calvinist melancholy” that he finds in Hawthorne’s best work, Étienne seems eager to mock America’s Puritan antecedents and the “superstitious baggage” that the settlers of New England brought with them. Condensing the novelist’s genealogy into a crude outline of the nation’s history, Étienne devises a clever parody of the line of descent that Hawthorne traces in the “Custom-House” Introduction to The Scarlet Letter:

Make the mystical sectarian go through two centuries of labor, pursue adventures, experience religious and philosophical decomposition; for a hundred years, make him penetrate the wilderness and clear the soil; for another hundred years, quarter him on a ship. Suppose that, having become in appearance the perfect Yankee ( schooled by work, commerce, and Benjamin Franklin), one day he ceases from that drudgery and, just for a moment, has quenched his thirst for lucre. A hardy, yet generous philosophy makes him despise the commercial and materialist society that surrounds him. For the first time in two hundred years, he thinks. The old man quickly goes through changes of garb, habits, and opinions. He takes up a pen and writes Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novels.
Montégut, on the other hand, approaches the question of Hawthorne’s cultural inheritance with a deeper understanding of its artistic significance. Noticing that “whenever Hawthorne speaks of his terrible forebears, he speaks with respect, almost with fear,” Montégut demonstrates a keener sensitivity to the historical nature of the author’s imagination. Though he does not employ the vocabulary that Taine would make famous, Montégut nevertheless appreciates the importance of *la race, le milieu et le moment* in the genesis of the American romancer’s art. Instead of Taine’s material determinism, however, Montégut preferred a poet’s metaphor to suggest the relevance of these criteria. “Hawthorne’s talent marvelously explains the persistence of ancestral values that are perpetuated over time,” he insists—“the ‘music of the blood’ . . . that (especially in provincial society) repeats in successive generations the same melody but with different variations.” For Montégut, Hawthorne’s “sense of the past” has the power to evoke resonant echoes; to Étienne, the very notion of meaningful history in a land of money-grubbing Yankees seems absurd.

After the creative hiatus occasioned by Hawthorne’s consular appointment at Liverpool (1853–57), the appearance of *The Marble Faun* (or *Transformation*, as the French knew it from the title preferred by the British publisher) in 1860 deepened this rift in critical opinion. To Montégut, the author’s last romance confirmed his sense that a kind of Puritan misanthropy pervaded Hawthorne’s outlook and kept him, as it were, a prisoner of the seventeenth century (but without a sustaining faith). Étienne, by contrast, seems more impressed with *The Marble Faun*’s Transcendental themes and origins, Romantic influences that ultimately triumph over the residues of Hawthorne’s Puritan nature. Somewhat ironically, Étienne finds the best evidence for his interpretation in a work of Montégut’s: the latter’s 1851 French translation of Emerson’s *Essays*, a text to which Étienne refers several times in the pages of his critique. Acknowledging that, in his prior assessment of Hawthorne, he had insisted upon the enduring relevance of the author’s Puritan inheritance, Étienne now confesses that he “knew very well that this son of the Puritans was, at heart, a Transcendentalist.” Only the occasion for proving it was wanting, and that occasion was now at hand with the publication of *The Marble Faun*. (Like Emerson himself, Étienne seems to have adopted the notion that a foolish consistency is merely the hobgoblin of little minds.) Significantly, though, Étienne openly regrets the extent to which Hawthorne has allowed Transcendental ideas—especially the heresy of Pantheism—to dominate his narrative. “At first glance,” he admits, “we might easily be deceived about this”: Hawthorne’s last romance “might seem to be a new study of remorse in the human soul, a supplement to the
powerful pages of *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables.*” But the resolution of the plot—with the suggestion “that good might issue from the crime, that evil might be a means of progress”—would turn the tables on such an argument. “If the old Puritans were brought back to life,” Étienne chuckles, they would find these ideas “a trifle unorthodox.”

Reading Emerson would seem to have given Étienne the key to most if not all of Hawthorne’s moral mythologies. The philosopher’s aesthetic encounter with Rome, famously recorded in his essay “Art,” prefigures Hawthorne’s reactions to the Eternal City. His poetic incarnation of a forest seer (in “Woodnotes I”) becomes the physical model for Donatello. His extended metaphors of metamorphosis (from “Compensation”) collapse into the very theme and title of Hawthorne’s work: *Transformation.* His rejection of theological absolutes (in “Circles”) provides an apparent vehicle for the resolution of Hawthorne’s plot. Étienne’s astonished gloss on a passage from that essay—

> I own I am gladdened by seeing the predominance of the saccharine principle throughout vegetable nature, and not less by beholding in morals that unrestrained inundation of the principle of good into every chink and hole that selfishness has left open, yea, into selfishness and sin itself; so that no evil is pure, nor hell itself without its extreme satisfactions.46

—is humorously remarkable. “What a notion!” he exclaims: “This unfrocked Unitarian minister has almost affirmed that our crimes themselves might be the living stones that will serve to construct the temples of the true God!” Outwardly true to form, though, Hawthorne echoes this principle when Kenyon offers a type of moral closure to the parable of Donatello’s fall from innocence. “Sin has educated Donatello, and elevated him,” he tells Hilda.

> “Is sin, then,—which we deem such a dreadful blackness in the universe,—is it, like sorrow, merely an element of human education, through which we struggle to a higher and purer state than we could otherwise have attained? Did Adam fall, that we might ultimately rise to a far loftier paradise than his?” (460)

Hilda, we know, strenuously rejects this view, and Kenyon apparently surrenders to the sterner logic of her puritanical orthodoxy; but Étienne brushes this aside as an irrelevance. The philosophical logic of the novel trumps the author’s explicit intention. Literary pantheism is the “fashion” of the day, and Hawthorne’s romance is perfectly à la mode.
With certain reservations, Montégut still is more forgiving of Hawthorne’s moral ambiguity. If only because the novel’s conclusion might offer some relief to the portrait of sin and suffering that Hawthorne has composed, Montégut seems eager to embrace the more hopeful of the two alternatives that the author presents in his final pages. From the grim survey of Hawthorne’s oeuvre that the critic employs as a kind of extended preface to his specific commentary on *The Marble Faun*, we know that Montégut considers the author a frighteningly dispassionate anatomist of human frailty. Unlike other great moralists (whose strictures against humanity nevertheless inspire noble action and generous aspirations), Hawthorne’s clinical dissections of the soul offer “nothing that makes the heart grow.” “He is coldly cruel without knowing it,” Montégut continues, “like the doctor who gives up hope on a patient and declares to his face that he has no chance of getting better. Our miseries appear irrevocable, our souls a realm of sin.”

What fascinates and repels Montégut at the same time is the curious way that Hawthorne’s writing paralyzes the reader’s ethical will. His tone is so neutral—even genial; and yet his meanings are insidious. Having “neither the ardent of a prayer nor the passion of a curse,” Hawthorne’s reflections on human nature are for that very reason terrifying. “Never will his aspirations for human betterment take flight,” Montégut observes, for “they are missing warmth and wings.” Death is the only escape from the metaphysical stasis that Hawthorne’s work implies, and that implication drives Montégut to the verge of labeling him an “immoral” writer. But even though he is dismayed by Hawthorne’s “pessimistic psychology,” Montégut credits him for having made a truly important discovery—that “sensibility is the dominant function of the soul, the one that commands all the other functions and dominates the moral organs”—a discovery that has added “a new page to the moral annals of mankind” and, therefore, redeems him from that charge.

Less governed in his approach to the novel by an overarching thesis, Montégut can hence address its faults more squarely. Like some other contemporary English and American critics, Montégut complains about the bifurcated texture of *The Marble Faun* and its not wholly successful fusion of artistic and moral themes. “The novel is really two,” he suggests: “it comprises both an aesthetic novel and a psychological novel that are at war with one another, and that, like two rivals, compete for the reader’s attention.” Instead of reinforcing each other, these two dimensions of the story frustrate the reader’s desire for more complete disclosure of insight into the characters’ interior states of mind. Montégut’s assessment of this problem is hilariously on target. “I know no crueler disappointments than those that are reserved for us by stories with aesthetic pretensions,” he admits. “We go out to
accompany two lovers during their walk, surely counting that they will chat about their love and that they will acquaint us with their rapture. Not at all. Instead, they lead us in front of an arch of triumph and begin to take notes like British tourists.” Montégut’s descriptive parody of Hawthorne’s narrative technique is almost worthy of his rival at the Revue contemporaine. Even more disappointing is what he terms the novel’s willful obscurity. “From beginning to end,” he complains, “the fates of the characters is [sic] crossed by a secret that it is impossible for us to explain to the reader, because the author has not explained it himself, and he is careful to warn us that even he does not know of what it consists. We know very well that such things can happen in real life, but we expect a novel to be more explicit than real life, and we have some trouble being satisfied by the excuses Hawthorne presents to the reader at the end of the book.” Too much wrapped up in its own mysteries and its long-winded digressions on statuary and painting, The Marble Faun painfully reveals the exercise of an overextended imagination. Montégut is almost embarrassed to see an author he admires stretching awkwardly to fill up the pages of a Victorian triple-decker, and his reproach is fairly cutting. “Hawthorne could have given us one of his admirable psychological tales—to which he possesses the secret—but instead he offers us an inferior romance that will add little to his fame.” In this instance, at least, Montégut’s penchant for prophetical criticism seems justified. Henry James was among the first to repeat these judgments and cement them as a given in Anglo-American literary opinion. Also finding The Marble Faun the least successful of Hawthorne’s longer fictions, James lamented that the “story straggles and wanders, is dropped and taken up again, and towards the close lapses into an almost fatal vagueness.”47 His last words on the novel were Montégut’s first.

James was not the only Anglo-American critic to compliment Montégut by way of translation (or plagiarism!). Already in 1859 the venerable North American Review had referred to him as “the young and distinguished contributor to the Revue des Deux Mondes, with whose name readers on this side of the Atlantic are familiar, from the very excellently written pages he has more than once devoted to the contemporary productions of American literature.”48 Accordingly, the American art journal The Crayon published lengthy extracts from “Un romancier pessimiste en Amérique,” just two months after it appeared in the Revue des Deux Mondes and applauded the author for his “admirable critique.”49 Especially significant for that audience was Montégut’s shrewd analysis of the particular difficulties of appreciation that most nineteenth-century Americans encountered when they were confronted by works of fine art. The novelist’s lengthy digressions on Italian
painting and sculpture—betraying naïve judgment—prompt Montégut to an honest but sympathetic observation about Hawthorne’s limitations. “We sense in his opinions, as in those of all of his compatriots in the arts, a certain intrinsic weakness that results from a fundamental deficiency in education, a deficiency that the historical circumstances of America have created, and that her best endowed minds will need much time to overcome.” Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, Étienne ignored this opportunity to skewer American provincialism, although his imaginary portrait of Hawthorne prowling through the galleries of the Vatican retains traces of his characteristic wit. And certainly there is some truth in his intimation that a New England artist like Hawthorne (craving for something beyond the utilitarian surfaces of his native land) would have been tempted to shout “Eureka!” when he found himself surrounded by a surplus of symbolic forms to which his imagination could respond. Étiennes’s tableau goes beyond caricature to capture the same quality of naïveté that Montégut apologetically discerns:

No doubt, one day, when he was strolling through those Vatican galleries (with his Poet’s admiration and his American skepticism abreast and side to side), suddenly he stopped himself in front of that Faun of Praxiteles—so alive, so young, so handsome. He, the Puritan, the Transcendentalist, the citizen of a sad, mirthless nation, arrived in front of this beauty, this youth, this freshness, this childish laughter, and cried to himself, “I’ve found it!”

The truth of their insights compares favorably with Hawthorne’s personal account, later published in *The French and Italian Notebooks*:

We afterwards went into the sculpture-gallery, where I looked at the Faun of Praxiteles, and was sensible of a peculiar charm in it; a sylvan beauty and homeliness, friendly and wild at once. The lengthened, but not preposterous ears, and the little tail, which we infer, have an exquisite effect, and make the spectator smile in his very heart. This race of fauns was the most delightful of all that antiquity imagined. It seems to me that a story, with all sorts of fun and pathos in it, might be contrived on the idea of their species having become intermingled with the human race; a family with the faun blood in them, having prolonged itself from the classic era till our own days. The tail might have disappeared, by dint of constant intermarriages with ordinary mortals; but the pretty hairy ears should occasionally reappear in members of the family; and the moral instincts and intellectual characteristics of the faun might be most picturesquely brought out, without detriment to the human interest of the story.
Eureka!—indeed.

Four years later—at the time of Hawthorne’s death—Montégut would revise his estimate of *The Marble Faun*, feeling that he owed “a reparation to the author’s memory.” Still acknowledging the novel’s defects, he now felt that “the beauty of the subject and the depth of psychological analysis” transcended all of them. A second reading had persuaded him that Hawthorne’s treatment of the Augustinian doctrine of *felix culpa* (the Fortunate Fall) in some measure redeemed the troubling moral ambiguity of his work in general—a view accepted much later by many Anglo-American critics of neo-orthodox persuasion. Though not quite as effusive as Hyatt Waggoner (who treats the novel almost as the *summa theologica* of Hawthorne’s career), Montégut still needs to affirm that “in his own way, Hawthorne applies the revelation of truth that Christianity brought to the world: that the price of the soul is infinite and that, even in the sorriest conditions of existence, it cannot be bought with all the treasures of the earth.” We should not be surprised (or even necessarily disappointed) to see that the critic’s moral agenda has overtaken his more troubled apprehensions about the nature of Hawthorne’s fiction. His compulsion to write a suitable epitaph for his favorite American author invariably would have led him to this orthodox, but debatable, conclusion. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that Montégut’s interest in American culture died with Hawthorne. His 1864 essay was the last work of criticism he wrote about American literature. After that date, the changing nature of American social life attracted his attention only twice. The French face of Nathaniel Hawthorne was limned.

**Notes**


6. Montégut’s allusion to Spanish poet and playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca
(1600–1681) is incorrect. The phrase música de la sangre is instead found in not one but two other dramatic works by Calderón’s contemporaries: the opening scene of Los amantes de Teruel (1635) by Juan Pérez de Montalbán (1602–38) and Act II of El más impropio verdugo (1645) by Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla (1607–48). We are grateful to Professors Don Cruickshank (University College, Dublin) and Germán Vega García-Luengos (University of Valladolid) for confirming this misattribution.


9. In his Study of Hawthorne (1876; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1969), George Parsons Lathrop describes an interview with Hawthorne’s sister-in-law, Elizabeth Peabody, who told him that the author once recounted to her a dream “by which he was beset, that he was walking abroad, and that all the houses were mirrors which reflected him a thousand times and overwhelmed him with mortification” (155). The parallel with Montégut’s “bizarre vision” is suggestively uncanny.


13. Winters, Maulé’s Curse, 158. Almost all of Winters’s citations refer to (then standard) works of colonial American history and Puritan thought.

14. Perhaps most spectacularly in Melville’s, in which he asserts that the difference between Shakespeare and Hawthorne “is by no means immeasurable. Not a very great deal more, and Nathaniel were verily William.” See “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” 246.

15. Reversing an earlier enthusiasm for Hawthorne’s tales, Edgar Allan Poe famously denounced the writer’s allegories, in defense of which he found “scarcely one respectable word to be said.” More temperate—and judicious—was the judgment of Edwin P. Whipple, who (in 1860) echoed Montégut’s assessment almost line by line. “The defect of the serious stories,” he noted

   is, that character is introduced, not as thinking, but as the illustration of thought. The persons are ghostly, with a sad lack of flesh and blood. They are phantasmal symbols of a reflective and imaginative analysis of human passions and aspirations. The dialogue, especially, is bookish, as though the personages knew their speech was to be printed, and were careful of the collocation and cadence of their words. . . . [The author] cannot contract his mind to the patient delineation of a moral individual, but attempts to use individuals in order to express the last results of patient moral perception.

Edgar Allan Poe, rev. of Twice-told Tales and Mosses from an Old Manse [1847], in Essays and Reviews (New York: Library of America, 1984), 582; Edwin P. Whipple, “Nathaniel Hawthorne” [1860], in Character and Characteristic Men (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1867), 226. Poe’s earlier, more generous, assessments of Hawthorne are also reprinted in Essays and Reviews, 568–77.
16. “[T]here can be no harm in the Author’s remarking,” Hawthorne admits, that his stories
have the pale tint of flowers that blossomed in too retired a shade—the coolness
of a meditative habit, which diffuses itself through the feeling and observation
of every sketch. Instead of passion, there is sentiment; and, even in what purport
to be pictures of actual life, we have allegory, not always so warmly dressed in
its habiliments of flesh and blood, as to be taken into the reader’s mind without
a shiver. (TTT 5)

17. Baudelaire’s translations of individual stories and poems began to appear in
French periodicals as early as 1848. In volume form, Histoires extraordinaires was pub-
lished by Michel Lévy in 1856 (with an important Preface by Baudelaire, “Edgar Poe:
sa vie et ses œuvres”) and followed up the next year by Nouvelle histoires extraordinaires.
It is surely worth noting that in his Preface to the second volume (“Notes nouvelles sur
Edgar Poe”), Baudelaire plagiarized Poe’s criticism of Twice-told Tales, lifting generaliza-
tions about the “unity of effect” that only shorter fiction could evoke and then applying
such praiseworthy criteria to Poe himself. See Melvin Zimmerman, “Baudelaire,
detailed bibliographical information about Baudelaire’s translations, see Célestin Pierre
1927), 13–41, 95–119; and Patrick F. Quinn, The French Face of Edgar Poe (Carbondale:

18. Louis Étienne, “The American Storytellers—Edgar Allan Poe,” in Affidavits of
was first published in the Revue contemporaine 32 (15 Jul. 1857): 492–524.

19. “Ein Gutteil dessen, was Baudelaire in Edgar Allan Poe fand, erfaßte Montégut in
Hawthorne, un des plus remarquables conteurs d’Amérique.” Burkhart Küster, Die Litera-

20. “Charles Baudelaire” [1876], Literary Criticism: French Writers; Other European
Writers; The Prefaces to the New York Edition, edited by Leon Edel (New York: Library of
America, 1984), 155.


22. Roger Asselineau, “Hawthorne Abroad,” in Hawthorne Centenary Essays, edited
by Roy Harvey Pearce (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1964), 381.

Scarlet Letter,” in Studies in the American Renaissance, edited by Joel Myerson (Wood-
bridge, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 278.


26. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Contes racontés deux fois [Twice-told Tales], Nouvelle bib-
liothèque populaire (Paris: Henri Gautier, 1888), back cover: “Très populaire en Améri-
que, connu par de nombreuses traductions dans toute l’Europe, Nathaniel Hawthorne a eu
de son vivant une grande vogue et se lit encore aujourd’hui avec les plus v’interêt.” Informa-
tion about French editions of Hawthorne’s work can be found in Nina E. Browne, A
Bibliography of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1905), 96–99,
supplemented by additional entries in the Bibliothèque Nationale (http://www.bnf.fr/).
27. In his *Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1890), Moncure D. Conway suggests that the writer’s French *nom de plume*—Monsieur de l’Aubépine—“was one cause of the interest of French writers in Hawthorne” (40). He also refers explicitly to Montégut’s 1860 essay, most of the translations noted in the text, as well as those by Paul Masson (“La Fiancée du Shaker”—“The Shaker Bridal”—in *Revue bleue* [16 Nov. 1889]: 627–30) and Léonce Rabillon, who translated *Le livre des merveilles* (*A Wonderbook for Boys and Girls*) for Hachette in 1858.


29. This instance is from his 1860 essay. Curiously, in both 1852 and later in 1864, Montégut preferred forms of the more literally correct “mépriser” in citing this passage.


32. Montégut’s jibe can be seen as a snide anticipation of Lionel Trilling’s deeper recognition (speaking of the title character in James’s *The Princess Casamassima* [1886]) that, in her purblind quest for social justice, the Princess “constitutes a striking symbol of that powerful part of modern culture that exists by means of its claim to political innocence and by its false seriousness—the political awareness that is not aware, the social consciousness which hates full consciousness, the moral earnestness which is moral luxury.” Hawthorne’s exploration of the profound psychological limitations of his fictional reformers hints at all these dimensions of troubled modernity. *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950; rpt. New York: Anchor Books, 1953), 88.

33. Some years earlier, Chasles had confirmed the stereotype of Yankee materialism, echoed here by Étienne. Americans “wish to push conquest in every direction,” Chasles bristled, “to experiment, to try every chance. At the age of fifteen, the man learns that he is to be the architect of his own fortune. The ties of family are so elastic, and virility begins so early, that it is a hard matter to tell where youth ends or minority ceases. . . . Each hopes to get rich, to make one leap from deepest poverty to opulence. The national morality suffers from this; activity and energy are developed at the expense of the calmer virtues. . . . Impatience to acquire, and love of lucre, prevent the culture of art, and that happy disposition which is content to give and receive enjoyment. Nothing but money and the enterprise which wins it are respected.” Philarète Chasles, *Anglo-American Literature and Manners*, translated by Donald MacLeod (New York: C. Scribner, 1852), 294–95.

34. Carpenter does not discuss *The House of the Seven Gables* in his classic essay (“Puritans Preferred Blondes: The Heroines of Melville and Hawthorne,” *New England Quarterly* 9 [1936]: 253–72), but Hawthorne displays the same preference in that novel, too. Phoebe sports the same “light-brown ringlets” as that other daughter of the Puritans, Hilda, in *The Marble Faun*. 
38. Hawthorne himself was aware of the contradiction. “A romance on the plan of Gil Blas,” he wrote, “adapted to American society and Manners, would cease to be a romance” (*The House of the Seven Gables*, 176).
40. Étienne’s rhetorical questions anticipate Arac’s broadest conclusion—that “the organization of (in)action” in both the Pierce biography and Hawthorne’s novels “works through a structure of conflicting values related to the political impasse of the 1850s”—as well as his implicit call to action for contemporary readers (“The Politics of *The Scarlet Letter*,” 259).
41. As an earlier student of Montégut has observed, his faith in France was unshakeable; but whenever he approaches the events of 1848 or 1871, “he shows the profoundest pessimism; everywhere there is ‘la disparition de la tradition, disparition du lien religieux, disparition de l’homme éclairé’; all is corrupted by the new forces of industry; and the ultimate cause of nineteenth century malaise was the Revolution.” See J. W. Skinner, “Some Aspects of Émile Montégut,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 3 (1923): 284.
43. James, *Hawthorne*, 401.
45. Taine elaborated the significance of these factors in the Preface to his *History of English Literature* (1863).
47. James, *Hawthorne*, 447.
52. As Wagonner writes, “Hawthorne’s whole career had prepared him to write *The Marble Faun*, his ‘story of the fall of man’” (*Hawthorne: A Critical Study*, [Cambridge,