I.

Death is without pity this year. He is reaping left and right, up and down, with a blind fury. Not content in a few months to have taken two men of great talent, Thackeray and Hippolyte Flandrin, the savage hunter, wanting even bigger prey, suddenly doubled his anger, and, in less than two weeks, has struck two men of genius: Meyerbeer and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Not long ago, a distinguished writer spoke of the passing of Eugène Delacroix, remarking that men of letters are especially prone to feelings of isolation when they suffer the successive disappearances of the great artists and poets whom they have customarily admired.1 Most of the time, we only know these celebrated people through their works or reputation. We have never been given the honor of their conversation; often we have never even seen their faces: some are separated from us by long distances, by oceans and tall mountains, others by rank and social class—and all by glory. None of this matters: they die and we feel a little more alone in the world than before. Their death hits us like a personal grief. And is it not a personal grief? For what we know about them is what is most precious. They have offered us not the banal hospitality of their salon, but the more privileged hospitality of their intelligence. They have given us access to their innermost recesses and shared their most intimate secrets. Their souls have combined with ours,
their lives have been tied up in ours, their experiences have confirmed our experiences; even if they did not know or love us, we at least knew and loved them.

Among all these losses, however, still there are some that are particularly painful, some that wrench the heart more profoundly and evoke a special melancholy. These are the men who rose to fame at the same time we entered our youth, and who took possession of glory at the same time we took possession of life. Artists of great renown, already long established when we arrived at manhood, touch us less when they pass away because they are less our contemporaries; we did not see them born or growing up; we did not hear the first chorus of praise that greeted their arrival; we were not in the concert hall that night when a thousand other Christopher Colombuses were present at the discovery and could exclaim on the spot: a man of genius is among us! How different the deaths of the illustrious who had the same dawning as we did! They are associated not only with our intelligence, our admiration, our enthusiasm, but also with our dearest memories, our most ardent feelings, our most personal life. In a word, a link of mysterious sympathy attaches them to our heart.

Oh! The memory is vivid of the great literary success that marked our twentieth year. That success belongs to us as much as it does to the author, because from that moment we can date our own life, and when we find ourselves thinking about it, the incidents of our existence then come back unexpectedly, indissolubly peopled with the characters of the novelist and poet or brightened by the fantasies of the humorist. We see again the sun that shone the day when we bought our first number of *Vanity Fair*, the literary sensation at that time—the same hour that you entered your majority because I would love to assume that you are a contemporary of this novel.² Many years since have passed for you, and today, reflecting on it, don’t you find that there was something in that title that you overlooked, something ironically emblematic? Aren’t you now of the opinion that it is too bad that Thackeray’s success cannot renew itself for each generation under the same title, offering as it does a natural preface to all human existence? It is astonishing how much at a distance you discover links between your own existence and those great literary triumphs of your youth. You perceive a thousand analogies between the sentiments they expressed and the state of mind you had when you read them. Indeed, reading was what pleased you when they came to find you, so that the good fortune that placed them in your hands was wiser than your own choice would have been. Not that you would have doubted it: each new book (like you, a child of the century) told you as much. Doesn’t it touch you still, that autumn evening, when, in the silence
of the countryside, *Jane Eyre* (for which you waited so impatiently) came to you as a resounding success, a book similar to a storm that breaks out in the wilderness or a happiness threatened by the very shadow that envelopes it? How dear would that book be if you were to discover retrospectively that its character captured exactly that phase of your existence when it appeared! Its memory will always remain attached to your soul! And somber Hawthorne, did he not endear himself to you at just the right moment? Isn't it true that he came to you in the bosom of happiness to present his casket wreaths and his funereal perfumes? Oh! What favorable hours, those, of black melancholy and sinister dreams, to have conversations with Hawthorne’s visions, to read *The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables, Mosses from an Old Manse*! How the nascent celebrity of this lugubrious talent went hand in hand with melancholy preoccupations that were new, perhaps, for you as well! How the sentiments he expressed with so much depth—solitude, superstition, fear, despondency—lived and breathed in you! Thus, what sadness grips us when one of these men passes away who has been so intimately joined to our existence by mysterious osmosis. It seems as if a portion of us has disappeared with them. Leave it to a Chapelle to cry over the death of Pindar with besotted tenderness; let your tears more genuinely mourn the deaths of the novelists and poets with whom you have grown up: rightly so, because they touch you more than the greatest genius of the past.

That is the sentiment that we have felt many times already, and especially so with the news of Hawthorne’s death. But this time our regret is even better justified by that egoism of memory that we have just tried to describe, because Hawthorne was a veritable man of genius, because he was one of those rare persons to whom Nature gives birth in her hours of fantastic inspiration, of whom she makes but one copy, and whom she will never again bring to life once he has passed away. He was one of those original and unique talents like Heinrich Heine, like Thomas Carlyle, who, without equaling the very great geniuses, gives more than they do to those who read and study them: he gives a feeling of the new and unexpected. For minds already saturated with the familiar beauties of art and literature, such writers are the most energetic of stimulants, as well as the most amusing of surprises. In the greatest of geniuses there is almost always some fraction that we know, so to speak, in advance; and whatever really is new in such a man does not surprise us a bit either, because what he reveals to us is ordinarily so important, so essential to our existence, it seems impossible that we have not already come across it at some point or another. Genius speaks to us so simply that we are no more grateful to him than we would be to a messenger who faithfully transmits his words to us. The genius of great
writers is so impersonal that we barely feel the need to honor them for it. Moreover, they give us a certain feeling of security that, while increasing our respect for them, diminishes greatly our regret when they die: we feel that Nature, having taken them on as her interpreters, will preserve the molds in which they were cast, that she will use those molds for new creations, and that the forms of genius will not disappear with them. But those other rare persons in the group to which Nathaniel Hawthorne belongs are something else entirely. We have never seen them before, and we feel that once they are gone, we shall never see them again. What they say to us hits us like something that has never been said before and something that only they themselves can utter: whatever portion of truth—often very limited—that they have to reveal to us is intimately linked to their person. If they did not exist, a certain order of thought and feeling would have remained unknown to us, and we would still be unaware of the particular literary pleasures they have given us. In another sense, their disappearance is also more irreparable than that of the greatest men of genius. A Marivaux is more difficult to replace than a Lesage, a Diderot more than a Voltaire, a Wordsworth more than a Lord Byron. There will always be Lesages, Voltaires, and Byrons because those forms of genius are too elementary, too simple or too great to disappear. But who after Marivaux will discover, with a hand that is at once so firm and so delicate, the secrets of the human heart? Where else will we encounter to the same degree that perfect harmony between delicacy and precision, between subtlety and sharpness? The sort of plastic incandescence of that volcano of eloquence that went by the name of Diderot, whose random spurts of lava became living figures, was extinguished forever. No one will ever again meet that mixture of the Ideal and the Real, of practical sentiment and mystical ecstasy that distinguished Wordsworth. No one again will bring to the simplest facets of life the same touching and austere tenderness, no one again will know how to fly heavenward on the wing of a butterfly or to bundle himself in a cocoon in order to penetrate the secrets of death and immortality.

In just this way the form of Hawthorne’s genius has disappeared with him. No other writer will arrange those funereal bouquets he excelled at making, nor combine with the same art the everlasting flowers (devoid of scent or life)—the purple mallow (pale symbol of resignation and lassitude), the yellow marigold, the crazy columbine, and that violet, with its equivocal name, that made up the garlands of a dying Ophelia. The cypress and the willows of that abandoned cemetery that he has made his literary domain will no longer have a caretaker. That somber and profound psychology lived only once.
There are few events in Hawthorne's biography; his life is entirely intellectual, and the little we do know of his history has been told by him in the prefaces to *Mosses from an Old Manse* and *The Scarlet Letter*, and in several chapters of his latest book, *Transformation*. He was born in Salem, Massachusetts. We cannot give his date of birth with assurance. Some biographers have him born in 1809, others in 1804, but we lean toward an intermediate date, for we read that he was the fellow student of Longfellow at Bowdoin College and that he was graduated in the same year, 1825, which leads us to believe that he was almost the same age as the famous poet, born in 1807. Hawthorne the democrat was not the first to arrive: he had ancestors and a genealogy; his lineage ties him to the very origins of the United States. He was a descendant of those emigrants, somber and zealous Puritans who made the vessel *Mayflower* famous, and who laid the cornerstone, as their descendant said, of the foundation of New England. You know them, these formidable personages, if only in having seen them pass (with a Bible in one hand, a sword in the other) in the novels of Walter Scott; if only to remind you, according to your synopsis of English history, of John Bradshaw’s interrogation of Charles I.

The first person who carried the charming name of Hawthorne (Aubépine)—somewhat like the Furies who carried the name Eumenides, or “Kindly Ones”—established himself in the little town of Salem, so famous in the annals of American Puritanism for its witch trials and its obstinate fight against the Devil. Satan had no enemy more formidable than this first Hawthorne—soldier, legislator, and judge all at once—and who, for better or worse, embodied, as his descendant has said, all the traits of the Puritan character. He was the persecutor of the poor Quakers, who have immortalized his name in their histories and are largely responsible for his terrible reputation. His son, who inherited his influence, made himself known for his severity during the witch trials. But everything will be accounted for in the here below, and the all-knowing wisdom that permitted the triumph of persecution will not let spilled blood go without vengeance. The pitiless justice and ferocious morality of these first Hawthornes were punished as soon as their supposed works of salvation were achieved. The family declined rapidly, its diminished fortunes represented by a long line of struggling seafarers and merchants, until at last its strong, yet long-hidden root gave rise to that lugubrious human flower with the name of Nathaniel Hawthorne—the culmination of a bloodline in which two centuries of Puritan doctrines, austere habits, bloody memories, melancholy thoughts and sorrows had run their course.

Without cherishing the memory of his ancestors, Hawthorne (ever the philosopher and skeptic) maintained for them a sort of timid respect; every
time he speaks of them, he betrays the attitude, as it were, of a surprised child caught red-handed by severe parents. In the preface to his novel entitled *The Scarlet Letter*, he shows them speaking across the gulf of time:

“What is he?” murmurs one grey shadow of my forefathers to the other. “A writer of story books! What kind of business in life—what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day and generation—may that be? Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!” [Such are the compliments bandied between my great grandsires and myself, across the gulf of time!] And yet, let them scorn me as they will, strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine.”

The author is right: the traits of the Puritan race are in him—indestructibly, indelibly—and from them he derives his singular originality. They persist in spite of his will, his philosophical opinions, his cool nature (even his religious agnosticism).

The qualities and peculiarities that distinguish him are the same that distinguished the English Puritans of the seventeenth century. 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. The force of vision and hallucination by which Hawthorne transforms his thoughts into characters and his psychological hypotheses into realities is the same that acted so strongly upon his forebears, the irresistible consequence of their examinations of conscience. 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. No one else but the Puritan writers, not even the greatest poets, has possessed so completely the aptitude
that we admire incidentally in Milton and that has made Bunyan’s name immortal. Even in the hands of the greatest poets and mystics, allegory gives us at best a superficial illusion, because it so baldly designates the symbol to be perceived and the dream to be discerned. But Puritan allegory obscures the symbol altogether and just barely permits us to unravel the dream. How difficult to recognize those abstractions in the familiar, intimate, domestic faces that look at us with the eyes of our neighbors, who speak to us with the sound of our parents’ voices, who seduce or provoke us (as the case may be) with the physiognomies of our friends or enemies! This gift for allegory, an indispensable complement of his force of vision and psychological subtlety, Hawthorne possessed to the highest degree. He knew how to animate and shed merciless light upon the hidden desires of the soul and 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. He was surely the son of the Puritans because it is fruitless to look for other faculties in him that would distinguish them. The subtle examination of conscience, the power of hallucination, the marvelous aptitude to express oneself through allegory—we find all of Hawthorne’s talent in these three things. One can say, then, that this talent is an inheritance of flesh and blood, and that Hawthorne was particularly enriched by the legacy of his ancestors.

There is, however, a considerable difference between him and them, a difference that we will let our readers freely qualify as happy or sad according to the nature of their opinions. In his novels and above all in his short stories (several of which are admirable little works of art), we have nothing more than the material substance, the clay and the earth, of Puritanism in dissolution. The divine spirit, which was its essence, has completely disappeared. The phantoms that haunt the mind of Hawthorne are very much the same as those that haunted the minds of his ancestors, except that his wear the mantle of philosophy while theirs wore a Christian shroud. This descendant of the Puritans is, in a word, an unbeliever, a philosopher, and he belongs to that sect of literary and metaphysical types from Massachusetts familiarly classed as Transcendentalists. On this tuff of austere Calvinist gloom (that forms the base of his nature), the nineteenth century has thrown down successively its layers of liberalism, democracy, and German philosophy—indeed, socialism. Alas! These modern lights could not render Hawthorne’s mind more joyous and were not able to let hope enter in. With his philosophical opinions, Hawthorne is even more somber than his Christian ancestors, because the
lugubrious vision that the Puritans had of the world is worsened in him by the loss of religious faith. At least the radiance of divine grace spread its light on the visions of his ancestors and made beautiful Rembrandt paintings mixed with sun and shadow, rich with all the magnificence of chiaroscuro, while in Hawthorne we have only the illumination of a pale, cold metaphysical brightness that falls from stars without substance, and under which the poor human soul, shivering and shocked, goes off to search for the truth that darkness hides from it. The Puritans saw the world divided between two great powers, Jesus and Satan: one was a divine watchman always on his rounds in a wailing kingdom, with a lantern of grace in hand; the other, a sinister poacher, always hidden in the bushes of the law and the shrubbery of mundane interest, forever trying to take aim at those hapless souls. In Hawthorne, this vision, already somber, became completely black, because the Savior has disappeared, and with Him, all joy and tenderness, so that humanity seems even more damned under the reign of philosophical tolerance than it ever did under the reign of Calvinist predestination.

It was not just Hawthorne’s talent that bore the imprint of Puritanism, but also his character. He had taciturn habits, and was inclined toward solitude without being unsociable, he was melancholy without being morose. His portrait is one of an intelligent and refined man, a little weak, in whom all joy was incessantly battered by an all-powerful sadness. A thin smile on his lips and a pale glimmer in his eyes confirm the existence of this melancholy struggle. Miss Frederica Bremer, the Swede who is well known for her beautiful novels, depicts him to us (in her curious Journey to the United States) sitting silent for long hours while in the company of his talkative friends—Emerson, Ellery Channing, and all the rest. One evening, during one of those brief intervals of lassitude that athletes of the word indulge between their jousts of eloquence, Emerson saw Hawthorne (who had not yet uttered a syllable) daydreaming in a corner, and offered an assessment that picturesquely characterizes the other’s taciturn nature: “Hawthorne rides well his horse of [the] night.” Would you care to hop on this horse and ride along with him? I warn you ahead of time that the journey will be heart-wrenching, and you are going to cross into that well-known country of Christian and Puritan geography, the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

II.

Philosophers have much discussed the question of knowing whether Man is born good or evil, and the debate has not yet been resolved satisfactorily.
Perhaps the question itself is poorly framed? Maybe it would be more judicious to ask if we are not born predisposed to believe in good more than in evil? If one fact is certain and constant, it is that (good or bad) we are all born optimists. Nature does not create pessimists. Pessimism is the sad fruit of experience and life; it is always possible to return to its root causes and to name the incident that engendered it in us. However, this is not the case for Hawthorne: pessimism for him is so much an inheritance of flesh and blood that we see it erupt in his very first stories, written in the full bloom of youth. With respect to psychological depth, life experience, and artistic form, his first collection of tales—or, rather, moral allegories (which he published under the title of *Twice-told Tales*, so named because they had appeared previously in newspapers and magazines)—is certainly much inferior to those collected in the volume entitled *Mosses from an Old Manse*. However, even in the earlier book there reigns a sort of naïve horror all the more affecting since experience plays a much lesser role. It is the spontaneous flowering of a soul melancholy by nature, already familiar for all eternity with sadness and terror. One feels that, almost without effort, he plays the lugubrious chords of misfortune, of old age, of sin, and of death, and that the somber melodies escaping from his lips are instinctive and involuntary. His imagination assumes physical form in the daughter of the scientist, Rappaccini (whose story he told), who grows up in a botanical garden composed of poisonous plants. To enter into this garden is death for anyone but her. But there alone, however, by the grace of her enforced acclimation, can she draw life, health, and beauty.

As soon as his literary vocation was pronounced, Hawthorne revealed a peculiar talent for expressing the melodies rendered by hearts when they are breaking, and for reproducing the beautiful iridescent colors exuded by souls that have been poisoned. Just as certain young people (exuberant and gay) have a knack for mimicking the voices of fashionable actors or the cries of different animals, Hawthorne perfectly captures the sound of funeral bells and that music (irregular and without rhythm, it is true, but undeniably expressive in its originality) composed by sobbing. *Twice-told Tales* was published in the fullness of youth: the first edition in 1837, the second in 1842. Oh! the singular distractions! What laughing images that young talent liked to surround himself with! When reading these tales, a sort of perfume of death—the stale aroma of box tree branches laid on the casket, of the burning candles, of the wreath of ever-lasting flowers—rises to one’s nostrils and fills the brain with funereal visions. Death and sin appear in everything like natural productions of life and the world. All the work of life is to produce death; all the work of the world is to produce
sin. Health and joy are only appearances and illusions: beneath the roses of youth lie the thorns of deformity and decrepitude. Youth, happiness, and beauty—all bend and collapse under the weight of a mortality that is in us from infancy, a little like the stones and soil that cave in from the efforts of a man who is trying to escape the grave. Funereal emblems are spread out everywhere—hearts gnawed by the worm that never dies, souls consumed by a fire that never burns out. How far removed we are—is it not so—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! 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. It has been a long time, a very long time, since they first became wedded to pain. Habit has blunted the sharpness of suffering in them. The vapors of their melancholy have solidified; their sorrow has petrified and condensed in the form of some mania or other eccentricity that makes one shiver.

What do you think of a gentleman who has the pleasant idea of ringing funeral bells on the day of his marriage? At the age of sixty, he marries the fiancée of his soul, the woman to whom his youth had given all his thoughts of love. Disdainful of all other affection, he has spent his whole life in expectation and solitude, and now, at the door of the tomb, she wishes to marry him. He obeys. But instead of appearing at the altar to the joyous peals of wedding bells, he arrives to the sound of a death knell, wearing a funeral shroud and accompanied by witnesses dressed in mourning. Eloquently he justifies his eccentricity: “After forty years,” he tells his betrothed,

“when I have built my tomb, and would not give up the thought of resting there—no, not for such a life as we once pictured—you call me to the altar. At your summons, I am here. But other husbands have enjoyed your youth, your beauty, your warmth of heart, and all that could be termed your life. What is there for me but your decay and death? And therefore I have bidden these funeral friends, and bespoken the sexton’s deepest knell, and am come, in my shroud, to wed you, as with a burial service, that we may join our hands at the door of the sepulchre, and enter it together.”

Still, one last accent of love surges forth in this old broken heart, like the last whiff of perfume escaping from the long-healed scar of an old myrrh tree:
“I have been wild. The despair of my whole lifetime had returned at once, and maddened me. Forgive; and be forgiven. Yes; it is evening with us now; and we have realized none of our morning dreams of happiness. But let us join our hands before the altar as lovers whom adverse circumstances have separated through life, yet who meet again as they are leaving it, and find their earthly affection changed into something holy as religion. And what is Time, to the married of Eternity?”

(“The Wedding Knell,” *TTT* 35, 36)

Here is another eccentricity that cedes nothing to the first. One Sunday, at the hour of worship, the Reverend Mr. Hooper, minister of Milford parish, stands before the flock whose care has been entrusted to him, with his face draped with a black veil. This black veil, as you might imagine, powerfully torments the imagination of his parishioners, who ask one another what it means and if their minister has lost his mind. Sunday after Sunday, however, the black veil never leaves the minister’s face. Strange hypotheses circulate among the parishioners, whose veneration for their pastor now transforms into terror. Little by little, solitude engulfs Mr. Hooper. That simple morsel of black gauze suffices to put up a barrier between him and other men. Even the most tender and pious woman (who loves him) cannot resist the terror that this emblem of sadness engenders, and, after having vainly asked after his secret, decides to leave the congregation. Thus, gossipping opinion assumes that Mr. Hooper has committed a hidden crime, in punishment for which he has been condemned to wear the black veil; consequently, he grows old in the midst of general horror. Finally, the hour of deliverance arrives; Mr. Hooper’s fellow churchmen surround him, beg him to reveal his secret, and finally to lift the black veil which for so long has hidden his face. Nevertheless, he still resists. “Dark old man!” exclaims one of these affrighted ministers, ‘with what horrible crime upon your soul are you now passing to the judgment?” Then, from the lips of the dying man, escapes this explanation of his lugubrious mania:

“Why do you tremble at me alone?” cried he, turning his veiled face round the circle of pale spectators. “Tremble also at each other! Have men avoided me, and women shown no pity, and children screamed and fled, only for my black veil? What, but the mystery which it obscurely typifies, has made this piece of crape so awful? When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best-beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then
deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I [have lived, and] die!
I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!"

(“The Minister’s Black Veil,” TTT’52)

How many other characters invite us to read the history of lingering agony on their faces? That sad old woman whom we see at the bedside of the dying man, and who presages death for all houses she enters, was long ago a beautiful girl. Unable to marry the one she loved, she accepted a union with the old man who left her a widow before her youth had expired. She could have remarried, but, alas!, at the bedside of this moribund man for whom she has cared for many years, she has contracted the infirmity of old age. Sadness has penetrated her soul as rheumatism penetrates the body, and she no longer finds herself at ease except when contemplating pain and death. She absolutely must have the spectacle of illness, the view of sad faces, the silences of shut-off rooms. This pale, wilted flower takes its life from the sap of the tomb.13 That frenetic maniac whom we see lying at death’s door had set off to travel the world in search an unpardonable sin, a sin that even God’s clemency could not absolve. And, finally, after many voyages, he finishes by discovering that he, all the while, possessed that inestimable jewel, and that all he had to do was to give it up, as faithful trustee, to the father of all lies, to the one whom Dante saw chained below the hell of ice where frigid souls are punished.14

“The Shaker Bridal” is yet another somber story.15 Two young people wait for years in vain for the hour when they are to be united. Both moved by a shared sadness, they come to find in a Shaker community the life of meditation and peace that suits tired hearts.16 One day, one of the elders has the idea of placing them, according to the rites of the sect, at the head of the pious collective. Let them be united spiritually, at the very least, since a marriage of the flesh has been denied them, and let them preside in this way over the pacific destinies of the association! The patriarch, Ephraim, joins the hands of these two mystics and pronounces (on their heads) a speech full of all the consolations that religion can give to the afflicted. Upon hearing this speech, the fiancée collapses. The religious consolations that were supposed to give her force and courage instead are a deathly poison for her; these words of hope convey nothing but despair.

Such are the fantasies and caprices of this somber imagination. 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? 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. There is not a single one of those intersections of ideas, not a single one of those marriages of feeling that have given birth to modern European poetry. This race of feeling and thought has been so well preserved against all alloy that, even in England (the birthplace of Puritanism), we can hardly find it in such a state of purity.

Not only can the tales make you traverse space and take you far from the world familiar to you, they also make you go back in time and impose on you a sense of the past. Hawthorne has his literary origins, as well as his moral origins, in seventeenth-century England. By their character and outward form, his writings recall works from the Elizabethan and (even more so) the Jacobean periods: not, it is true, the poetic literature which was blossoming with such rich variety and under such magnificent light in Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher, but rather the other literary vegetation that grew up simultaneously and contributed its most somber flowers and prickliest branches: John Webster, John Ford, Robert Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, Bishop Jeremy Taylor, and, one of the first in talent, but last chronologically, the Puritan John Bunyan. If Hawthorne resembles anyone, it is one of these old writers whose funereal and robust eccentricity he shares. Like Ford, he knows how to tell the progress of suffering in broken hearts. Like Webster, he knows how to make fools dance around heroes sworn to unhappiness. Like Burton, he knows how to classify different types of melancholic humors. Like Browne, he knows how to expound eloquently upon the nothingness of the world and the power of time which extends a shroud of loss over everything. Like Bunyan, he knows how to tell the anguish of the Christian who leaves home searching for deliverance from the burden of sin. Regarding Bishop Taylor, there is in a pious treatise of his a funereal anecdote that comes to mind every time I read one of Hawthorne’s writings. A fair young German gentlewoman has long been asked in vain by her friends to have her portrait done. At last their relentless appeals exact from her a promise to have her likeness painted after she has spent a week in the tomb. They obey and, eight days after her death, they find her face half eaten by worms and a serpent lodged in her heart. “And so [s]he stands,”
writes Taylor, “pictured among [her] armed Ancestours.” Here we have a frontispiece for Hawthorne’s works.

These are the real literary ancestors of Hawthorne, and I cannot help thinking that, if his talent resembles theirs, so too will his fate. He will live like them and in the same manner. Who today reads the dissertations of Sir Thomas Browne and Burton, the dramas of Webster, the sermons of Bishop Taylor? Gourmets of old literature and connoisseurs of good literature, lovers of rarities that are little more than curiosities of erudition, imaginations that, having exhausted the familiar pathways of classic literature, love to feel at ease in these asylums (closed to the profane) and there, united, can savor little-known and little-understood beauties. It will always be this way for Hawthorne. He will never be popular; but he will never be forgotten. If we cannot promise immortality to his memory, we at least can promise him longevity. Every fifty years, some admirer of beautiful things will reinvent him again, shed light on him and reprint him, and that will last a certain number of centuries—after which he will pass forever into the abysses of that eternity which throws its cold and austere shadow on his works.

As for kindred in our time, he has none, even in America. I have looked high and low and have seen only two writers who bear a certain resemblance to him—the Englishman William Godwin, author of *Caleb Williams* (whose name often comes to mind when we peruse Hawthorne’s writings), and the American Charles Brockden Brown, the author of *Wieland; or, the Mysterious Voice* and *Edgar Huntly*, who lived during the last years of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth. But Hawthorne is much too skeptical and not enough of a utopian idealist to be compared to Godwin. He loves too little and he hates too little to know the intensity of passion, the fever for justice that, in Godwin, becomes an overwhelming monomania. Between him and Brockden Brown, a more evident kinship exists. He loves to strike the same chords—remorse, superstition, fanaticism—but he supersedes his predecessor with all the superiority that a highly gifted artist has over an inept novice. He would never have jumbled up the elements that serve as the basis for *Wieland*—ventriloquist deception (worthy of Ann Radcliffe) and brutal terror (worthy of Lewis)—with the deeper psychological themes of that novel.

Here I almost feel the need to make an aside and apologize to the reader for making him companionate with so many images of sadness and mourning. But what is to be done? My first obligation as a critic is to explain what gives life to Hawthorne’s talent. Excuse me, then, as we move on to another section of the cemetery, abundantly planted with tombstones whose ingenuous inscriptions give us pause for thought.
There are two other collections of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short stories and allegories, *Mosses from an Old Manse* and *The Snow-Image and Other Tales*. The first of these two collections, published in 1846, corresponds to the happiest and most smiling epoch of Hawthorne’s life. After a short stay at the Fourierist association at Brook Farm, a brilliant and instructive escape of youth that we shall speak of again, the already married Hawthorne came to establish himself in an old abandoned manse near the small village of Concord, Massachusetts, on the river of the same name. He stayed there for three years, from 1843 to 1846, three years that seem to have been full of peace and gentleness for him. What a charming description he traces for us, in the preface of this collection, of this peaceful abode, all steeped in the souls of pious clergymen who had lived there, ghosts in white collars and black robes who haunt him certain days, and of the indolent river Concord, which meanders so lazily toward its eternity, the ocean, and which must be observed for several weeks before discovering in which direction its waters flow. In this solitude full of sunshine, chosen friends come like bees drunk with nectar from all the beautiful metaphysical plants to make heard their melodious buzzing: his neighbor, the subtle and deep Emerson; the eloquent theologian Parker, who left us almost three years ago for the land of shadows; Ellery Channing, the nephew of the illustrious preacher, fantastic dreamer and brilliant speaker; Mr. Alcott, the eccentric pythagorician; Mr. Thoreau, curious erudite about all the debris of Indian relics; Mr. Hillard; the poet Longfellow. It was during these contemplative years that the collection *Mosses from an Old Manse* was composed, and, doubtless too, a part of *The Snow-Image*: strange books, much superior to *Twice-told Tales*.21

Everything in these volumes, however, is not of equal worth; still it would be simple to excerpt one-hundred-fifty pages that might favorably compare with the best of English literature. To be sure, one-hundred-fifty pages is not very much, but it is enough to preserve a name. How many writers are there—in any era—who can assure themselves that they have written an equal number worthy of posterity’s admiration?

The lingering but powerful influences of Puritanism, so perceptible in *Twice-told Tales*, are here effaced like the beliefs and superstitions of childhood, and the mature talent of the man appears in its definitive form in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Psychological observation, previously enmeshed in Hawthorne’s didactic manner and his piously eccentric anecdotes (as if in a sort of sinister glue!), now liberates itself and has free rein. His philosophical conversion is complete. Whereas in *Twice-told Tales* (in that charming piece of whimsy, “Sunday at Home”) our daydreaming author pardons himself for no longer attending church, in *Mosses from an Old Manse* the lapse
of faith is so radical and so violent (in the captivating short story, “Young Goodman Brown”) that we can hardly hope to convey it. Although he may disavow it, Hawthorne has not abandoned Puritanism completely. What has happened to him is typical of any older, traditional society that attempts to rejuvenate itself: the imagined renovation is at best incomplete. While new principles seem to govern rational intellect, the soul and that which makes up the foundation of our being and life remain captive to ancient doctrines (what the theologians call “the habitual state”).

I know more desperate books, but I know none that leaves the soul so completely sad and disenchanted, that makes it feel the chill of death to the same degree, as *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Hawthorne’s melancholy is as much devastating as it is calm, and his pessimism is as cruel as it is irremediable. In the bursts of anger and the vivacity of loathing displayed by the most enraged misanthropes, we find compensations: the soul, reflexively, recuperates the ardor of belief in their blasphemous indignation and the gentleness of love in the bitterness of their hate. Hawthorne, to the contrary, leaves you incapable of any joy and of any love. With him there is no burst of anger, no sobbing, no tears, no despair—not one of these things that kill, but that also, paradoxically, save us. An imperturbable politeness governs the tone of his dolorous words; the implacable serenity of his sadness has no equal. One marvels 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.

But these toxicological experiments are of the greatest beauty, and whoever is well-versed in the science of the soul will recognize the eminent merit of them. What a cruel theme is contained within “Rappaccini’s Daughter”! That young woman’s father has cultivated a garden made up entirely of venomous plants that differentiate themselves from their sisters, innocent flowers, by the richness and matted luster of their colors. The young girl has grown up in grace and beauty in the midst of these mortal flowers, never suspecting their dangerous power. One day, she opens the gates of the garden to a young student with whom she has exchanged many amorous glances. No sooner has he entered, however, than the fatal atmosphere does its work. The hideous hidden truth reveals itself suddenly to the young girl, and she falls inanimate on the body of her lover before the old savant has time to give her the preserving antidote that would have rendered her
exposure innocuous. What profound moral truths come out of this little story! There is, of course, the banal truth, though always good to remember, that the same thing that is harmless to some is fatal to others. Next, there is a more important truth: science has no secret antidotes to render certain poisons ineffective. Having grown accustomed to these toxins, we think we can escape from their influences. But the poisons we have nourished, seemingly harmless, nevertheless reach us through the ones we love in such a way that our blasé indifference (shockingly immoral) is only—after all—illusory. At last we discover another revelation of a higher order: all science that is not inspired by love is immoral and guilty; all research prompted merely by cold curiosity is perverse. The story of the chemist Alymer contains, in another form, the same high truth. Aylmer has a wife of marvelous beauty who has not a single fault, except for a small mark on her cheek that resembles a tiny hand (which one might compare to a print left by the impress of a fairy). But is this birthmark a defect? Is it not simply a charming idiosyncrasy of nature that gives the young woman one more attractive quality? Nevertheless, this tiny blemish takes hold of Alymer’s imagination, besets his life with anxiety, paralyzes his love, and corrupts his happiness. To erase this mark, he uses all the resources of science. His wife, not wanting to be loved less, submits to his dangerous experiments. Little by little the hand disappears from her face: Aylmer’s science has triumphed! Alas! Nature cannot be toyed with. That little hand is indissolubly part of the mysterious web of life; it disappears from her face only to clutch at her heart whose movements it stops.

In truth, Hawthorne could have turned the moral that comes from these two tales against himself, because the extremity of analysis, the extent to which he pushes it, is itself a sort of perversity. In the obstinate rummaging of the darkest corners of the soul and the labyrinth of the heart, strange things are discovered. Hidden treasures are not always found, neither diamonds nor pearls, but rather monsters and hibernating reptiles. Among them, surely one of the most dangerous is the serpent that torments the hypochondriac Elliston. He goes everywhere complaining of a snake (coiled in his bosom!) whose bites make him suffer cruelly. Nothing can cure him of the funereal illusion. Friends cease their consolations, doctors abandon their science, and theologians their religious admonitions. However, Elliston is not mistaken. He truly has a serpent in his heart, the serpent of egotism that fattens itself on his essence. It is the same sickness that claims similar dominion over the unhappy Gervaise Hastings.
putting their hands up to their hearts, and anxious or taciturn hypochondriacs, there appears a handsome young man named Gervaise Hastings. What right has he to be there? No one can uncover the reasons for his invitation, yet they are so uncontestable that—year after year—Hastings never stops being one of the party. Youth slips away, then middle age, and Hastings is always chosen to be one of the ten guests. Hastings’s unhappiness is profound indeed. He has spent his life loving nothing.

III.

Contemporary critics sometimes have included Hawthorne among the ranks of so-called humorists, but I believe that in this instance criticism has been duped by the form that the American writer loves to give to his thoughts. Like the humorists, Hawthorne is very fond of the short essay and the rapid sketch, which allow him to give substance to those fugitive essences of intelligence and those perfumes of the heart that would be lost and evaporate in longer treatises or novels. But there the resemblance stops. Hawthorne, to the contrary, is entirely without humor because, essentially, he has no joy, no cordiality. In him, there is none of that radiant gaiety that illuminates even the most somber states of the soul with moral sunshine, and that can restore the warmth of humanity to sentiments most shocked by cold or the most shivering affection. He has, here and there, some happy descriptions of nature, composed with a delicate and tranquil touch, some brilliant and cold caprices, akin to crystals of hoarfrost, a few amusing fantasies, like those chemical experiments—with their reflections of blue, pink, and green flames or unexpected combinations of color—that captivate the attention of children. But his snowflakes melt under your fingertips, and seldom do those beautiful flames not release some suffocating odor that brings us back to the peculiar atmosphere that Hawthorne’s talent loves to breathe. Sometimes he tries to smile, but this smile is just like the adventures of his young, sleeping David Swan, who awakens without finding out that, one by one, Fortune, Love, and Death have come and leaned over his beautiful face in slumber. He wakes from his dreams before imagination has the time to realize them. Yet Hawthorne often bears a great resemblance to a man who justly merits the name of humorist (though he does not belong to literature): the painter Hogarth. His psychology delights in explaining the same moral oddities that Hogarth loves to amuse himself with in his merciless way. Hawthorne takes great pleasure, for example, in enumerating for us the curious motives of Mr. Wakefield’s conduct (the man who removes himself from his wife and
friends for twenty years, living in a neighboring house, and who comes back home just as tranquilly as if he had left the night before). Thus, in the entire tribe of humorists there is one to whom Hawthorne bears resemblance. Of course, this one is the most morose of all, the painter of Puritan morals and the preacher of Puritan principles on canvas.

Still, this pessimist has his hours of serenity where he sees human nature in an ideal and noble light. Besides his somber stories there is a whole series of philosophical allegories that are like Hawthorne’s compliments to the human soul for the rich possibilities with which it is endowed and the brilliant future that could be its own. Hawthorne’s opinion on the soul is, as it were, double: when he considers it in the here-and-now, his opinion is pessimistic and skeptical; when he projects it into the future, his opinion is more utopian. This fine, cold observer, who, while denying the doctrine of predestination demonstrates so well the doctrine of original sin, who knows so well which ambiguous shadows tarnish the purest souls, who gives himself the malicious pleasure (in one of his short stories) of making the phantoms of imaginary crimes walk past the conscience of a virtuous man, who only sees (when he looks to the future) Edenic perspectives, horizons of the promised land, and paradise regained. Hawthorne’s metaphysics and morals are as serene as his psychology is dismaying. There is a contradiction here, but a noble contradiction after all, where that obstinate hope that makes up the core of our nature is revealed. Hawthorne’s moral philosophy is the same as that of his illustrious friends from Massachusetts. It is that German philosophy transformed by the Americans—that utilitarian idealism, that stoicism tinged with Benthamism—that casts its bright and piercing light in the writing of Emerson. Two examples will suffice to give us an idea of these purely moral allegories. Perhaps you know Emerson’s essay in which he asserts that every man’s destiny is at his side (within his reach, so to speak), that it is chimerical to look for it in faraway regions or to dream about it in a world elsewhere? The narrow boundaries of a village are enough to accomplish a vast destiny, and the most humble conditions are not an obstacle to the realization of our biggest dreams, provided that these dreams have their source in the moral life of the soul and not in the sensual life of the imagination. This doctrine has been expressed most dramatically by Hawthorne in two profound short stories: “The Threefold Destiny” and “The Great Stone Face.” A young man dreams of three things: that he will discover treasure at the foot of a tree; that the most beautiful woman in the world will love him; that he will be greeted as a king by three old men he meets at the gates to a city. He leaves to seek fulfillment of these prophetic visions, but, after many long years of sojourn, returns without finding anything, weary and
sad. Upon his return, he meets the beautiful Faith, a companion from childhood, who accepts with love the offer he makes her with his tired heart, and three old men, municipal officers of the town, greet him and offer him the responsibilities of a village schoolmaster. With regard to the treasure, after having searched in vain in his garden, he discovers it in his harvest: the soil, tilled by his own hands, is more fruitful.

“The Great Stone Face” is the most noble page ever penned by Hawthorne. Somewhere in New England, there lies an outcropping of rocks arranged in such a way that, from a distance, it offers the viewer a profile of a gigantic human face. A prophetic tradition, which embodies American pride (and which recalls the legend of the severed head found beneath Rome’s Capitol), says that there will appear in America a man whose traits will resemble those of the Great Stone Face. This man will be the greatest figure on earth, he will dominate America, and through him America will dominate the universe. From childhood, a young American who has heard this legend looks everywhere for the man whose visage is similar to the Stone Face; others around him do the same and think they have found him: first they gather around a rich merchant whose vessels are sailing the seas, a Medici of the New World, and who holds in his hands tremendous capital, whose credit rules the Exchange; next they flock to a general who has won many battles; then they cleave to an eloquent orator. “He is the very image of the Great Stone Face!” they cry, but they are always let down and the great man never appears. Meanwhile, the young child becomes an innocent, devoted man. With quiet modesty, he accomplishes the work that, little by little, is put before him by obligation or necessity. He earns his keep, helps his neighbors—even with the smallest of jobs—and over time he finds that by excelling in life he has earned a fine reputation without even thinking about it. His neighbors, his city, then the state, and then the entire Nation, perceive that they have among them a man who grew up inconspicuously, like a solitary oak in the forest, simple, but full of strength all at once. And the traits of this man resemble those of the Great Stone Face. The great man of America existed as an unknown to his compatriots and to himself. He was not announced by thunderous rounds of applause, military fanfare, or by the metallic clinking of riches. Yet again, Hawthorne has no page more beautiful or noble than this.

Every young nation has its age of generous hopes and radiant dreams. This series of philosophical allegories brings us back to those happy days, the happiest the American republic has ever known (Halcyon Days, in poetical English) the period between the liberation of Texas and the 1847 [1846–48] Mexican-American War. Ten quick years, full of confidence, hope, brilliant
dreams, and generous chimeras never to return again! So great was the confidence of the American republic in its destinies then, 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. It was a time when universal joy seemed within reach, when we could see humanity’s poorest children harvesting the wheat from their own fields, pressing the grapes of their own vines, and, at night, sitting next to their fig trees, teaching the morals of happiness and wisdom of the “good times to come” to new generations. *Les bons temps à venir*—“good times to come”—was an expression often used then by the prophetic voices of the Massachusetts savants. Alas! Is it true, as we were told the other day by one of the most illustrious men in France, that really to understand our dreams we must always reverse their implied meanings: that we must read chagrin when they say joy, and find suffering when they promise happiness? By what malice of nature is it that man, of all beings given life, is the only one for whom prophecies are uncertain and deceiving? The seagull surely prophesies the arrival of a storm, and the swallow the return of spring; the melodies of the nightingale promise warm and luminous nights; but the phenomena of the moral world do not obey the instincts of the human soul as the phenomena of nature do the instincts of the birds and the beasts. The hopeful words of sages too often are answered by grief. How many times, during the course of a life, have we had occasion to remember Juliet’s words damning the morning bird (“Some say the lark and loathed toad change eyes”), thinking that the funereal raven, in a similar exchange, would appropriate the nightingale’s melodious voice, and would be the surest emblem of the soul’s fond wishes. It is this epoch of chimerical hope, this springtime of the American soul, that often revives Hawthorne’s moral allegories for us, that revives in particular the beautiful legend of “The Great Stone Face.”

These hopes alone would be enough to explain why the wisest and most enlightened minds of the American Union lent such credence to the socialist dreams of that era. The barrier that separated humanity from happiness seemed so frail that the hand of a child could knock it down. Plans for utopian states, harmoniously constructed societies built upon a new moral architecture, sprang up everywhere, convinced that their designs were more enlightened than the old instinctual architecture that had produced an imperfect social order, no better than those ancient, asymmetrical cities where palaces were surrounded by market stalls and where more humble dwellings were a shambles. Some of these plans even began to take shape. One of the most famous attempts was one in which Hawthorne took part around 1840. A Fourierist association made up of a crowd of young enthusiasts (among
whom we find the poet Dana, Ellery Channing, and so forth) established Brook Farm in Roxbury, Massachusetts, under the direction of George Ripley. The Association did not live up to all the promises that it made, and it broke apart with no other consequence than having enhanced the experience and practical wisdom of its members, and having kept them apart, momentarily, from the harsh realities of the “old world,” as they preferred to call all other societies, including their own young American democracy. However, the stay at Brook Farm was not lost upon Hawthorne. Ten years later, having collected his memories, he realized that this utopia through which he had passed was connected more or less directly to the imaginary land dear to all poets, and that he was at least able to claim a stake there. He tried to reconstitute the daydream from which he was awakened years before, and he wrote the remarkable account entitled *The Blithedale Romance*. But it was not easy: the unreal chimera of utopia cannot compete with the more substantial Idealism that blooms in the true kingdom of Fairyland, and the novel remains the least well-known and the least popular of Hawthorne’s works.

One must not conclude that this half-obscurity is owing to the inferiority of the book. *The Blithedale Romance* is worth just as much as Hawthorne’s other writings, but the vast public (happily enough) cannot appreciate characters and passions that are foreign to itself. This is a novel made to be understood only by those rare, unfortunate souls who have had the misfortune to live among dangerous brethren, whom, for lack of a better expression, we might call *alexandrine* types. Such readers will recognize the truth in the portraits traced by Hawthorne of Hollingsworth (the philanthropist), Westervelt (the charlatan), Priscilla (the sleepwalker), and, Zenobia (the emancipated prophetess of the weaker sex). For the honor and happiness of those unfortunate readers, I hope they share the sentiments of the skeptic Miles Coverdale (pseudonym of Hawthorne himself) with regard to these characters, and (like him) will discover the difficult struggle they have to wage in order to defend themselves against the obsessions of their companions’ disquieting wills, to silence the insolent babbling of their compromising imaginations, and to elude the artifices of their ambiguous casuistry. They will find here above all an inexplicable anxiety and obscure melancholy that takes hold of them from the very first page. There they are, this cast of characters, delineated by the hand of a master, with their dryness of heart, their intractable pride, their poverty of imagination, their insubstantial affections, their principles of conduct drawn from other motives than those that govern the common behavior of men. Ambiguous beings for whom the adjective “eccentric” seems to have been invented: we do not know how exactly to define them. Are they
virtuous or perverse, innocent or guilty? They escape the laws of humanity and cannot be judged by them. They are eloquent (if the gusts of wind on a bare steppe are eloquent), poetic (if that voice of nothingness that comes from the shadows during the slumber of creation is poetic), profound (as nothingness and the three dimensions of space are deep). Such, in particular, is that singular character Hollingsworth, who gallops toward the absurd with such heroic intrepidity, and who resists so bravely all common sense and evidence. Do not covet Hollingsworth's friendship: it is dangerous, and, furthermore, you would not be sure of obtaining it. In order to be loved by him, one must be a little poisonous or a little patricidal. Hollingsworth is possessed by a philosophical hobbyhorse called the “moral regeneration of criminals.” He believes himself to be generous and devout because he lives in service to this idea; he cannot see that this idea is nothing more than an extension of himself, and he commits an act of fetishism and pride worse than that of Pygmalion. Woe to those in whom he discovers some virtue or some talent that might serve to realize his philanthropic obsessions! He will break your heart, he will trample you underfoot for the greater glory of his chimeras. And do not believe that it is easy to escape Hollingsworth once he has decided that you might help him in his designs. Ask Miles Coverdale instead what resolve he had to muster in order to say “No!” to the importunities of this tyrannical stubbornness! What a beautiful scene it is in which Hollingsworth and Coverdale part ways. It admirably gauges the threat that these chimerical characters represent. The lesson is instructive and can be useful for everyone. So, although The Blithedale Romance was intended mostly for readers who have known utopian idealists, we would not hesitate to recommend it as well to those who have not yet had this sad honor. We never know whom we might meet in life.

In truth, it seems that Hawthorne was predestined to run through the entire gamut of sad emotions. Among these sentiments, infinite in their variety, there is none more irritating and more bothersome than that unspeakable anxiety we experience whenever we try to read another’s face but find that his true nature is indecipherable, even though we earnestly need to get to the heart of things. It is the cruelest form of indecision: the pressure of a thousand conflicting emotions makes us tread on pins and needles, and paralyzes our mind, which must both quell an anger that dares not explode (for fear of being mistaken) and avoid a prudence that would convict us of pusillanimity. This paranoia is marvelously expressed by The Blithedale Romance, which, one might say, was written altogether under the influence of jettatura, or the Italian “evil eye.” It seems as if we see shadows pass and hear the noise of the flight of timid ghosts who, having approached us in
order to be noticed, are fleeing in order to escape recognition. And above all these characters, before whom conscience trembles, glides the demon of Ambiguity on extended wings.

Let us leave *The Blithedale Romance* and return to clearer, if not less somber, perceptions. One that Hawthorne admirably expressed (and that we are shocked to encounter in young, democratic America) is a perception of decline. It would seem that such a sentiment ought properly to belong to our own older civilization—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. Alas! The human heart is the same everywhere, and 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, 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. There, as elsewhere, memories of the nation’s origins, participation in its great events, and the blinding adherence to doctrine have sufficed to separate certain families from the mass of society. The rich plantation owner in Virginia or the Carolinas, with aristocratic mores, descendant of English gentlemen and adventurers from the time of Queen Elizabeth and King James, would have some difficulty recognizing as his equal the modest Yankee farmer of the North. In this New England itself, so strongly democratic, the families of Puritan origin distinguish themselves (to a certain degree) from the majority of the population: to be descended from a *Mayflower* emigrant, from a zealous preacher who was a disciple of Increase Mather, or from an ally of Governor Endicott conveys a sort of title. Finally, we know particular deference is given to families who helped in achieving the revolution that would separate the United States from England.

Do not believe that declension weighs less heavily in a democratic country than it does in an aristocratic one. It is a very interesting fact that equality renders all decline more painful because it leaves no resources to pride. Effectively, in aristocratic countries, 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. It is this type of decline that Hawthorne admirably describes in the longest of his novels, *The House of the Seven Gables*.

If the reader is curious to know the differences of form the same feeling might assume in the context of different civilizations, he might compare *The House of the Seven Gables* to *The Bride of Lammermoor*, and the decadence of the Ravenswoods to that of the Pyncheons. How much easier it would appear to him to die of starvation with Ravenswood and Caleb Balderstone than to get by in tidy misery with Miss Hepzibah, Clifford Pyncheon, and Uncle Venner in the House of the Seven Gables. In Scott’s romance, the decadence of nobility gives rise to nothing but savage despair and a proud taciturnity. But bourgeois decadence engenders the worst infirmity that can afflict the human soul: timidity. Nothing is more lamentable than the spectacle of Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon, obliged to open a cent shop in order to survive. She, the descendant of Puritans, the gentlewoman from the land of the Yankees, deprived of her fortune—there she is, now suddenly the inferior of the middling gossiping townsfolk who come to frequent her counter! The quality of the cloth, give or take a single ornament, determines deference or respect. Hawthorne, with lacerating delicacy, has noted all the flinchings, all the apprehensions, all the nervous timidities that torture poor Hepzibah’s soul on the day when she decides upon this enormous act: opening a humble storefront in her ancestral home. It is a unique painting of suffering that the sentiment of human respect can inflict upon one forsaken. No less admirable is the portrait of Hepzibah’s brother, Clifford Pyncheon, a tortured soul in the manner of Torquato Tasso—a Torquato Tasso of the American middle class—a Tasso minus the gift of the poetic word, a being born for his unhappiness with all of his susceptible and exquisite senses and innate taste for beauty. The delicacy of his nature demands a happiness that the weakness of his nature renders impossible: Clifford wilts and languishes between an imperious exigency and a radical impossibility! Rarely has psychological penetration gone so far.

**IV.**

*The House of the Seven Gables* is perhaps of all of Hawthorne’s books the one by which we can best judge the qualities—and lacunae—of his talent. All the funereal images and the poignant ideas that we have laid before the
reader’s eyes might make him think that Hawthorne’s talent approaches the melodramatic. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Hawthorne is loath to leave the domain of psychology; the terrors and sinister sentiments (which he paints masterfully) rarely extend beyond the threshold of the soul, and hardly ever end up presenting themselves through some sort of melodramatic exterior combination, but instead have the advantage of being pure, strong, and gripping. He takes extraordinary pains to people his novels with characters and events, to invent a fable, to knit a drama. His long-winded works resemble those desolate places where crimes might take place without any witness save the birds in the sky, the reptiles on the ground, and the wide-open, yet invisible eye of the characters’ conscience. The House of the Seven Gables, running to four-hundred compactly printed pages, is nothing more than a long analysis of two abandoned and solitary souls. The reader must wait for the drama until the end of the book, but, when it arrives, he finds it to be insufficient—or, rather, adequate for a work half as long. The House of the Seven Gables is an admirable psychological study but only a would-be novel.

Once, and only once, did Hawthorne achieve the great dramatic effects of terror and pity that make for popularity without leaving his psychological domain, carried only by the strength of his subject. In his youth, before he had become a well-known name, Hawthorne held a modest position as a custom’s house officer in Boston, a place for which he was indebted to Mr. Bancroft, the historian of the United States. After turning his psychological gaze upon all his fellow customs house employees (whose portraits he traces for us so vividly in the preface to The Scarlet Letter), Hawthorne looked for a way to end office boredom much as a lazy army officer tries to escape the fatigue of garrison life. He began rummaging through the papers and documents of the customs house; and it was in these papers, many of which dated back to the time of the Puritans, that he found the elements that he would later compose into the most peculiar work in the annals of literature: The Scarlet Letter.

It is the story of an adulterous woman, condemned by the Puritan tribunal to wear on her breast a capital A, embroidered of red wool—a judgment that puts her to shame and earns scorn from all. Her accomplice is a young minister, who, as fate would have it, is forced to sit among her judges. Only a lyric drama could furnish appropriate comparisons to express the intensity of pain contained within this book; it would even be right to say that, despite the resources of musical art, the most dramatic opera could not match the lugubrious trio that Hawthorne makes us hear. We attend to the slow destruction of three hearts, all differently but all equally wounded—
mortalwoundedallthree—thatshroudthemselvesinsilenceandhidethesecreteatingawayatthem,like the little fox who gnawed at the young Spartan’s entrails. Every line of the book delivers Death’s first blow, a Death neither fantastic nor macabre, but rather grimly determined, ready for the job at hand, utterly Puritan, whose concealed, slow, and sustained work we follow. To brighten this somber tableau and give it light, the author uses a technique that only makes it more painful. The beam that lights up his drama like Rembrandt’s chiaroscuros is Pearl, the child born of the adultery, a little, doubting, bizarre flame, who makes us want to ask her if she is some heavenly light sent down to call back the broken hearts to love, or if she is a will-o’-the-wisp made to dance over their tombs. Two scenes stand out in the middle of this story: their pathetic force can scarcely be equaled, and one can hardly forget having read them. The first is the scene where Hester Prynne pleads with the Puritan council to keep her child (who want to take Pearl away), and betrays the secret to the reader through the intimate manner in which, in a paroxysm of anguish, she addresses the young minister sitting amidst the judges. The second is the one in which the young minister, gasping under remorse, faints and is revived by the outraged husband, still unaware of the offender’s name, in the same public square where Hester stood in shackles.

I previously named the old dramatist John Ford among Hawthorne’s literary ancestors. If the reader has admired the wrenching scenes in Broken Heart in which Ford has us attend Penthea’s agony, he will also admire Hawthorne’s depiction of Hester Prynne’s sorrows and Dimmesdale’s anguish. They are the same types of feelings, and the modern author cedes nothing to the older playwright.

Hawthorne’s political opinions placed him in the Democratic Party, a fairly strange circumstance if we reflect upon the philosophical society in which he lived and the power of the Republican Party—a recent transformation of the old Whig and Free-Soiler parties—in the state in which he was born. Perhaps this can be explained by the same skepticism that had estranged him from Brook Farm after his few months’ residence there, his limited taste for the extreme views, gruff philanthropy, and resolute politics of the Republican Party. Be that as it may, when Franklin Pierce replaced Millard Fillmore as president of the United States, Hawthorne celebrated his election as a personal triumph, and wrote a dithyrambic biography of this honest but weak man to whom we can trace the origins of the war which not long ago destroyed the United States, because of the laxity he demonstrated in the execution of the Clay compromise and his injudicious tolerance for revoking the old Missouri Compromise. In recompense, Pierce named Hawthorne consul to Liverpool, where he lived, one might easily believe,
less concerned with his administrative duties than with literature, psychology, and travels to Italy and other countries of the Old World. We owe his last great work, *Transformation; or, the Romance of Monte-Beni*, to this stay in Europe.

I owe a reparation to the author’s memory. When this novel appeared, after a first reading (and just appreciation of its superior beauties and the singular depth of its theme), I ranked it a little above Hawthorne’s other works. A second reading has slightly modified this judgment. Doubtless, there are faults. The work does not have the powerful unity of *The Scarlet Letter* or the energetic concentration of the short stories; the story line is not tight enough; the descriptions of the countryside, museums, and churches impinge perhaps too much on the fable; but the beauty of the subject and the depth of psychological analysis erase all these defects. We cannot say too much in praise of this novel; it is worthy of all the meditations of a philosopher.

In one of his visions, the Puritan John Bunyan discovered that there were roads that began in Heaven and went straight to Hell; for his part, Hawthorne recognized that there are roads that originate in Hell and ascend to Heaven. Evil, for example, may be not only the occasion or the auxiliary, but also the very generative cause of Good. Innocence without blemish, on the other hand, and unclouded happiness imply a certain perfection, but a perfection that depends on the absence of a moral life. Which one is happier—the man descended from the fauns of pagan antiquity (innocently free, lightheartedly candid, naïvely sensual) or the man formed on the model of modern Christian life—disquieted, meditative, melancholic, incapable of tranquil delight, effortless freedom, or confident exhilaration, knowing that all joys reveal grief and all pleasures corruption? The faun is surely the happier precisely because he is the more immature. The faun can transform himself, the instinctive man can become a moral man, but he will pay for that transformation with his happiness and his innocence, because only one power can effect his metamorphosis—that of sin, crime, and remorse. The faun must be chased from his Eden in order to lose innocence and primitive purity and to acquire the life of the soul. If Nature wants him to be happy, she will leave him in the company of the beasts of the forest; if she wants him to be noble, she will call Sin to his aid and will give him the company of Misfortune and Remorse. With the same admonition that she gave to one of the most unfortunate and famous sons of Italy (whom she so strangely greeted upon his first entrance to the world), Nature will say to him, “Go, my beloved child. You shall be regarded as my favored one for many centuries: live—be great and unhappy.”42
Among all the children of Italy, the old country of fauns and nymphs, there is none more cheerful and light of heart than Donatello, the count of Monte-Beni. His life passes by innocently and voluptuously, as candid and wild as the life of the beautiful creatures of the woods and the melodious children of the air. For him, the world of the soul and the world of the body are not separate and hostile. Instead, there is but one, one that his dormant conscience has not even taken pains to name, whose laws he follows without knowing them, with an obedience that costs him nothing but the sweetness of pleasure. Fed in such a way by the nourishing saps of instinct, his being flourishes with gracious liberty and harmonious unity. So close are his ties to Nature that he rediscovers her primitive language, the one that Adam spoke to the animals in earthly paradise. When he goes into the forest and he wants to talk to his brothers, he sits at the breast of his mother, Earth, and begins to sing a melody of his own invention, a melody that in every note sounds tender, plaintive, passionate, and joyous. After a few moments, the foxes come out of their dens and venomous reptiles poke their heads out of their lairs to hear him. The animals are not afraid of him. All feel as if they are children of a common mother.

Miriam, a young English girl he loves and who tries to provoke him (as one tries to goad a greyhound or a spaniel), at last discovers that he bears a certain resemblance to the Faun of Praxiteles. This circumstance, which at first seems strange to him, is quite naturally explained, because, without keeping in mind the mythological origin that the nobility of Monte-Beni have given themselves (they are descendants, so they claim, of the offspring of a faun and a mortal, and their lineage includes a knight who had been loved by a naiad), it is not even remotely possible to imagine for Praxiteles's faun an existence more elementary—more naive, closer to instinct—than that of Donatello. Donatello is unaware of Evil, but one day Fate obliges him to it in a way that imperils his happiness. In their walks through the environs of Rome, Donatello and Miriam are constantly harassed by a type of maniac in monk's robes, who follows Miriam everywhere and whose enigmatic gestures seem to imply a secret. One night an agitated Donatello throws him from the top of the Tarpeian Rock, the same torture that the Ancients inflicted, at the same site, upon cowards and traitors. With a ghastly scream, the detestable spirit of Fra Antonio returns to the underworld, but, at the same moment, happiness departs forever from Donatello's soul. The happy faun is no more: never again will he jump like a gazelle or betray the innocent audacity and impish frolic of an undomesticated pet. Melancholy sits fixedly in a soul where everything had been fluid; Remorse spreads out its shadows where everything had been light. Several months after this inci-
dent, the sculptor Kenyon tries to resume work on a bust of Donatello but discovers that he is impeded by a singular difficulty: not one of the traits that he had sketched even so recently now matches the pensive, serious, dolorous face upon which he gazes. A new man is born, but this new man does not inherit the privileges of the old. Nature turns away her maternal face, and the animals retreat from his approach. One day when Donatello goes to walk away his troubles deep in the woods, he tries to sing as he did before that primitive melody through which he made himself understood to the denizens of the forest. The bushes move and leaves scatter, but not one bird, not one creature shows itself. In losing his innocence, he has lost the powers he held from Nature, and he breaks down in tears. From then on, he will live only for the moral good to which he was initiated by involuntary crime and remorse.

*Transformation*, which dates from 1860, is the last great work by Hawthorne. From then on, with the exception of one volume entitled *Our Old Home* (in which he summarized his impressions of his stay in Europe)⁴⁴ Hawthorne kept silent. He died just at the moment, they say, when his Roman friends again were expecting him in the city about which he spoke with such eloquence and respect in that very novel, *Transformation*.

What is the moral scope of Hawthorne’s works, and what is the nature of the impressions they leave us? Are those impressions salutary or dangerous, designed to elevate the soul or batter it down? To this question, we will make a double answer. No, without a doubt, one must not look to Hawthorne for words of consolation and hope; and yet, no matter how sad and disenchanting they might be, his writings do not lead us to denigrate human nature. No misanthrope, no pessimist has had such a high opinion of the soul. Hawthorne made a psychological discovery of the highest importance: the human soul is the most delicate substance and its real temperament is a nervous temperament, and that sensibility is the basis for all its acts. The most perfect barometer cannot register the smallest of variations in the external atmosphere with as much precision as the soul responds to variations in the moral atmosphere. One atom will suffice to destroy its health, a wisp of wind to tarnish its candor. The soul is corruptible, true, to the last degree, but this vulnerability stems from the same cause as its delicacy, and its depravations, like its virtues, bear witness in the same way to its sensibility. Happy, then, is our soul even with its sicknesses and vices, since these maladies and vices are, for those who look carefully, just as much proof of its nobility and indications of its supreme value. 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.

I will close with advice that summarizes in concise form all the morality we can take from Hawthorne’s writings and the type of spiritual service we can ask of them. Carefully refrain from picking up his books in days of mourning or sadness, when you need consolation and hope; but take them from your library shelf, where you left them, on the days when life seems sweet or whenever happiness has smiled upon you, and read a few pages in order to remind yourself of your true condition: one of suffering and sorrow. For you, this reading will be like donning one of those hair shirts that the pious employ to remind their flesh, avid for pleasure, of the necessity of penitence and the terrible reality of death.

Le moniteur universel (27 Jun., 11 Jul., 11 and 27 Aug. 1864)

Notes


2. Thackeray’s masterpiece was issued in illustrated monthly parts from 1847 to 1848.

3. Chapelle was the name by which Claude Emmanuel Lhuillier (1626–86), a French libertine poet, was familiarly known.

4. Montégut would seem to be redacting Emerson’s famous dictum (from “Self-Reliance”) that “in every work of genius we find our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.”

5. Pierre Carlet de Chambelain de Marivaux (1688–1763), French author and playwright, is recognized for the playful language of flirtation (marivaudage) in such plays as Le jeu de l’amour et le hasard (1730). Alain René Lesage (1668–1747), a contemporary of Marivaux, authored satires and realistic novels such as Le diable boiteux (1707) and Gil Blas de Santillane (1715–35), as well as comedies such as Turcaret (1709). Denis Diderot (1713–84) and Voltaire, a.k.a. François Marie Arouet (1694–1778), were two of the most prolific philosophers of the French Enlightenment. William Wordsworth (1770–1850) is considered the leading poet of English Romanticism; his seminal work, Lyrical Ballads (1798), was written with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. George Gordon (Lord) Byron (1788–1824), one of the most well known British Romantics, led an unconventional life that seemed to embody the characteristics of the heroes of his own works.

6. In Act 4, Scene 7, of Hamlet, Queen Gertrude reports the drowning of Ophelia, whose corpse is adorned with “fantastic garlands” made up of “crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,” called “dead men’s fingers.” Not really a flower, the latter are actually coral polyps commonly found in the coastal waters of the North Atlantic.

7. The British publisher’s title for The Marble Faun (1860).
8. Hawthorne was born 4 Jul. 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts.

9. In December 1649, John Bradshaw (1602–59) served as the Chief Judge in the trial of Charles I, accusing the British monarch of “a wicked design to erect and uphold in himself an unlimited and tyrannical power to rule according to his will, and to overthrow the rights and liberties of the people of England.” The king, who refused to recognize Parliament’s power to try him, was executed in January 1650.

10. For Hawthorne’s genealogy, see chapter VI, note 1.

11. Fredrika Bremer (1801–65), Swedish novelist, traveled extensively in the United States between 1849 and 1861 and published an account of her visit, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, 2 vols., translated by Mary Howatt (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853). Montégut may be conflating his sources, as Bremer’s epistles do not repeat this anecdote. The one direct encounter with Hawthorne that she describes conveys a similar impression, however, as she recounts an evening spent “in an endeavor [to] converse. But, whether it was his fault or mine, I can not say, but it did not succeed. I had to talk by myself, and at length became quite dejected, and felt I know not how. Nevertheless, Hawthorne was evidently kind, and wished to make me comfortable—but we could not get on together in conversation” (2: 597). Montégut wrote a brief notice of Bremer’s work (“Divers auteurs américains”) for *the Revue des Deux Mondes* (15 Oct. 1853): 399–403.


15. First published in *Twice-told Tales*, 2nd ed. (1842).

16. Formally known as the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Coming, this Christian body was first inspired in England in 1758 by Sister Ann Lee, who later removed to America with a small group of believers in 1774. The Shakers, as they commonly came to be known, developed an idiosyncratic mode of religious expression which included communal living, productive labor, celibacy, and a ritual noted for its dancing and bodily quivering.

17. Montégut adduces a canonical roll call of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century literary masters. Edmund Spenser (ca. 1552–99) celebrated the greatness of Elizabeth and her realm in *The Faerie Queene*. Montégut was well acquainted with the works of William Shakespeare (1564–1616), whose plays and poems he soon would translate into French (10 vols, 1868–73). Shakespeare’s near-contemporaries, Ben Jonson (1572/73–1637), Francis Beaumont (1584–1616), and John Fletcher (ca. 1579–ca. 1625), wrote numerous stage plays, court masques, and poetic works. John Webster (ca. 1578–ca. 1632) is best known today for his revenge-tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. John Ford (1586–1639?) wrote dramas that explored melancholy, torture, incest, and other psychological themes. Robert Burton (1577–1640) took a heroically encyclopedic view of his subject in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621 and enlarged through successive editions. Sir Thomas Browne (1605–82) wrote numerous learned tracts on religion, medicine, and natural history. John Bunyan (1628–88), a lay Puritan preacher, wrote *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678–84), perhaps the most
famous English allegory. Bishop Jeremy Taylor (1613–67) survived the Puritan commonwealth despite his Royalist sentiments and wrote movingly about religious toleration and cases of conscience.


19. Montégut anticipates the judgment of William Dean Howells, who wrote in *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900) that “we are always finding new Hawthornes, but the illusion soon wears away, and then we perceive that they were not Hawthorne's at all; that he had some peculiar difference from them, which, by and-by, we shall no doubt consent must be his difference from all men evermore” (56–57).

20. Besides writing novels such as *Caleb Williams* (1794), William Godwin (1756–1836) endorsed a radical theory of political justice and human perfectibility. Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810) was one of the first Americans to attempt a career as a writer of prose fiction, producing a series of Gothic romances at breakneck speed: *Wieland; or, The Transformation* (1798), *Arthur Mervyn* (1799), *Ormond* (1799), *Edgar Huntly* (1799), *Clara Howard* (1801), and *Jane Talbot* (1801). One of the principal figures in *Wieland* is a shape-shifter, Carwin, whose talent as a ventriloquist (or biloquist, as Brown prefers to denominate him) confuses the other characters and helps to precipitate the novel’s catastrophe.

21. After leaving Brook Farm, Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody (1809–71) in July 1842. The couple immediately took up residence at the Old Manse in Concord, where they lived for three and a half years. The Hawthornes moved back to Salem in 1845; many of the stories collected in *The Snow-Image* probably were written there.

22. Montégut would have had no way of knowing that Hawthorne first published “Young Goodman Brown” in the *New-England Magazine* in 1835 and only later collected it in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846).

23. Significantly, Giovanni’s entrance to the garden is prompted as much by his curiosity about Dr. Rappaccini’s experiments as by the presence of Beatrice; he is admitted not by Rappaccini’s daughter but by a servant woman who knows of a private gateway and whom he bribes. Beatrice collapses, moreover, after she imbibes a (too-powerful) antidote brought by her admirer, who now holds her responsible for his having contracted the garden’s fatal contagion. Perhaps because he later recognized the error of his paraphrase, Montégut omitted this passage when he reprinted this essay as an Introduction to a French edition of Hawthorne’s stories, *Contes étranges*, published in Paris in 1866.


30. The Utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), an English jurist, advocates the moral principle of the greatest good for the greatest number.

31. Emerson expresses variants of this idea in different essays, but his most sustained critique of the “superstition” of travel is found in “Self-Reliance”: 
It is for want of self-culture that the superstition of Travelling, whose idols are Italy, England, Egypt, retains its fascination for all educated Americans. They who made England, Italy, or Greece venerable in the imagination did so by sticking fast where they were, like an axis of the earth. In many hours we feel that duty is our place. The soul is no traveller; the wise man stays at home, and when his necessities, his duties, on any occasion call him from his house, or into foreign lands, he is at home still and shall make men sensible by the expression of his countenance that he goes, the missionary of wisdom and virtue, and visits cities and men like a sovereign and not like an interloper or a valet.

(Collected Works 2: 46)

32. First published, respectively, in *Twice-told Tales*, 2nd ed. (1842), and *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-told Tales* (1852).

33. Montégut refers, of course, to the monumental granite outcropping known as the “Old Man of the Mountains,” which has long been the state symbol of New Hampshire, but which collapsed in May 2003 owing to the eroding powers of snow, wind, and rain.


36. Montégut invites comparison with the 1819 historical romance by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), which chronicles the dispossession of the Ravenswood family after the Glorious Revolution and the revenge-tragedy that ensues. Caleb Balderstone is the faithful retainer of the Ravenswood clan, determined to maintain the fallen dignity of the family in the eyes of the world.

37. Torquato Tasso (1544–95), Italian poet best remembered for his epic of the First Crusade, *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581).

38. George Bancroft (1800–1891) published his monumental—and nationalistic—*History of the United States* in ten volumes from 1834 to 1876. Himself the recipient of numerous patronage appointments to government posts, Bancroft helped secure Hawthorne his job at the Boston Custom House in 1839, which he kept until 1841. Hawthorne’s later patronage appointment as Surveyor of the Port of Salem (1846–49) owed more to the intervention of other friends in the Democratic Party. His dismissal from the latter post occasioned the writing of “The Custom-House” Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*. Montégut has innocently conflated the two events.

39. In his account of the rigors of Spartan discipline inspired by Lycurgus, Plutarch cites the example of a young boy who has stolen a fox and hidden it under his garments: ashamed of the theft, he prefers to have the animal gnaw on his entrails until he dies from the wounds rather than reveal his secret.

40. John Ford (1586–1639), English dramatist, whose play, *Broken Heart*, was published in 1633.

41. Despite initial reservation, in 1854 Pierce signed the notorious Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the ban on slavery in the western territories that had been in place since the admission of Missouri to the Union in 1820. In the wake of this legislation—and the bitter debate preceding its passage—the old party system disintegrated, and mounting tensions between North and South propelled the country toward civil war.
Montégut wrote an essay on Pierce based largely on Hawthorne’s campaign biography; see “Le général Franklin Pierce,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1 Feb. 1852): 605–16.

42. Montégut quotes the opening lines of a “Dialogue between Nature and a Soul” by Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), Italian poet and essayist. The dialogue was first published in *Operette morali* (1835).

43. In Hawthorne’s novel, Miriam’s precise ancestry is never disclosed.

44. Published by Ticknor & Fields in 1863.