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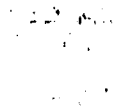
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‘All that associates, saves’:

Hawthorne Biography
and Twentieth-Century American Cultural Criticism

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in English



Angela Groth-Seary

University of Kent
2005



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ABSTRACT

This study gives an account of the roles that biographies of Nathaniel Hawthorne, a nineteenth-century American writer, have come to play within the twentieth-century discourses concerned with American literature as a national literature and as a field of academic inquiry. While attempting to outline the general development of Hawthorne biography in this context, it concentrates mainly on three Hawthorne biographies and on the historical, intellectual and political contexts within which they were produced: Newton Arvin's *Hawthorne*, published in 1929, Randall Stewart's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (1948), and Walter Herbert's *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-class Family* (1993). Each of these lives has been a benchmark in Hawthorne biography; they have introduced new theories and methods and have been embraced by some contemporary critics but contested by others. The first chapter of this thesis outlines debates about biographical practice in a specifically American context. Chapter 2 reads the Hawthorne biographies of the 1920s in the context of Van Wyck Brooks's call to 'create a usable past'. Chapter 3 examines the Hawthorne biographies of the late 1940s, paying particular attention to the ways in which politically conservative or liberal values are inscribed in them and situating them in relation to the attitudes towards biography on the part of practitioners of the New Criticism on one hand and of historical scholarship on the other. Chapter 4 explores new developments in Hawthorne biography since the early 1980s and specifically analyses Herbert's 'new historicist' study of the nuclear Hawthorne family in the light of David Reynolds's notion of 'cultural biography'. The thesis ends with a conclusion which considers the forms in which Hawthorne biography might continue in the twenty-first century.

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A NOTE ON REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Citations from the *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by William Charvat, Roy Harvey Pearce, and Claude M. Simpson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962-) are made parenthetically in the text, by volume, as follows:

- CE 1: *The Scarlet Letter*
CE 5: *Our Old Home*
CE 8: *The American Notebooks*
CE 10: *Mosses from an Old Manse*
CE 11: *The Snow Image and Uncollected Tales*
CE 14: *The French and Italian Notebooks*
CE 15: *The Letters, 1813-1843*
CE 17: *The Letters, 1853-1856*
CE 18: *The Letters, 1857-1864*

Sources are referenced in footnotes; if more references to the same source follow immediately these are made parenthetically in the text. Where a colon appears in a reference after a 'p.' it separates the volume number from the page number, for example p. 2:15 refers to volume 2, page 15. Unless otherwise indicated, omissions in quotations, indicated by '...', and alterations to quotations in square brackets are mine.

INTRODUCTION

Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds.¹

The portraits vary so widely in tone, style and fact that, at first, they appear to say less about Hawthorne the man and writer than they do about the subjective nature of biography itself. How a biographer chooses to select, order, and express the facts of Hawthorne's life and the feeling of Hawthorne's autobiographical pieces is determined in part by the philosophical and emotional lenses through which the writer views his material.²

The starting point for my inquiry has always been a fascination with the sheer number of full-length biographies of Nathaniel Hawthorne produced since his death in 1864. Roughly thirty-eight book-length biographies of Hawthorne have been published so far.³ The latest one of these came out in September 2003, its author, Prof. Brenda Wineapple, having received a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), who evidently did not consider a new life of Hawthorne a waste of their money.⁴ Hawthorne himself did not want a biography to be written. We know this from his wife, who respected his wish, but still obliged the public (and the publisher James T. Fields) by making her husband's private journals available for publication, albeit in carefully expurgated editions.⁵ We also know it from Hawthorne's daughter Rose, who was the second of his own children to disobey – her older brother Julian had done so before her and he in turn had been beaten to it by Rose's husband, George Parsons Lathrop. Rose relates how, not long before his death, 'My father began to... impart to my mother and

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Uses of Great Men' in Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, ed. by Joel Porte (New York: The Library of America, 1983), pp. 615-632 (p. 616).

² Danny Lee Robinson, "'An Image of an Image': The Shape of Hawthorne Biography, 1840-1904' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Duke University, 1985), p. 8.

³ See Appendix A, where I also deal with the problem of defining 'book-length' biographies.

⁴ The ACLS describes itself as 'the most broadly based organization representing scholars as scholars rather than as specialists in particular fields'; its mission is to 'advance humanistic studies in all fields of learning in the humanities and the related social sciences' (see the ACLS website: <http://www.acls.org/mor-intr.htm>).

[my sister] Una all that he particularly desired to say to them, among other things his dislike of biographies, and that he forbade any such matter in connection with himself in any distance in the future'. She is fully aware of the strangeness of her position in having written a biography of her father: 'This command,' she says,

respected for a number of years, has been, like all such forcible and prophetic demurs, most signally set aside. It would take long to explain my own modifications of opinion from arguments of fierce resistance to the request for a biographical handling of him; and it matters, no doubt, very little.

One of the reasons she does give for her contravention – in a hyperbole that reflects her own religious conversion – is that a man like her father 'must be thoroughly known, as great saints are always sooner or later known, though endeavoring to hide their victories of holiness and charity'.⁶ Another reason, Patricia Valenti argues, was an overwhelming need on Rose's part to feel that she was 'useful' and 'of use', and in particular to exert a 'usefulness to a community beyond the immediate family'; lecturing and writing about her father helped her to do that, especially since the proceeds ultimately fed into the charity she established to care for victims of incurable cancer.⁷ It is noteworthy that an early Hawthorne biographer believed that biographical activity could be 'of use', 'useful' to the larger community, as the notion that biography should be 'usable' for the community was later advanced by practitioners in the 1910s and 20s (see Chapter 2).

But, according to Valenti, writing about her father also gave Rose 'the pretext for writing her own life', which she effected by depositing her autobiographical 'signature' throughout the book (p. 63). It is a truism that, as Ronald Bosco states in an essay on biographies of Emerson, biographers 'find what they seek' in the subject's life.⁸ Danny Robinson, from whose thesis the second motto at the head of this introduction is taken, discovered the same during her investigation of nineteenth-century Hawthorne

⁵ Sophia Hawthorne, 'Preface' to *Passages from the English Note-Books in The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, with Introductory Notes by George Parsons Lathrop* (Riverside edition, 12 vols., London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Company, 1883), pp. 7:411-414 (p. 7:411).

⁶ Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, *Memories of Hawthorne* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), pp. 477-478.

⁷ Patricia Dunlavy Valenti, 'Rose Hawthorne Lathrop's Auto/Biography: *Memories of Hawthorne*' in *Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*, ed. by John L. Idol Jr. and Melinda M. Ponder (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), pp. 55-64 (pp. 56-57).

biography, and Robert Lee has argued with regard to Henry James's *Hawthorne* that James himself accomplished 'the finding, the secreting even, of his own "biography" in that of Hawthorne'; with a good deal of acuity (but little grasp of demonology) he suggests that James has made himself the 'incubus within the biographical host'.⁹ I am, therefore, not setting out to prove that Hawthorne biographers have always written their own concerns and convictions and aspects of their own lives into their renderings of his, although I do not take it for granted either. What I am interested in is *how* this process takes place, what those concerns and convictions have been for twentieth-century biographers who have chosen Nathaniel Hawthorne as their subject, and which aspects or moments of his life have engaged those biographers most strongly.

It is an arresting and somewhat chastening thought that all the Hawthorne biographers mentioned in this study should have seen fit to disrespect one of their subject's most strongly expressed wishes. Each of these biographers therefore labors under a burden of legitimization and in some way needs to justify his or her efforts; biographies, perhaps with the exception of such an obvious piece of hack work as Herbert Gorman's *Study in Solitude* (although even Gorman invested something of himself in his text), are rarely written without some kind of rationale. Among such motives are the perceived need to correct errors made in previous biographies or the desire to include aspects others had missed, or to re-narrate the life in a way that is relevant to one's contemporaries. But there must be a more fundamental reason why Hawthorne should have been seized upon again and again as a biographical subject and it might be a recognition that Hawthorne confers legitimacy on labors undertaken in the name of American literature. Edwin Cady notes that by the 1890s 'Hawthorne's example served steadily as an authorization and incitement to writers' and 'a minor critic might well have doubted his respectability if he failed to cite Hawthorne whether in praise of

⁸ Ronald A. Bosco, 'We Find What We Seek: Emerson and His Biographers' in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 269-290 (p. 269).

⁹ A. Robert Lee, 'The Mirrors of Biography: Henry James's *Hawthorne*' in *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography*, ed. by David Ellis (London: Pluto Press, 1993), pp. 67-80 (p. 79).

or attack against any writing in question'.¹⁰ Along similar lines Richard Brodhead suggests that as the 'establisher of the coherence and continuity of American literature, Hawthorne has functioned too as what might be called its entry guard, the agent who admits new authors inside that line'.¹¹ For authors and critics, it seems, Hawthorne has thus functioned as the great legitimator. He has been the gatekeeper, one of a relatively small number of figures who admit authors and critics to the city of 'American literature', someone whom it is impossible to get past without paying him his due. The same may well be true for Hawthorne biography, which, as if by a cumulative effect, has attracted so many practitioners to itself.

Hawthorne's life was not as rich in external incidents as the lives of many of his contemporaries. He was no Abraham Lincoln, nor was he a Melville, who had traveled to the South Seas, nor a Poe, with certain periods of his life completely unaccounted for, and therefore there must be a different explanation for this profusion of biographies. In a letter to his publisher James T. Fields a few months before his death, pondering his inability to finish a fifth romance, Hawthorne himself summed it up as 'a life of much smoulder and scanty fire'.¹² Most biographers have disagreed, whether in relation to Hawthorne's personal life or his literary output. Some biographers have found his representational value precisely in the sense of failure Hawthorne himself had expressed in the letter to Fields. Other biographers have sought to expose a secret, find the skeleton in the closet whose existence Nathaniel's son Julian at the beginning of his two-volume *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife* (1884) so emphatically denies: 'The closet, to be sure, had no skeleton in it; there was nothing to be hidden'.¹³ If there was not, why go to the trouble of denying it – 'No smoke without fire!' – some subsequent biographers have wondered, resolving to tear the veil from aspects of Hawthorne's life that had previously been hidden. This is particularly true for some of the biographies of the 1980s, and the secret thus uncovered was usually connected to a perceived conjunction between

¹⁰ Edwin H. Cady, "'The Wizard Hand': Hawthorne, 1864-1900" in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Brian Harding (4 vols., Robertsbridge: Helm Information, 1998), pp. 4:74-87 (p. 4:83).

¹¹ Richard Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 9.

¹² James T. Fields, *Yesterdays with Authors* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 116.

¹³ Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife* (2 vols., Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1968), p. 1:v.

sexuality and family. Indeed, Philip Young's *Hawthorne's Secret: An Un-Told Tale* (1984), published a century after Julian Hawthorne's book, undertakes just such an exposure. In a book that owes much to Frederick Crews's *The Sins of the Fathers* (1966), he begins by saying:

The notion that... [Hawthorne] had something to hide has been discredited for decades – buried under heaped-up biographical data. Long on information, short in understanding, lives of Hawthorne accumulate endlessly. The notion that there *was* some secret has long appeared hopelessly romantic, culturally lagged, an embarrassment to the well-informed. These people, on the other hand, are forced to believe that a writer preoccupied with sin and guilt ...had no deep experience of them.¹⁴

After much suggestive beating about the bush, and bringing forward 'evidence' that is derived almost entirely from Hawthorne's fictions rather than, for instance, the letters and notebooks, Young arrives at the conclusion that

there does not seem to be any way around the question of the relationship between Nathaniel and Elizabeth Hawthorne [his sister]. The least that must reluctantly be suggested, and the most that can be responsibly intimated, is that it looks as if Something Happened. Just what that may have been – and the range of possibility is broad – it would be as fruitless as vulgar to guess. ...Guilt can arise from deeds which, physically, 'never had existence' (p. 135).

The guilty secret Young believes he has uncovered, then, is that Hawthorne may have harbored an incestuous passion for his older sister that may never have found physical expression. I have cited Young at some length here because his case sheds much light on the landscape of Hawthorne biography. Young's method of using predominantly Hawthorne's fictions as his source material (just like Crews had done) raises questions about the materials available to biographers as evidence, and about how these materials should be appropriately used; in particular it raises the question of how to read an author's imaginative writings biographically.

Secondly, Young's central 'discovery', the incest theme, has a genealogy which reaches from Vernon Loggins's *The Hawthornes* (1951) through Crews to Young himself, and in a note at the end of the book Young makes it clear that, in addition to those two writers, he also wishes to be seen as the heir of D. H. Lawrence and Leslie

¹⁴ Philip Young, *Hawthorne's Secret: An Un-Told Tale* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1984), p. 6.

Fiedler, two theorists of American literature who have stressed its dark and subversive aspects (pp. 164-166). All biographers, through appropriation or rejection, are part of such genealogies: they embrace some former approaches, or parts of them, and reject others, either explicitly or implicitly.

This ties in with a third point, namely Young's aggressive remarks about previous Hawthorne biographies – 'long on information, short in understanding' –, which demonstrate the fundamentally agonistic relationship between biographies: each new biographer needs to clear a space for his or her own effort by elbowing aside the body of biographies already written. It is noteworthy that in Young's case this aggressiveness is paired with a certain degree of blindness. Only four years before, James Mellow had suggested, albeit in a footnote, the more shocking possibility of Nathaniel having been the victim of a 'homosexual assault' at the hands of his uncle, Robert Manning, during a period when they had to share a bed because of the shortage of sleeping places in the Manning household.¹⁵ Moreover, Mellow opens and closes his book with allusions to a possible secret. His motto is a quotation from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and his final scene recounts Julian Hawthorne's visit to the aging Melville, who told him that 'he was convinced Hawthorne had all his life concealed some great secret, which would, were it known, explain all the mysteries of his career' (p. 589), so that Young's triumphant whoop seems itself somewhat 'lagged'.

Finally, there is the question of biographical methods and approaches; Young's 'literary detective' approach, for example, is favored by some readers over other biographical angles. The first edition of *Hawthorne's Secret* features a back-cover endorsement by the novelist Saul Bellow which praises Young, a docent at Pennsylvania State University, as being 'serious but not "square," not in the least academic'. The relevant meaning of 'square' in *The Pocket Dictionary of American Slang* is 'one who is or persists in being unworldly[,] unsophisticated, naïve, old-fashioned, ignorant of current trends and interests, or unenlightened';¹⁶ Bellow's declaration implies that academic books are created out of an ivory tower existence that is out of touch with the

¹⁵ James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 610 n.66.

¹⁶ Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner (eds.), *The Pocket Dictionary of American Slang: A Popular Abridgment of the Dictionary of American Slang* (New York: Pocket Books, 1968), p. 325.

issues that matter in the 'real' world. This reminds us, firstly, that there are different target audiences for (literary) biography who expect different things from the genre: readers of an author's works who are interested in finding out more about the person who created them; people who enjoy biographies because they prefer stories about 'real' people to fiction; literary critics and scholars, who are likely to have views on the position and function of biography within the nexus of literature, history, and criticism; people who believe that reading biographies is the best way to learn about, and perhaps from, the past; – of course one and the same reader can incorporate several of these approaches to biography at the same time. Secondly, Bellow's remark highlights the distinction between the popular and the scholarly: it poses the question whether what academics do is 'relevant' to the reading public.

Because (literary) biography is an amphibious genre that subsists in both popular and academic spheres, it provides a space in which anxieties about the status of cultural production within the culture at large can be played out. Biography exists at the intersection of a number of discourses: it straddles the gap between academic and popular markets. Moreover, it shares traits with historiography, literary history, fiction, and autobiography. Literary biography often combines literary history and scholarship with criticism, and debates about these practices in turn have consequences for biography. But, most importantly, biography participates in social and political discourses; the subject's life frequently functions as a lens through which the biographer and the reader may obtain a sharper focus on contemporary concerns.

On the whole, Young's somewhat sensational approach to Hawthorne's life has been the exception rather than the rule; even Mellow couches his speculations extremely cautiously and delegates them to a footnote. Other biographers have found Nathaniel Hawthorne's life highly interesting and relevant even without positing extraordinary secrets.

In this study I seek to give an account of the roles that biographies of Nathaniel Hawthorne, a nineteenth-century American writer, have come to play within the twentieth-century discourses concerned with American literature as a national literature and as a field of academic inquiry. While attempting to outline the general development

of Hawthorne biography in this context, I concentrate mainly on three Hawthorne biographies and on the historical, intellectual and political contexts within which they were produced: Newton Arvin's *Hawthorne*, published in 1929, Randall Stewart's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (1948), and Walter Herbert's *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-class Family* (1993). Each of these lives has been a benchmark in Hawthorne biography; they have introduced new theories and methods and have been embraced by some contemporary critics but contested by others. This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 outlines debates about biographical practice in a specifically American context. Chapter 2 reads the Hawthorne biographies of the 1920s in the context of Van Wyck Brooks's call to 'create a usable past'. Chapter 3 examines the Hawthorne biographies of the late 1940s, paying particular attention to the ways in which politically conservative or liberal values are inscribed in them and situating them in relation to the attitudes towards biography on the part of practitioners of the New Criticism on one hand, and of historical scholarship on the other. Chapter 4 explores new developments in Hawthorne biography since the early 1980s and specifically analyses Herbert's 'new historicist' study of the nuclear Hawthorne family in the light of David Reynolds's notion of 'cultural biography'. The thesis ends with a conclusion which considers the forms in which Hawthorne biography might continue in the twenty-first century.

My focus on these Hawthorne biographies by Arvin, Stewart and Herbert aims to highlight and explore the differences, but also the inherent similarities and overlaps of those three periods in the history of American studies by exploring how, during each of these periods, biography was used as a way of addressing the question of the relevance of literature, and thus American literary studies, for American society as a whole. 'Cultural criticism' is the term that best characterizes the intellectual and institutional formations in which these Hawthorne biographies participate. A brief definition of this term, narrowed down to the field of literature, could be 'literary criticism... [as] a kind of social and political action by other means'.¹⁷ Stefan Collini suggests that if we 'use

¹⁷ Gerald Graff and Bruce Robbins, 'Cultural Criticism' in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), pp. 419-436 (p. 423). My definition of the term draws largely on Graff and Robbins's exposition, but is also informed by my own encounters

the term “culture” in its primary sense of “artistic and intellectual activities” then “cultural criticism” signifies the movement from this complex of artistic and intellectual work outward, towards society’.¹⁸ ‘Cultural criticism’, according to Graff, Robbins and Trachtenberg, first developed in America during the ‘Gilded Age’; it was one of the main strategies by which conservative, often academic and mostly patrician, intellectuals reacted against the momentous changes transforming post-Civil-War society.¹⁹ Based on an idea of ‘culture’ largely derived from Ruskin and Arnold they sought to uphold the universal and eternal values of the ‘best that is thought and known in the world’ as a bulwark against the fragmenting forces of industrialization, immigration and democratization.²⁰ This kind of criticism posits a previous social formation characterized by organic wholeness and consensus whose passing it deplors but whose content it still finds and seeks to preserve in ‘culture’. Thus, early cultural criticism was a deliberately passive but nevertheless politicized engagement with perceived societal ills. This conservative cultural criticism is characterized by hostility towards theory, which it perceives, in Graff and Robbins’s words, as ‘a preeminent case of the fragmented technocratic disciplinarity that combines with the other specialized machineries of modern industrialism to plunge society into the contention of ideologies’.²¹ Cultural criticism in this sense has continued to be practiced into the present era; in fact, in the following chapters we will encounter several recent examples where biography as a genre is seen as an antidote to the perceived fragmenting forces of theory. Cultural criticism has also been found a useful strategy by critics on the left, frequently comprehending similar gestures towards a more harmonious society, sometimes envisaged in the future. However, cultural criticism has also become more actively political and combative through the rise, in the universities, of such areas as Feminist,

with cultural criticism as practiced by the critics examined in this study. Also useful for clarifying my argument as been Stefan Collini’s outline of the debate between himself and Francis Mulhern regarding ‘cultural criticism’ versus ‘cultural politics’ in Collini, ‘Defending Cultural Criticism’, *New Left Review*, 18 (November/December 2002), 73-97.

¹⁸ Collini, ‘Defending’, p. 91.

¹⁹ Graff and Robbins, ‘Cultural Criticism’, p. 423; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 154.

²⁰ ‘Best that is thought and known’: Matthew Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism at the present Time’ in Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 26-51 (pp. 36, 37, 50).

²¹ Graff and Robbins, ‘Cultural Criticism’, p. 425.

post-colonialist, gay and lesbian, or racial minority studies with their attendant literary theories. Traditionalists see this trend as disruptive, a fragmentation of literary culture into special-interest groups, whereas it in fact demonstrates a greater democratization of university education (pp. 431-432). Graff and Robbins suggest that this 'new theory-driven academic criticism represents... the recovery of the aims of the older cultural criticism at a time when that older criticism is no longer adequate to express a dissensual cultural scene' (p. 431). I argue in this thesis that Hawthorne biographers have tended to practice an intensely politicized engagement with their contemporaneous society through their writings about this nineteenth-century figure, and that their Hawthorne biographies thus constitute variously aligned instances of 'cultural criticism'.

In his brief survey of Hawthorne biographies in the recent *Historical Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Leland Person skips immediately from the nineteenth-century reminiscences by family members and friends to the nineteen-eighties, with no mention of Randall Stewart's book, which stood for at least two decades after its publication in 1948 as the 'definitive' Hawthorne biography, or Newton Arvin's (the only academic monograph on Hawthorne for over a decade after its publication), or any other of the almost twenty Hawthorne biographies published during the first eight decades of the twentieth century before the appearance, in 1980, of James R. Mellow's *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*, Arlin Turner's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* and Raymona E. Hull's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience, 1853-1864*.²² Implicit in Person's summary is the assumption that, apart from those nineteenth-century biographies based on first-hand knowledge of the subject, the older Hawthorne biographies have become superseded by the most recent ones, and that we need not consult those older ones in order to find out anything about Hawthorne's life. A similar bias can be seen in the section on Hawthorne criticism, where Person confines himself to mentioning studies that approach or situate Hawthorne historically, with a strong emphasis on books produced in the 1990s. Again, the underlying claim is that our knowledge increases and progresses, and that our recent emphasis on history, linked to,

²² Leland S. Person, 'Bibliographical Essay: Hawthorne and History' in *A Historical Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. by Larry J. Reynolds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 183-209 (pp. 184-186); in fairness it must be said that Person's bibliography is rather more complete.

but not exclusive to ‘new historicist’ method, is a better way of looking at texts and authors than previous approaches; Person cites Roy R. Male’s *Hawthorne’s Tragic Vision* (1957) as ‘a good example of the classic “universalist” criticism – with its emphasis on sin and redemptive “moral growth”’, and he juxtaposes that book directly with Michael Colacurcio’s *The Province of Piety* (1984), which he describes as in contrast a ‘richly and deeply informed study’ (p. 194).

I cannot disagree with Person regarding the validity of recent historicizing approaches to American literature over previous ones, and I align my own critical position with those approaches. But precisely for that reason I have found the engagement with ‘superseded’ biographies and critical projects highly rewarding, as understanding about the critical past gives us a perspective on our own efforts. And indeed, over the last twenty years, there have been many investigations into patterns of past criticism. There has, for instance, been a revival of interest in the critical projects of figures like Van Wyck Brooks and, recently, Newton Arvin, and there have been numerous more general treatments of American academic history. Of the latter I have made most use of those by Gerald Graff and Kermit Vanderbilt.²³

A slightly different approach to understanding the production, circulation and supersession of works of literary and cultural criticism, and biography is offered by the discipline of book history, which has arisen over the last few decades. In an essay titled ‘What Is the History of Books?’ Robert Darnton offers a diagram, which he calls the ‘communications circuit,’ describing the production and consumption of books in their social, economic and legal contexts.²⁴ He outlines the mutual influence of author and publisher, of publisher on printers, onward to shippers, to booksellers, and from them to readers (in the form of buyers, borrowers, clubs and libraries), noting that readers in turn have an influence on authors and publishers:

The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition. Authors are readers themselves. By reading and associating with other readers and writers, they form notions of genre and style

²³ Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); Kermit Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy: The Roots, Growth, and Maturity of a Profession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986).

²⁴ Robert Darnton, ‘What Is the History of Books?’ in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 107-135 (p. 112).

and a general sense of the literary enterprise, which affect their texts, whether they are composing Shakespearean sonnets or directions for assembling radio kits (p. 111).

I acknowledge the importance of each of these nodes, but I focus my attention on this interaction between authors and readers that Darnton here describes. My study concentrates largely on academic biographies, whose authors and readers, who are often themselves authors and/or academics, frequently interact in particularly direct and impassioned ways, by reviewing each other's works or by building refutations or affirmations into their own treatments of the same or related subjects. While my approach is to some degree biographical, I deal mostly with materials which have been in the public domain, rather than with private documents, for such materials constitute the public debate about biography in which the critics and scholars discussed here all participate.

I could perhaps have picked any well-canonized nineteenth-century writer (Emerson, Whitman, Poe, Dickinson, Melville, Twain) as the main subject for this thesis. Some of the tendencies would be the same, the details, however, very different as each subject throws up different sets of questions (see Appendix B). There was no Melville biography before 1921, for example, and no Dickinson biography before 1924. Whitman, in contrast, is the one writer of this group who has attracted more biographies than any other, but where Melville and Dickinson biographies, when they finally began to be written, were produced predominantly by academics, Whitman's life has appealed to a far more mixed range of biographers, relatively few of whom, however, have been women. The significant statistical differences in the gender distribution of biographers in relation to the different biographical subjects translate into different political and cultural agendas (see Appendix B.2.2). We can see that the production of biographies of American Renaissance writers has been a predominantly male domain, with women arriving late on the scene and then frequently setting about restoring the racial and gender balance. It is noteworthy that Frederick Douglass has received far more attention from female biographers than have other male literary figures, like Emerson or Hawthorne, and that much of their output takes the form of short educational biographies for young people. Much the same pattern emerges among biographies of Harriet Beecher Stowe. The individuals who were taken up as biographical subjects

evidently carried different values for different sections of society. The distribution of different types of biography in relation to subject can throw light on the political and social position of the biographers. These data can, of course, do no more than to suggest tendencies, but my survey may indicate other aspects of biographies of nineteenth-century American writers that are worth investigating.

Mine is not the first comparative study investigating the biographies written about a particular American literary figure: Oxford University Press's 'Historical Guides to American Authors' series tends to include bibliographical essays which offer brief overviews of biographies of the writer in question, for example Bosco's account of Emerson biography, Person's of Hawthorne biography and David Reynolds's survey of biographies of Whitman.²⁵ In the recent *Emily Dickinson Handbook* Martha Ackmann provides a valuable overview of Dickinson biography, demonstrating in particular the impact which even small discoveries of new documentary evidence, sometimes related to Dickinson's relatives or contemporaries rather than the poet herself, may have on understanding aspects of the subject's life or revising one's previous understanding of those aspects.²⁶ In 1985 Danny Lee Robinson completed a Ph.D. thesis at Duke University on biographical portraits of Hawthorne up to his centenary in 1904.²⁷ Hers is a meticulous study, but there is little investigation of the role of biography in late-nineteenth century American culture and little reflection on epistemological issues related to the genre. Closest to my own undertaking may be Clare L. Spark's monumental study *Hunting Captain Ahab: Psychological Warfare and the Melville Revival* (2001), whose intentionally Melvillean scope and grandiloquence I will, however, be in no position to emulate.²⁸ Spark's project is not primarily concerned with the function of biography, but because the Melville revival was to a large extent precipitated by biographies her book throws light on Melville biographers like Raymond

²⁵ See Bosco, 'We Find What We Seek'; Person, 'Bibliographical Essay'; David S. Reynolds, 'Bibliographical Essay' in *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman*, edited by David S. Reynolds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 251-259.

²⁶ Martha Ackmann, 'Biographical Studies of Dickinson' in *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, edited by Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle and Christanne Miller (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), pp. 11-23.

²⁷ Robinson, "'Image'".

²⁸ Clare L. Spark, *Hunting Captain Ahab: Psychological Warfare and the Melville Revival* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2001).

Weaver, Lewis Mumford and Jay Leyda and situates them in their cultural and intellectual contexts, with an emphasis on institutional and Cold-War politics.

If, as I believe, similar projects to mine could be possible and fruitful in relation to other biographical subjects, why have I chosen Hawthorne? In a phrase borrowed from Van Wyck Brooks's essay 'On Creating a Usable Past', Richard Brodhead describes Hawthorne as 'the only American fiction writer never to have lived in the limbo of the non-elect'.²⁹ Hawthorne has been one of a very small number of consistently canonized figures in American literature. We are provided, in his case, with an unbroken succession of biographies since the 1870s; the only other figures about whom biographies have been produced so regularly and copiously were Emerson and Whitman, and Whitman was not appreciated by American literary academics until the paradigm shift of the 1910s and 20s. However, unlike any other figure this central to each successive American literary canon, Hawthorne's 'greatness' itself has been a fiercely contested space. Martin Green in 1963 and Jane Tompkins in 1985 have each set out to deliberately and systematically dismantle the foundations of Hawthorne's literary reputation. Green argues that Hawthorne is neither a 'good writer' nor a 'great writer'. He methodically points out logical inconsistencies, intellectual blunders and moments of imaginative poverty in Hawthorne's works and cites some genuinely dreadful or offensive passages from his fictional and private writings, like the stilted language of the Puritan children in *The Scarlet Letter* (CE 1, p. 102) or Hawthorne's comments about the ugliness of English women: 'The grim, red-faced monsters! Surely a man would be justified in murdering them – in taking a sharp knife and cutting away their mountainous flesh until he had brought them into reasonable shape'.³⁰ Tompkins follows a different line of attack; she asserts that Hawthorne has, since the publication of *Twice-told Tales*, benefited from institutional support that other, at the time equally successful writers, like Susan Warner, lost because their connections failed them: 'Hawthorne's canonization was the result of a network of common interests – familial, social, professional,

²⁹ Brodhead, *School*, p. 10; see also Van Wyck Brooks, 'On Creating a Usable past' in *Van Wyck Brooks: The Early Years, A Selection from His Works, 1908-1921*, edited by Claire Sprague (rev. ed., Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), pp. 219-226 (p. 226).

³⁰ Martin Green, 'The Hawthorne Myth: A Protest' in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Brian Harding (4 vols., Robertsbridge: Helm Information, 1998), pp. 4:59-73, especially pp. 68, 66.

commercial, and national – that, combined, made Hawthorne a literary and cultural artifact, a national possession'.³¹ She argues that the value of 'classic texts', like Hawthorne's, is not intrinsic, but institutionally conditioned, that 'changing definitions of literary value, institutionally and socially produced, continually refashion the literary canon to suit the culture's needs' (p. 34). The crux about these assessments is that they are, if not persuasive, then at least arresting: Hawthorne's eminence needs to be reasserted against these evaluations and we are forced to think our way back into the reasons why Hawthorne is indeed relevant, what it is about his life and his writings that keeps us examining and reexamining them. This is the case to an extent that would not apply, I believe, if we were confronted with similar criticisms of Melville or Whitman or Dickinson or Twain.³² What I mean to say is that when confronted with these criticisms of Hawthorne it requires an effort to remember what is exceptional about his writings, whereas with Melville or Dickinson I find no such effort necessary.

Significantly, the development of Hawthorne biography has not been driven by major new biographical discoveries, although some such discoveries have been made. Randall Stewart has been an extremely important figure in initiating the practice of establishing definitive scholarly editions of an author's works, making *all* their writings available, and setting standards of factual research based on these definitive texts. There have been areas of contention regarding facts: for example disagreements whether the text known as 'Hawthorne's First Notebook' is genuine or a forgery; or Lewis Mumford's assumption that Hawthorne had portrayed Melville as 'Ethan Brand', facilitated by an error of dating the composition of the story which was perpetuated by Newton Arvin and rectified by Stewart by simply ascertaining the correct date.³³

³¹ Jane Tompkins, 'Masterpiece Theater: The Politics of Hawthorne's Literary Reputation' in Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 3-39 (p. 32).

³² For example, Paul Lauter's article on Melville's admission to the canon in the early 1920s emphasises the partisan reasons for his adoption, but ultimately emphatically reaffirms the merit of Melville's works (see 'Melville Climbs the Canon', *American Literature*, 66.1 (March 1994), 1-24).

³³ See Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), pp. 145-147; Newton Arvin, *Hawthorne* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), p. 169; Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 111. Stewart writes: 'Lewis Mumford's *Herman Melville* (1929) did great damage to the truth concerning Hawthorne and Melville by representing Hawthorne, through cold unresponsiveness, as the villain in Melville's personal tragedy. This view was supported chiefly by the assumption that Hawthorne portrayed Melville in "Ethan Brand." The assumption proved to be incorrect, for "Ethan Brand" was published six months before Hawthorne

However, the main drive of Hawthorne biography has been interpretative, concerned with re-reading familiar materials, pulling in materials related to other historical figures, introducing elements of Hawthorne's cultural context, applying new theoretical approaches such as psychoanalysis or new historicism and attempting to make Hawthorne's life relevant to contemporary social and political issues. In studying Hawthorne biography we can see that biographical modes do not simply replace one another as new ways of thinking or new information become available. It is tempting to think of biography as developing by a process analogous to that described in Raymond Williams's model of the succession of 'cultural processes', wherein competing approaches coexist at different stages of their life cycle, each approach being either 'dominant', 'residual' or 'emergent'.³⁴ However, if biography can be said to evolve in this way, then the progress is, at least in relation to Hawthorne biography, very slow indeed: for every three steps taken forward during the twentieth century, we can observe at least two backwards steps being taken. Similar debates about common sense versus theory, or documentary evidence versus orality, or objectivity versus interpretation have been enacted again and again, throughout the twentieth century, by different casts of disputants.

This thesis does not set out to reveal anything new about Nathaniel Hawthorne, but it does seek to show something of the political and social significance of the biographical genre in American academic culture by outlining the debates surrounding biographies of Hawthorne and of some of his contemporaries. William Dean Howells, an ardent admirer who had met Hawthorne in 1860, wrote:

We are always finding new Hawthornes, but the illusion soon wears away, and then we perceive that they were not Hawthornes 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.³⁵

met Melville and was fully outlined in his journal two years before the publication of Melville's first book'. Stewart's original argument was published in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, April 27, 1929. The Hawthorne-Melville friendship itself is of course one of the most contested aspects of Hawthorne and Melville biography.

³⁴ See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 121-127.

³⁵ W. D. Howells, *Literary Friends and Acquaintance: A Personal Retrospect of American Authorship*, ed. by David F. Hiatt and Edwin H. Cody (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 52.

What follows will examine some of the 'new Hawthornes' found by his twentieth-century biographers and explore the ways in which each new Hawthorne managed to adapt to the cultural and political circumstances of his time. This might seem to suggest that there is little hope that biographies could ever converge on Hawthorne's essential 'difference'. On balance, I think biography *is* circling closer to a true understanding of Hawthorne, but not so much by the refinement of successive books as by the accumulation of disparate interpretations, and the dialogues among them.

CHAPTER 1: BIOGRAPHY IN AMERICA

Read no history, nothing but biography, for that is life without theory.³⁶

Much the same situation [as in England] prevails in the United States, as a visit to a bookstore of even moderate size demonstrates. ...Located next to Bibles, the section devoted to biography fills eight floor-to-ceiling shelves with highly diverse contents. One shelf loaded with volumes about the British royal family is balanced by another reserved for the Kennedy family. Books about Lillian Hellman and Ernest Hemingway sit side by side.... Other volumes recount the lives of politicians, figure skaters, film stars, radio personalities, wealthy entrepreneurs, and retired generals.³⁷

1.1 Introduction

This second passage, from a recent collection of essays on biography, describes the immense popularity of the genre in England and the United States. Taking as its example a bookshop rather than, for example, a library, it also highlights the fact that life-writing is firmly embedded in the structures of production and consumption that characterize Western capitalist societies, where books and other cultural goods are produced and priced according to the projected demands of consumers, and where the cultural tastes of these consumers are to a large extent, though by no means wholly, shaped by the marketing strategies employed by publishers and booksellers. Much recent research in American Studies – especially since the methods of the New Historicism emerged and began to dominate the field in the early to mid-1980s – has investigated this implication of literary production with the economic structures that have evolved since the

³⁶ Benjamin Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming: A Psychological Romance* (London: Peter Davis, 1927), p. 110.

³⁷ Joe Law and Linda K. Hughes, “‘And What Have You Done?’ Victorian Biography Today’ in *Biographical Passages: Essays in Victorian and Modernist Biography*, ed. by Joe Law and Linda K. Hughes (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000), pp. 1-17 (pp. 1-2).

emergence of a mass market economy in the early to mid-nineteenth century.³⁸ Crucial for this shift in emphasis in American studies have been motions in the field of book history towards ‘incorporating the social and cultural conditions governing the production, dissemination and reception of print and texts’, as David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery describe this development.³⁹ However, scholarly works themselves, such as, for example, academic biographies published by university presses, are by no means exempt from the sway of the marketplace; their production is dependent on the current critical climate (for example the dominance of just such a critical approach as the New Historicism and the proliferation of interest in book history) and the canon – in short on what academic publishers can hope to sell to their target groups.

It is important to note that biography is a genre that can straddle the boundary between the academic and the popular more easily than others: readers who would not read a book of, say, Henry James criticism might not buy, but quite possibly borrow from a library, Leon Edel’s five-volume James biography; they might certainly buy Richard Ellmann’s lives of Joyce and Wilde, which are replete with academic footnotes. The Pulitzer Prize, which has been awarded since 1917, has a category for biography, in which the prize-winning biographies of literary figures rub shoulders with lives of politicians, inventors, intellectuals, freedom fighters and other national heroes. It is significant, however, that, although there are many biographies of literary figures among the Pulitzer Prize winners, the two literary subjects which each inspired two Pulitzer

³⁸ The research of William Charvat since the 1930s has provided particularly important groundwork for this approach (cf. for example William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992)). Recent studies include: Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); William G. Rowland, Jr., *Literature and the Marketplace: Romantic Writers and Their Audiences in Great Britain and the United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

³⁹ David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery are the editors of *The History Book Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Alistair McCleery is Director of the Scottish Centre for the Book. The quotation is from the now defunct Scottish Centre for the Book website at Napier University: <http://www.pmpc.napier.ac.uk/scob/HOBR/section1.html>. For an essay that outlines a methodology for book history see also Darnton’s ‘What Is the History of Books?’. Both book history and the New Historicism are inherently interdisciplinary approaches: inasmuch as they consider biography as a genre, they are interested in describing the conditions that govern the production and consumption of texts, such as biographies, from different angles (sociological, historical, legal, economical, anthropological, etc.), rather than in prescribing how books should be written and read.

Prize winning biographies are Harriet Beecher Stowe (Forrest Wilson's *Crusader in Crinoline* (in 1942) and Joan Hedrick's *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (in 1995)) and Benjamin Franklin (William Cabell Bruce (in 1918), and Carl Van Doren (in 1939)). What these two authors have in common, of course, is that their impact has largely been understood to be social and political rather than literary. No biographies of American Renaissance authors besides those of Stowe have been awarded the prize; this is particularly remarkable since Stowe has received far less 'serious' or academic biographical attention than other writers of the period (see Appendix B.1). The American National Book Award, instituted in 1950, has shown a somewhat different tendency: among the many literary biographies to which it has been awarded under either its nonfiction or its (short-lived) autobiography/biography category are Newton Arvin's *Herman Melville* (in 1951), Richard Sewall's *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (in 1975), and James Mellow's *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (in 1983).⁴⁰

Although academic interest in American biography has significantly increased during the last quarter of the twentieth century, systematic studies and histories of the genre are vastly outnumbered by books and articles on American autobiography.⁴¹ It is also notable that there was considerable systematic interest in the history of English biography at a time when American biography was rarely investigated in its own right. In fact, many American investigators of biography have concentrated almost exclusively

⁴⁰ A listing of Pulitzer Prize winning books and information about the history of the award can be found at <http://www.pulitzer.org/> ; National Book Award winners are listed on the National Book Foundation website at <http://www.nationalbook.org/nbawinners.html> ; cf. also <http://www.literature-awards.com/> for a general listing of literary awards.

⁴¹ See studies of American autobiography by James Olney, John Paul Eakin, Robert Sayre, work on African American autobiography (especially by William L. Andrews and Arnold Rampersad), including the important sub-genre of the slave narrative, Native American autobiography (especially by Arnold Krupat), and American women's autobiography – in its own right and as it overlaps with the other branches –, to mention only the most prominent. An important and prolific series, Wisconsin Studies in American Autobiography (established in 1988 and edited by William L. Andrews), comprises at least thirty volumes (for a list see <http://sites.unc.edu/andrews/>). This predominance of studies of autobiography over studies of biography is reflected, but also exaggerated, in the bibliographies accompanying the four entries on United States 'Life Writing' and 'Auto/Biography' in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (ed. by Margaretta Jolly (2 vols., London and Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001), pp. 2:898, 2:900, 2:902, 2:905) in which each of the four contributors compiling them has concentrated almost exclusively on critical works on autobiography.

on English biography.⁴² There are a number of possible reasons for this comparative neglect. American autobiography, especially because of Benjamin Franklin, but in fact since the personal accounts of the earliest Puritan settlers, has come to be regarded as a ‘wide-spread and characteristic form of American expression’.⁴³ English biography, with its genealogy extending from Eadmer (life of St. Anselm) through William Roper (Thomas More), Izaak Walton (John Donne and others), Johnson and Boswell, to James Froude (the Carlyle marriage) and Lytton Strachey (*Eminent Victorians*), is seen as inheriting and developing Roman historico-biographical practice – Plutarch’s *Lives* and Tacitus’s *Agricola* were translated into English in the second half of the 16th century – and this English biographical tradition is regarded as the cradle of ‘modern’ biography.⁴⁴ Biography, on the other hand, is credited neither with being as quintessentially American a genre as autobiography, nor with being as relevant for the development of biography as a genre as its English relative; although it constitutes a branch of the same family tree it is seen as one that has been stunted or warped in its development. A frequently expressed view is that while in England Samuel Johnson (e.g. *Life of Richard Savage* (1744)) and James Boswell (*Life of Johnson* (1791)) were inventing modern biography, the Americans – most notably Cotton Mather with his monumental *Magnalia*

⁴² E.g. Mark Longaker, *English Biography in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931); Joseph W. Reed, Jr., *English Biography in the Early Nineteenth-Century: 1801-1838* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

⁴³ Robert F. Sayre, ‘Autobiography and the Making of America’ in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 146-168 (p. 146). Sayre goes even further to suggest: ‘Autobiography may be the preeminent kind of American expression’ (p. 147). Cf. also James M. Cox, *Recovering Literature’s Lost Ground: Essays in American Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 11-12: ‘Autobiography has been important in this country. ...It is no mere accident that an astonishingly large proportion of the slender shelf of so-called American classics is occupied by autobiographies’. And Newton Arvin writes: ‘It is no accident that, emblematically at least, at the very gateway of American literature stand two autobiographies: no accident that Jonathan Edwards should have written his “Personal Narrative” or Franklin the story of his life. Nothing was more natural than that Edwards and Franklin should have taken themselves as subjects; between them, they span the whole reach, upward and downward, of the individualist principle’ (Newton Arvin, ‘Individualism and the American Writer’ in *Literary Opinion in America: Essays Illustrating the Status, Methods, and Problems of Criticism in the United States in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Morton Dauwen Zabel (2 vols., 3rd ed., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), pp. 2:544-549 (p. 2:545)).

⁴⁴ For a summary with this kind of bias see *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (15th ed., Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 1992), pp. 23:190-3. See also Catherine Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 13: ‘At the outset of the seventeenth century, biography began to shift its center of gravity to England, as this nation entered its most active period of commercial, technological, and cultural global expansion...’.

Christi Americana (1702) and Mason Locke Weems with his several lives of George Washington (1799, 1800-1808) – were somehow getting it wrong.⁴⁵ According to this position, American biography, for the first two centuries or so, fell short of a standard of ‘objectivity’ to which biographies should conform.⁴⁶

The present chapter deals with the question of how to read biography in a specifically American context. Without attempting to offer a comprehensive history of the genre of biography in America, it will identify some of the problems that arise when American biography is considered historically.⁴⁷ Two issues are of particular importance in this context: firstly, I want to suggest, with Sacvan Bercovitch, that the American biographical genre, along with many other forms of expression, is decisively shaped by the persistence of Puritan rhetoric in the American national consciousness.⁴⁸ Secondly, by constructing exemplary identities, biography in America is a genre that inherently politicizes its authors and readers. Scott Casper declares that in nineteenth-century America ‘biographers and critics and readers alike believed that biography had power: the power to shape individuals’ lives and character and to help define America’s national

⁴⁵ In the chronology in Parke’s recent *Biography: Writing Lives* (2002), the first reference to United States biography is Emerson’s *Representative Men* (1850); after that, references to biographical texts produced in the United States are frequent. The timeline completely ignores figures like Mather and Weems, although Parke (who is herself an American) discusses them briefly in her first chapter.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Richard Hankins, ‘Puritans, Patriots, and Panegyric: The Beginnings of American Biography’, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 9.2 (1976), 95-109.

⁴⁷ The first extensive study devoted exclusively to American biography is Edward Hayes O’Neill, *A History of American Biography, 1800-1935* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935). Richard D. Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) is a useful volume. Sacvan Bercovitch’s *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975) is an important study of American Puritan biography. *Studies in Biography* (Harvard English Studies Series 8, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), edited by Daniel Aaron, contains some insightful essays. The journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* (Biographical Research Center, University of Hawaii) was founded in 1978; however, as David Ellis points out, ‘nearly half’ of the material published in this journal ‘is on autobiography and the rest is predominantly concerned with illustrations of biographical practice’ (Ellis, *Literary Lives: Biography and the Search for Understanding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 178 n.14). A first volume in a series called ‘The Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism’ was published in 1991, but there has as yet not been another volume: William H. Epstein (ed.), *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press). The most recent and most extensive investigation of the cultural role of biography in America is Scott E. Casper’s *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁴⁸ Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, passim.

character'; biography had 'constructive, cultural purposes'.⁴⁹ Explicitly and implicitly, such purposes persist in American biographies of the twentieth century. According to Bercovitch and Werner Sollors, among many other cultural critics, American identity is based on a person's consent (or assent) to American values at least as much as it depends on his or her ethnic descent: to be American is to act American, rather than to be born American.⁵⁰ Seymour Lipset formulates this view in terms meant to conjure up the terminology used by a notorious identity-probing state apparatus in the mid-twentieth century – the House (of Representatives) Un-American Activities Committee: 'In Europe, nationality is related to community, and thus one cannot become un-English or un-Swedish. Being an American, however, is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those who reject American values are un-American'.⁵¹ This means that an American identity, once established, cannot be taken for granted: it needs to be constantly probed, ritually repeated, reaffirmed. Biography is a genre that constructs and exhibits identities, and can thus play an important role in showing people how to be, become, and remain American.

With Nathaniel Hawthorne, I investigate a biographical subject who tends to be portrayed in terms of a complicated synthesis of American descent and consent to American values, culture and ideology. Many biographies represent his lineage as inextricably fused with such factors as his lifelong adherence to the Democratic Party, his lack of interest in group movements (like Transcendentalism or Abolitionism), his choice to become an author, his moral conservatism. The result is that Hawthorne is often interpreted as an ultra-representative American – although the terms of such a construal can differ considerably from one biography to the next. Within an ideological framework that identifies the first Anglo-Saxon colonists, rather than, for example, the

⁴⁹ Casper, *Constructing*, pp. 2, 3.

⁵⁰ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 31. The HUAC was set up in 1938 by the conservative opposition to Roosevelt's New Deal (see George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (4th ed., New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), p. 1192); its original task was to identify Nazi and Soviet Union agents in the prewar United States, but 'it turned its attention increasingly to liberals active in labor, government, and the arts' (see Stanley Hochman and Eleanor Hochman, *The Penguin Dictionary of Contemporary American History, 1945 to the Present* (3rd ed., Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1997), pp. 249-50).

indigenous population, as the original Americans, Hawthorne's American descent is impeccable, and the biographies tend to make the most of its circumstances: William Hathorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne's great-great-great-grandfather, came to the continent between 1630 and 1633 as part of the first wave of Massachusetts Bay colonists (Julian Hawthorne places him aboard the *Arbella*, the ship on which John Winthrop arrived in 1630, although there is no evidence for that⁵²); he was involved in the persecution of members of the Quaker sect. William Hathorne's son John was one of the presiding judges during the 1692 Salem witch trials. Both men achieved prosperity and high status in their communities and the Hawthorne biographies usually refer to them by their titles, Major William and Colonel John Hathorne. The biographers tend to discuss this lineage at some length, usually in chapters or sections devoted to Hawthorne's childhood and youth. The argumentative move from descent to assent is then frequently performed through establishing an identification on Hawthorne's part with his Puritan ancestors. Randall Stewart, for example, places great emphasis on Hawthorne's pride in the fact that William Hathorne defied the king of England⁵³ – a defiance which has of course an (unstated) parallel on a national scale in the American revolution. But most frequently a particular section of 'The Custom-House' is cited, or alluded to, wherein Hawthorne tells the reader: 'The figure of that first ancestor... still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past, which I scarcely claim in reference to the present phase of the town' (CE 1, p. 9). He then turns to William and John Hathorne's persecution of Quakers and 'witches' and declares:

At all events, I, the present writer, take shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them – as I have heard, and as the dreary and unprosperous condition of the race, for many a long year back, would argue to exist – may be now and henceforth removed (p. 10).

This acceptance of and attempt to purge the family shame is frequently seen as the source for Hawthorne's preoccupation with sin and guilt; it is at once an appropriation and a defiance of his ancestors, an arrival at an established American identity and a departure towards a new one, for Hawthorne's identity as a 'classic' American author is

⁵² Julian Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*, p. 1:10; see Robert L. Gale, *A Nathaniel Hawthorne Encyclopedia* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 217.

⁵³ Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, pp. 1-2.

bound up with this move. “Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!” (ibid.), Hawthorne imagines his ancestors to exclaim, and several biographies take his choice to become a writer as a defining instance of his representative Americanness: he embraced his family’s and America’s past by taking it as his subject matter, and at the same time he helped to forge America more completely into a nation by contributing to the country’s emergent literary culture. In addition to the element of ancestry, the relationship between birth and consent is in Hawthorne’s case even more closely intertwined as the result of an accident: Hawthorne was born on the 4th of July. James Mellow, for example suggests:

The coincidence of his birthday with the union’s was to have its effect on Hawthorne’s life. The house on not-so-illustrious Union Street was within sound of Salem Common, and throughout his childhood and well into later life, Hawthorne took special pleasure in the great national birthday celebrated on the green, poplar-lined triangle of the common. ...A solitary young man of reticent habits, he nonetheless became a connoisseur of popular events – Fourth of July celebrations, military musters, country fairs, and traveling raree shows. ...He had a marked preference for democratic, rather than aristocratic, occasions.⁵⁴

And Arlin Turner, in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*, like Mellow’s book first published in 1980, makes the point even more explicitly. This is his opening paragraph:

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on Union Street, July 4, 1804. His birth on the birthday of the young nation and on a Union Street might be taken to forecast the author who would find materials for his tales and romances in the America of his own time and earlier, who would seek to understand the special character and meaning of America, and whose works would stand high in the national literature as it won a place among the literatures of the world.⁵⁵

Consenting to American values does not necessarily mean a straightforward exercise in yea-saying. Rather, there is an anti-institutional tradition of individualist dissent in American ideology which is at once expressed by *and* derived from Emerson’s exhortation in ‘Self-Reliance’: ‘Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist’.⁵⁶ As Bercovitch shows, ‘individualism’ was a negative term originally coined by French radicals in the 1820s and later used by European and American radicals and socialists to

⁵⁴ Mellow, *Hawthorne in His Times*, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁵ Arlin Turner, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘Self-Reliance’ in *Essays and Lectures*, pp. 257-282 (p. 261).

attack the Jacksonian liberal doctrine of self-interest and laissez-faire.⁵⁷ During the 1830s and 40s, the Jacksonians themselves appropriated the term ‘individualism’ and inverted it to define, positively, precisely those aspects of their program that the socialists attacked. In fact, Jacksonian ideologues – among them John Louis O’Sullivan, the editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, in which twenty-three of Hawthorne’s sketches and tales were published between 1837 and 1845 – recast ‘individualism’ as the ultimate aim towards which all civilization should strive (pp. 312-313). Emerson, too, appropriated the term from the socialists and then transformed it, first to mean what we now understand by ‘individuality’ (pp. 314-315) in opposition both to the socialist or ‘associationist’ movements of his time (including Brook Farm, the commune in which Hawthorne for a time participated) and to the Jacksonians’ own inversion of the term.⁵⁸ He envisaged a utopia of ‘ideal union’ (like the socialists) brought about by an ‘actual individualism’ (as opposed to socialist collectivist projects but also to the Jacksonian ‘systemic individualism’).⁵⁹ It was only after the European uprisings of 1848 that Emerson came to reach a much greater rapprochement with Jacksonian mainstream liberalism.⁶⁰ It is the anti-institutional Emerson of the early essays who is now most frequently invoked as the well-spring of American individualism, but it is the ‘systemic’ individualism of Jacksonian democracy, with which he later came to overlap, which has become absorbed into the American ideological bloodstream.

Biographers have sought to identify similar anti-institutional sentiments in Hawthorne, sometimes in his opposition to the very causes or modes of thinking that they identify with Emerson himself: Transcendentalism, optimism, progressivism. Arlin Turner praises Hawthorne’s ‘habitual independence of thought and action, his skeptical outlook and his unshakable reliance on his own convictions’;⁶¹ Randall Stewart records, with apparent satisfaction, that Hawthorne ‘declined the gift of a ticket to one of

⁵⁷ Bercovitch, *Rites*, pp. 309-310.

⁵⁸ Hawthorne joined the Brook Farm experiment for a few months in 1841, hoping eventually to live there with Sophia, but he soon felt that the manual labor made it impossible for him to write creatively. He later satirized the experiment in *The Blithedale Romance*.

⁵⁹ Bercovitch, *Rites*, p. 329; Emerson, ‘New England Reformers’ in *Essays and Lectures*, pp. 589-609 (p. 599).

⁶⁰ Bercovitch, *Rites*, pp. 337-338.

Emerson's lectures' at a time when 'the air of Boston and its environs was electric with Transcendentalism';⁶² elsewhere he shows a clear preference for Hawthorne's 'Calvinism' over Emerson's 'liberalism'.⁶³ As a champion of 'individualism' and especially as a proponent of the tenet of 'self-help', however, Stewart considers Emerson commendable.⁶⁴

Like 'individualism', 'liberal' and 'liberalism' are terms whose meanings constantly shift and slide. As these terms appear throughout this thesis, I want to clarify at this point the meanings which they assume. I have encountered the term 'liberal' in at least three different and to some extent contradictory senses: firstly it describes, in a fairly neutral sense, what Seymour Lipset calls the 'American Creed' of 'liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire';⁶⁵ secondly it is used as a pejorative term leveled by conservatives against progressives or radicals (this is how Stewart uses the term); thirdly, it is frequently used by people on the left to criticize the 'individualist' doctrine of the 'American Creed', and is thus frequently directed against the very conservatives who brand progressives and radicals as 'liberal'.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Turner, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, pp. v-vi.

⁶² Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 58.

⁶³ Stewart, 'The Old Cost of the Human Redemption' (chapter 6 of *American Literature and Christian Doctrine* (1958)) cited from *Regionalism and Beyond: Essays of Randall Stewart*, ed. by George Core (Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), pp. 194-215 (pp. 194-5).

⁶⁴ Stewart wrote in the article 'Three Views of the Individual as Reflected in American Identity', published in 1944: 'The individual as individual has withered – so much so that the terms "individual," "individualistic," "individualism," at least in some quarters, are no longer quite respectable. (I was a little shocked to read in a recent book by a distinguished professor of English a reference to "the Philistine dogma of self-help." It had never occurred to me to apply the term 'Philistine' to Emerson and Edwards and the many other representatives of the humane tradition.); *Regionalism*, pp. 162-171 (p. 169).

⁶⁵ Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, pp. 19, 31.

⁶⁶ Cf. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), pp. 179-181, especially. p. 181: '...**liberal** as a term of political discourse is complex. It has been under regular and heavy attack from conservative positions, where the senses of lack of restraint and lack of discipline have been brought to bear, and also the sense of a (weak and sentimental) generosity. ...Against this kind of attack, **liberal** has often been a group term for PROGRESSIVE and RADICAL... opinions, and is still clear in this sense, notably in USA. But **liberal** as a pejorative term has also been widely used by socialists and especially Marxists. This use shares the conservative sense of lack of rigour and of weak and sentimental beliefs. Thus far it is interpreted by **liberals** as a familiar complaint, and there is a special edge in their reply to socialists, that they are concerned with political freedom and that socialists are not. But this masks the most serious sense of the socialist use, which is the historically accurate observation that **liberalism** is a doctrine based on INDIVIDUALIST... theories of man and society and is thus in fundamental conflict not only with SOCIALIST... but with most strictly SOCIAL... theories. The further observation, that **liberalism** is the highest form of thought developed within BOURGEOIS... society and in terms of CAPITALISM..., is also relevant, for when **liberal** is not being used as a loose swear-word, it is to this mixture of liberating and limiting ideas that it is intended

The uses of the biographical genre in America have been specific and diverse, and there is therefore no such thing as a monolithic institution or tradition of American biography. However, it is possible to identify recurring areas of dissent and conflict in critical positions in relation to the genre. In its ensuing sections the present chapter approaches the inherently political nature of American biography by asking the following questions: how is American biography situated within Western biographical practices? How does the Puritan rhetorical legacy affect the way American biographies are written? To what extent do American biographies participate in the discourses of American 'exceptionalism' and an ideological 'consensus'? Does 'exceptionalist' rhetoric feed into biography and vice versa? What role has Harold Nicolson's distinction between 'impure' and 'pure' biography played in an American context?⁶⁷ Specifically, what approaches have there been in American biographical theory and practice towards the 'usableness' of biography and the storytelling impulse inscribed in the genre on the one hand, and the need for and the methods to achieve historical truth on the other?⁶⁸ And, finally, in what ways is biography seen to function politically as a means of ideological consent or dissent? But first, to create greater clarity, it will be helpful to tackle a point of nomenclature.

1.2 American Biographies and 'American Biography'

Scott Casper suggests a useful distinction between 'American biographies' and 'American biography' for biography in nineteenth-century America, which I have adopted and adapted here. 'American biographies' is the more comprehensive term,

to refer. **Liberalism** is then a doctrine of certain necessary kinds of freedom, but also, and essentially, a doctrine of possessive individualism'.

For a very recent article discussing these contradictory meanings of the term 'liberalism' and recommending alternative 'insults' for the use of the American left and right against their respective opponents see 'Political Vocabulary: There's a Word for That' in *The Economist*, 6 November 2004, p. 14.

⁶⁷ See Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (Hogarth Lectures on Literature, London: The Hogarth Press, 1927), especially pp. 8-10.

⁶⁸ The notion of the 'usableness' of the past will become important in Chapter 2 in my discussion of Van Wyck Brooks, who coined it in the essay 'On Creating a Usable Past' (1918), and those critics who adopted or adapted his terminology.

denoting any biographies produced or published in America and including works on non-American subjects or written by non-American authors. The term ‘American biography’ is much more specific:

‘American biography,’ as discussed by nineteenth-century authors and critics, had national connotations. It became a rallying cry at various points in the century, for instance when early-national leaders sought to establish a uniquely American culture. It also described American-written lives of figures associated with the nation: the life of a Revolutionary hero in [Jared] Sparks’s *Library of American Biography*, but not the religious memoir of a pious Connecticut woman written by her minister.⁶⁹

The usefulness of Casper’s definition is not restricted to the discussion of nineteenth-century biography; I want to argue against his last point, however, that, even if biographies do not ostensibly or consciously participate in the consolidation of American national identity, they can still be implicated in such a consolidation: if the subject is portrayed in relation to a framework of a representatively American life, for which piety, for example, could be a marker, then we are dealing with ‘American biography’.

Casper cautions us immediately that ‘neither the texts called “American biographies” nor the concept of “American biography” was [sic] synonymous with the American *experience* of biography’ (ibid., italics added); actual readers brought to bear on biographies something he calls the ‘biographical imagination’, a ‘proclivity to see individual lives as stories: not merely sequences of events or episodes, but totalities with a certain coherence’ (p. 14). This has important implications: firstly, the distinction between biography and certain kinds of fiction became blurred because they fulfilled similar functions for nineteenth-century readers. They entertained, but they also provided behavioral models which readers might seek to imitate (or eschew), with the result that they might conceive of, and ultimately even tell, their own lives as such stories. Secondly, if the ‘biographical imagination’ tends to translate events and lives into stories, then the impulse towards a narrative reshaping of history is inscribed not just in the act of writing a biography, but also in the act of reading one; readers of biographies are not mere passive recipients but participate in constructing the lives they

⁶⁹ Casper, *Constructing*, p. 13.

read. Wolfgang Iser observes that in literary texts, and there is no reason why biographies should be excluded from this statement, 'the message is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader "receives" it by composing it'.⁷⁰ A third implication, which follows from the second, is that even merely formulaic accounts might have a lot more to offer the contemporaneous reader than is obvious at first glance; Jane Tompkins's argument applies here, which states that nineteenth-century readers read stereotyped characters in sentimental novels as a kind of shorthand which was able to 'convey enormous amounts of cultural information in an extremely condensed form'.⁷¹ Fourthly, and most importantly, the fact that biographies, both at the writing and at the reading end, tend to organize themselves into cohesive narratives poses a question which practitioners and theorists of the genre have tried to answer in manifold ways throughout the twentieth century: can biographical narrative and objectivity be reconciled?

I have adapted the term 'American biography' by opening it up in two temporal directions. Firstly, one of the problems at stake in this chapter is to what extent biography in colonial America, before the concept of America as a nation was available, can be read as 'American biography'.⁷² This is relevant because it is necessary to investigate possible implications of biographical practice in colonial America for the ways in which biographies have later come to be produced in the United States. Secondly, and more importantly, I ask throughout this thesis whether individual Hawthorne biographies can be read under the category 'American biography', for instance through their implication in the institutionalization of American literature as a national literature, or their constructions of Hawthorne as a representative or exemplary American/individual. Many American biographies deliberately aim to affirm American values, either positively, or through the inverted form of the jeremiad; others are ideological in the sense that they are simply unaware of their use of consensus rhetoric. Rob Wilson warns that 'even the most textually scrupulous literary biographies, wary of entrenched language and dead metaphors, risk enacting an American "rhetoric of

⁷⁰ Wolfgang Iser, 'Interaction between Text and Reader' in *The Book History Reader*, ed. by Finkelstein and McCleery, pp. 291-296 (pp. 291-2).

⁷¹ Tompkins, *Sensational*, p. xvi.

⁷² In opposition to the usage of the term 'American' by someone like, for example, James Cox, who equates 'the birth of America' with the 'separation from England' (Cox, *Recovering*, p. 16).

consensus” and thereby end up affirming liberal values and moral symbols’.⁷³ One of the questions asked in this thesis is whether the Hawthorne biographies investigated here participate in this rhetoric: can a ‘rallying cry’ for ‘a uniquely American culture’ be heard in twentieth-century Hawthorne biographies, and if so, does that make them less or more worthy of scholarly attention?

It is important here to point out another implication of ‘American biography’. If biographical subject, author and audience are all American, and if examples of American biography have as their intrinsic theme America as a nation, then we are confronted with systems of overlapping frames of reference: the biographer talks to the audience about something in which they inevitably have a stake – America. This would not necessarily be the case if the biographer were writing about, say, Mary, Queen of Scots, or Genghis Khan, although it is of course possible for an American biographer to encode American concerns in the biography of a non-American figure. Far less significant is which period in American history the biographical subject inhabited. Unlike, for example, the history of Germany or the states of the former Yugoslavia, American history is marked by continuity, and events and lives are comprehended as analogous to others: the romantic period was somehow like the Great Awakening; the Civil War bore a resemblance to the War of Revolution (‘Four score and seven years ago...’); the 1920s can profitably be compared to the 1850s; the McCarthyist crusade of the 1950s can be understood in terms of the Salem witch hunt of 1692. Such parallels are to a large extent contingent on the typological way of thinking that interpreted the Puritan migration to the North American continent as a repetition of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land. By implication, one’s own life as an American is part of this American history and is thus prefigured by, and explicable through, the life stories of others. It is, ultimately, the role of both the writer and the reader to embrace or resist such correspondences, and ‘American biography’, therefore, implies the mutual participation of author and audience in a political activity.

⁷³ Rob Wilson, ‘Producing American Selves: The Form of American Biography’ in Epstein (ed.), *Contesting the Subject*, pp. 167-192 (p. 174). Wilson here uses the term ‘liberal’ to refer pejoratively to conservative concepts, as noted above.

1.3 Biography as an Anglo-American Genre

Catherine Parke is among the many commentators who have observed that biography and autobiography are distinctively Western genres, whose flourishing is predicated on the development of a capitalist economy, an imperialist drive toward expansionism, and a class structure with a strong, literate middle-class with a belief in empirical science and romantic individualism.⁷⁴ If we wanted, with the New Critic Alan Tate, to single out Descartes as the instigator of modernity, who ‘isolated thought from man’s total being [and] isolated him from nature, including his own nature’,⁷⁵ then ‘Cogito, ergo sum’ emerges as the essential precondition of both biography and autobiography: if ‘I am’ and ‘I think’ are our fundamental certainties, then ‘I’ becomes isolated as a position from which we are able to look both outside and inside. ‘I’ becomes the Archimedean stable place, from which it is possible to apply a lever to the world.⁷⁶ Thus, the ‘Cogito’ provides us with the concepts of ‘self’ (I who thinks – the investigator) and of ‘other’ (that which I think about – the subject); but by separating ‘am’ and ‘think’ it also provides us with ourselves as subjects of investigation and thus makes autobiography possible.

Michael Shapiro suggests that it is undesirable to distinguish sharply between biography and autobiography, or even to ‘classify[...] works as a whole into biographical and nonbiographical genres’. He makes the case that between the Freudian position, which argues that the biographer’s self narcissistically inscribes itself in the text and thus turns it into a form of autobiography, and the poststructuralist position, according to which the author is displaced by the text’s linguistic, rhetorical and narrative structures, such a distinction would be futile.⁷⁷ While I agree that those two positions are useful for our understanding of how biographies are constructed and how

⁷⁴ Parke, *Biography*, pp. 31-32; see also James Clifford, “‘Hanging Up Looking Glasses at Odd Corners’: Ethnobiographical Prospects’ in *Studies in Biography*, ed. by Daniel Aaron, pp. 41-56 (p. 44).

⁷⁵ Alan Tate, ‘The Man of Letters in the Modern World’ in *American Critical Essays: Twentieth Century*, ed. by Harold Beaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 129-143 (p. 131). The hostility of New Criticism towards biography is discussed in Chapter 3.

⁷⁶ The most literal translation of Archimedes’s well-known dictum is ‘Give me where to stand, and I will move the earth’ (see Emily Morison Beck (ed.), *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations* (14th ed., Boston: Little, Brown, 1968), p. 105).

⁷⁷ Michael J. Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp. 60-61.

we can read them, I believe it is vital to maintain the distinction between biography and autobiography, because, crucially, biography rests on very different epistemological assumptions than autobiography. While autobiography, according to Jürgen Schlaeger, is ‘a discourse of anxiety’, biography is ‘a discourse of usurpation’. Autobiographers ‘have to be true to themselves and true to the image they would like to present to the public or to posterity’. In contrast, the ‘truth-criterion’ in biography ‘does not consist in the authenticity of an inside view but in the consistency of the narrative and the explanatory power of the arguments’.⁷⁸ Biography is thus concerned with mastery and control: the genre rests on the positivist assumption that a subject can be known from the outside, and that this knowledge can be organized for consumption by an audience. But unlike autobiography, which also relies on looking at a (past) self from outside, biography assumes a position of authority, a position that is dependent on the poise of objectivity being rigorously maintained. In autobiography, author and subject are identical: even if it can be argued that the interventions of time and reflection or analysis loosen this identity, autobiography is still primarily concerned with self, while biography deals with an ‘other’ which is to be mastered through explanation. In biography we see a triangulation between author, subject, and audience, in which author and audience are in a communicative relationship, whereas the biographical subject becomes the subject matter or theme of the discourse: the biographer tells the audience about the subject. However, as we will see below (section 1.4), in certain modes of ‘American biography’ an identity between all three vertices of this triangulation is achieved: the biographer, by writing the biography of a hero of the past, writes the biography of his community and therefore his own; he becomes not merely an authority, but a prophet.

The relationship between an autobiography and a biography of the same subject is frequently agonistic (as is the relationship between several biographies of the same subject), because any new biographical effort implies the insufficiency of previous ones. One assumption is that biographies are prepared to disclose blunders and weaknesses that the subjects might have suppressed in their autobiographies; another, reinforced by the influence of psychoanalysis on biography, is that biographies, because their

⁷⁸ Jürgen Schlaeger, ‘Biography: Cult as Culture’ in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. by John Batchelor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 57-71 (p. 59).

assessments are not clouded by repressive impulses, are better able to gauge their subjects' 'real' motives than the subjects are themselves.⁷⁹ This notion, that the biographer is better qualified to understand the subject, and can be expected to explicate him or her more reliably than the autobiographer can understand and explain her- or himself, has become central in proportion with the increased currency of scientific, medical and psychoanalytical discourses. It was dominant during most of the twentieth century until the categories and dichotomies on which those discourses rest – identity, self/other, the determinacy of language – were challenged by structuralist and post-structuralist theories, especially by deconstruction.⁸⁰ Of particular importance in this context is Derrida's formulation 'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte', which he specifically situates in relation to the problem of biography in '...That Dangerous Supplement...'. In this analysis of Rousseau's *Confessions* he points out not merely the sheer textuality of the evidence; more radically, he argues that the entities (self, other people, Nature) about which Rousseau was writing were not available to him other than as substitutions or traces and were inseparable from the act of describing them.

[I]n what one calls the real life of these existences 'of flesh and bone,' beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, *in the text*, that the absolute presence, Nature, that which words like 'real mother' name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence.⁸¹

Thus 'meaning' is only possible when experience is formulated and transformed into language. The following passage from *Limited Inc* provides a useful gloss on Derrida's terminology:

What I call 'text' implies all the structures called 'real,' 'economic,' 'historical,' 'socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once

⁷⁹ See Ellis, *Literary Lives*, p. 9.

⁸⁰ See Norman Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, vol. 17, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1989), pp. 44-47.

⁸¹ Jacques Derrida, '...That Dangerous Supplement...' in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 76-109 (pp. 102).

again that ‘there is nothing outside the text.’ That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed. ...But it does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this ‘real’ except in an interpretive experience.⁸²

Thus, for Derrida, the signification of a ‘life’ – in the sense of the ‘differential traces’ that are the only way the ‘real’ is accessible to us but also in the sense of the writing generated out of an engagement with those traces (e.g. biographical texts themselves) – lies in the very act of reading, which is always already a kind of writing. Derrida does not suggest that the ‘real’ is irrelevant – it is ‘of prime interest to us’;⁸³ what he does contend is that we need to rethink the processes of signification.

Hawthorne’s writings (letters, journals, fictions, prefaces), the chief sources used by his biographers, lend themselves very readily to be read in this way, for Hawthorne constantly dramatizes in his writings the impossibility of full presence. Identity is endlessly deferred. For instance, in the introduction to his short story ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’ he attributes the piece to a M. de l’Aubépine (fr. Hawthorne) whose work he proceeds to review. One of his criticisms of Aubépine’s opus is that it is characterized by ‘an inveterate love of allegory’ (CE 10, p. 91), which is one of the main criticisms leveled at Hawthorne himself not just by his contemporaries but even more so by later critics. It is impossible to decide which of these persons, Aubépine or the author of the preface, is invested by Hawthorne himself and we therefore cannot tell if Hawthorne is affirming or undermining his own critical reception: he is playing games with identity and with the language and content of the reviews of his work. He goes on to undermine all possible readings of the story, and indeed of any of his works, in advance: ‘...M. de l’Aubépine’s productions, if the reader chance to take them in precisely the proper point of view, may amuse a leisure hour as well as those of a brighter man; if otherwise, they can hardly fail to look excessively like nonsense’ (p. 92). Hawthorne does not discourage us from attempting a reading of the story, but refuses to authorize any interpretation that we are likely to come up with – if his texts look like nonsense it is because we haven’t looked at them from ‘precisely the proper point of view’. This is not

⁸² Derrida, ‘Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion’, in *Limited Inc*, ed. by Gerald Graff (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 111-160 (p. 148).

⁸³ Derrida, ‘Supplement’, p. 102.

the only preface in which he plays with his identity and similar games characterize his letters, and especially his letters to Sophia in which not only his own but also her identity undergoes numerous transmutations. In the opening lines of a single letter he addresses her as 'Most beloved Amelia' (her middle name, which, he says, 'I shall call you... sometimes in playfulness'), 'Sophie' ('the name by which my soul recognizes you'), and 'Dove' (which 'is the true word after all') (CE 15, p. 320). All these are supplements for the 'real', absent Sophia.

A realization somewhat like Derrida's judgment that 'what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence' is behind James Mellow's frustration at having to make choices in his pronouncements on Hawthorne's life:

[S]ummary assessments – Hawthorne's 'view' of the slavery problem or his opinion of Margaret Fuller, for example – neatly packaged in a paragraph or two and intended to stand for all time as the definitive evaluation of Hawthorne's mind on many subjects, became increasingly unsatisfactory. What Hawthorne (who was a master of ambiguity and evasion) felt on a particular day and in a particular set of circumstances may not have been what he thought on the following morning, much less a year later. I began to think of a biography (or a biographical method) in which everything – the circumstances of the moment, the topical opinions and impressions of the day – would be held in continuous solution, never allowed to crystallize out into falsifying summary assessments. ...That, obviously, was an impossible ideal; in biography as in life, one inevitably makes such judgments....⁸⁴

As soon as a phrase is put down all the other expressions that could have been chosen instead disappear. Mellow is well aware that his idea of keeping meaning in suspension is a fantasy. However, it is by committing oneself to an expression that meaning is generated because it is at this point that someone (oneself, a hearer or a reader) can engage with it, as Derrida suggests.

However, few Hawthorne biographers have expressed this kind of doubt. Biography has shown itself in practice to be remarkably resistant to theories that challenge the notion of a stable self that is available for investigation, a tendency which is particularly strong in a frame of reference within which the term biography is wedded to the notion of an 'Anglo-American' socio-political and cultural essence.⁸⁵ It is frequently affirmed that biography is a genre that is practiced and valued more in Britain

⁸⁴ Mellow, *Hawthorne in His Times*, p. 594.

⁸⁵ See Clifford, "'Hanging Up'", passim; Schlaeger, 'Biography', passim.

and the United States than in other Western countries. 'Biography has risen in the English speaking world but not elsewhere', as Michael Holroyd notes.⁸⁶ A striking instance of this view is expressed by the biographer Nigel Hamilton. Germans and 'Frenchmen', Hamilton argues, 'generally prove hopeless biographers' because they find it 'difficult to concentrate upon the man rather than the work'.⁸⁷ The Anglo-American biographer, in contrast, remains 'objective' and is capable of considering the subject separately from his works or acts, 'which, like a spider's web, may all too easily ensnare him'; therefore, he can make 'a contribution to *belles lettres* that goes far deeper than any German or Frenchman can understand – to the very heart of civilized, free and democratic society' (p. 117). For Hamilton, civilization, freedom, and democracy – the hallmarks of liberalism in its sense as an individualist and capitalist doctrine – are synonymous with British and American national character, which is marked by a commitment to the twin democratic values of individualism and patriotism. Biography, which satisfies 'the right of the reader to know, to be informed' (p. 116), is, literally, the genre that safeguards these virtues: 'Biography', he declares, 'is a matter of life and death: the test of a nation's ability to look at itself with honesty and balance' (p. 116). Clearly, England and the United States are here seen as the exemplary nations of the West, which other nations, like France and Germany – much less geared towards individualism, according to Hamilton, and thus prone to communal excesses (like the French Revolution, fascism, or, he would probably want to add, communism) – should try to emulate. According to Hamilton, biography means 'deliberate distancing', the 'attempt to stand back and chronicle the man's life as a human being, a man of flesh and blood, capable of error and deceit as well as great art' (p. 115). He believes that British and American biographers find it easier to accomplish such a 'distancing' because 'the average Anglo-American is suspicious of theory and ideas – the one leading to National Socialism and the other the excesses of the French Revolution. "First show me your man – then let me listen to what he has to say" is our unspoken injunction' (p. 106). Hamilton's article provides an extremely formulated, yet characteristic instance of the

⁸⁶ Michael Holroyd, 'How I Fell into Biography', in *The Troubled Face of Biography*, ed. by Eric Homberger and John Charmley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 94-103 (p. 99).

⁸⁷ Nigel Hamilton, 'Thomas Mann' in *The Craft of Literary Biography*, ed. by Jeffrey Meyers (1985), pp. 106-117 (p. 106).

recommendation of the hero's father in Disraeli's *Contarini Fleming*, quoted at the head of the present chapter, to prefer biography to history because it is 'life without theory'.

Justin Kaplan, too, observes that '[b]iography as we know it is a largely Anglo-American phenomenon'. But he takes a much more negative view than Hamilton:

Other societies draw a stricter line than we do between public and private arenas, between the work and the life. ... We assume we have a right to know everything about other people. This includes knowing what they 'do' in bed... even though it can be argued that this may have only a strained connection with what they do out in the world.⁸⁸

While Hamilton's conclusion that Anglo-Americans 'have so far avoided the tyranny of a Napoleon or a Hitler' (p. 115) because of their interest in the private as well as (even: rather than) the public person is patently absurd, it is also highly symptomatic. It accounts, for example, for the interest in the private lives of the candidates during presidential elections in the United States: 'First show me your candidate's moral character, then let me listen to his political program', is the injunction here. It thus also explains the existence of American campaign biographies, a genre to which Nathaniel Hawthorne himself contributed with his 1852 biography of his friend Franklin Pierce, the Democratic presidential candidate. Campaign biography first became a common practice during the 1824 elections when all candidates 'identified themselves with the Jeffersonian Republican party. In the absence of partisan difference, individuals' character and qualifications became a central issue, and the presentation of character assumed new importance'.⁸⁹ 'According to most [nineteenth-century campaign] biographers', as Casper observes, 'citizens had the right and the duty to learn about those who would lead them'.⁹⁰ Hamilton, Kaplan and Casper all use the word 'right' in conjunction with 'to know' or 'to learn' about the private lives of others; this use recalls the concept and the language of the amendments to the United States Constitution, which form the American 'Bill of Rights' and which are replete with the word 'right'

⁸⁸ Justin Kaplan, 'A Culture of Biography' in *The Literary Biography: Problems and Solutions*, ed. by Dale Salwak (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 1-11 (p. 1).

⁸⁹ Casper, *Constructing*, p. 95.

⁹⁰ Scott E. Casper, 'The Two Lives of Franklin Pierce: Hawthorne, Political Culture, and the Literary Market', *American Literary History*, 5.2 (1993), 203-230 (p. 206).

itself.⁹¹ These uses of the word ‘right’ show how deeply the conviction is ingrained, in an American context, that the lives of public figures belong to the public. Hamilton’s argument that biography is a tool for democracy and freedom is based on the notion that biographers need to convince readers, and that biography therefore implies an element of choice and thus of freedom. On the other hand, however, by representing certain life trajectories as normative and by focusing on subjects’ personalities rather than on the social, economic and political forces shaping their lives, biography can eliminate the notion that there are alternatives to an ideological position; that is Shapiro’s argument when he asserts that certain kinds of ‘biographical scripting tend to reinforce existing control structures in a society’.⁹²

1.4 ‘Auto-American-Biography’: the Biographer as Prophet of America

James Boswell’s *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) tends to be cited as the ‘supreme example’ of the biographical genre,⁹³ and the American academic David Wheeler makes a point of establishing his own nation’s stake in this cultural heritage when he states (and please note the possessive pronoun) that ‘Boswell’s biography [of Johnson is] arguably the best-known biography in our possession’.⁹⁴ Rob Wilson, in contrast, asserts that:

the archetypal American biographer is not James Boswell – as might be, and has been, professionally assumed – but Cotton Mather, that omnivorous minister of colonial Boston whose typological predisposition turned his New England subjects into so many messianic types on an ‘errand in the [Massachusetts] wilderness’ to redeem the social collective as well as to sanctify the labor of the private self.⁹⁵

Wilson thus emphasizes that, from its very beginnings, American biographical practice departed from developments of the genre in England; its principal thrust was ‘typological’, i.e. it drew parallels between Biblical events and the experiences of the Puritans who had emigrated to the new continent. But according to Sacvan Bercovitch,

⁹¹ See Tindall and Shi, *America*, pp. 324-6.

⁹² Shapiro, *Politics*, p. 65.

⁹³ J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. 84.

⁹⁴ David Wheeler, ‘Introduction: The Uses of Johnson’s Biographies’ in *Domestick Privacies: Samuel Johnson and the Art of Biography*, ed. by David Wheeler (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1987), pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

Cotton Mather's biographical methods in *Magnalia Christi Americana*, written during the 1690s and published in London in 1702, also bespeak his 'place in the main currents of English biography of his time'.⁹⁶ Biography in America remained interdependent with developments of the genre in Britain, but the genre also diverged significantly with its relocation to the North American continent.

Most of the early literature of colonial New England – sermons, historiography, biography, diaries, narratives of Indian captivity – was in some way auto/biographical, for the need to recognize 'visible sainthood' in oneself and others necessitated self-examination, and the holding up of others as examples of virtue or warnings against sinfulness. Madsen notes: 'The search for signs of God's approval, and ultimate salvation, or signs of God's wrath, and ultimate damnation occupies Puritan diaries, histories and biographies'.⁹⁷ In the early Puritan settlements it was indeed every individual's concern 'to know, to be informed' about one's own and one's neighbors' state of spiritual election: '...Puritan authors believed that the lives of the individual and of the group were inseparable. ...The spiritual journey of a single soul became a community drama that served as a paradigm for the plight of the congregation just as the well-being of the congregation was reflected in each member'.⁹⁸ Therefore, the decisive quality of early American biography, and related genres, was its social and community-building function, for which these biographical genres were the most fitting tools, as Mason Lowance explains:

For all the Puritan life-writers, the experience of eminent figures became the most prominent means of articulating New England's place in providential history. Both biography and autobiography were governed by this overriding concern, and the objectives of the historians as well as the biographers remained constant: to prove that New England and her people stood in a particular relation to God. Cotton

⁹⁵ Wilson, 'Producing', p. 168, additions in square brackets are Wilson's.

⁹⁶ Bercovitch stresses that Mather's *Magnalia* moves well within the boundaries described by late seventeenth and eighteenth-century English biography: '[Mather's] Lives report mainly what serves, or can be made to serve, his didactic ends. But the same reservation applies to biography throughout the eighteenth century. Exceptions may be found, but by and large the art of biography from Roper through Walton to Johnson forms a transitional mode between hagiography and modern biography. Though it insists on details, it forces them into the framework of the ideal. Its aim is to teach by use of examples. It rebels against medieval allegorization without really allowing for realism, in our empirical sense of the term'; Bercovitch suggests to call this transitional mode 'exemplary biography' (*Puritan Origins*, p. 4).

⁹⁷ Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 3.

⁹⁸ Emory Elliott, 'New England Puritan Literature' in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch (8 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1:169-306 (p. 1:205).

Mather's conviction that history should be the biography of saints derived from a commonly shared belief that scriptural history itself worked in this manner, and that the Bible was a compilation of achievements among God's chosen people, so that their story was best told through biographical and autobiographical narratives.⁹⁹

Biography and autobiography are the genres that most clearly articulate the relationship between the individual (the subject/writer of the auto/biography) and the collective (the subject's social group, but also the readership of the work). Some types of fiction can, in their own historical moments, fulfill similar social functions, but only because readers know how to read fictional characters acting in a fictional environment as representatively acting out the destinies of 'real people' in the 'real world'.¹⁰⁰ Biography and autobiography are in fact the genres on which these strategies of writing and reading rest. Thus, biographical writings, including autobiographical narratives and diaries, and historical writings were the most important literary means of formulating, preserving, and passing on the message of firstly the Puritan colonists, and later of Americans as an exemplary people. Bercovitch, himself a Canadian immigrant to the United States, calls the 'rhetoric of American identity' a 'central aspect of *our* Puritan legacy'.¹⁰¹

Bercovitch's book *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, an investigation of Puritan biographical practice, concentrates particularly on one of the lives in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*. This is the life of John Winthrop, the first governor of New England, who is re-imagined by Mather as 'Nehemias Americanus', Nehemiah being the biblical figure who 'led the Israelites back from Babylon to their promised land' (p. 1). In a central passage Bercovitch declares:

Mythographers tell us that the heroic 'superindividual' provides a model of tribal identity, and that the mythic rituals, by reenacting the exploits of the patriarchs, transform biography (in Lévi Strauss's phrase) into a 'form of history of a higher

⁹⁹ Mason I. Lowance, Jr., 'Biography and Autobiography' in *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, ed. by Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 67-82 (p. 69).

¹⁰⁰ Genres such as allegory (for example the 'Character' in Restoration England, or Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*), nineteenth-century American sentimental fictions, or the realist novel all had competent readers who could imaginatively restore the 'real' which was encoded in these texts. This, however, is not intended to minimize the inherent problems with the mimetic function of fiction, on which see for example Thomas Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

¹⁰¹ Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, p. ix, my italics.

power than itself'. Some such motives inform Mather's biographies. Only *his* superindividual is America itself, microcosm of the worldwide work of redemption and macrocosm of the redemptive work underway in each of its chosen people. Thus he obviates history by inverting it into a still higher form of narrative. Perhaps the best description of this form is auto-American-biography, where the central term, 'American,' referring as it does to a futuristic ideal, transforms the tribal ritual from a social mode of personal fulfillment into a personal mode of social fulfillment. In sum, it reconstitutes national prophecy and spiritual biography as prophetic autobiography. American Puritan hermeneutics begins by asserting the unique status of the community; it finds its amplest expression... in the unique powers it confers upon the solitary 'true perceiver' (p. 134).

Within Bercovitch's anthropological framework Denzin's definition of ethnography as the '[w]ritten account of a culture or group' and auto-ethnography as the '[a]ccount of one's life as an ethnographer' provides a useful entry point.¹⁰² The term auto-ethnography thus implies something qualitatively different from straightforward autobiography (giving an account of one's life): it directly incorporates the context and environment in which self-experience is achieved into its meaning. Bercovitch's term 'auto-American-biography' implies a similar entwinement of biographer and environment, but in his case the ethnographer is not a visiting stranger who has arrived from outside; when this biographer addresses the fate of his community his own is included in the discourse. Therefore, as the individual with the special gift of envisioning and interpreting past and future, he assumes a central place in the community and in the narrative itself. This 'prophetic' biographer 'obviates history' by rhetorically collapsing several time periods into one another. Ursula Brumm defines typology as 'a form of prophecy which sets two successive events into a reciprocal relation of anticipation and fulfillment'; referring to this definition, Sollors adds: 'Fulfillment generally implies not just repetition but also a heightening and overshadowing of the original event'.¹⁰³ Thus, A (the biographical subject) is compared to B (a figure from biblical history/cultural mythology): B anticipates A; A in turn fulfills B, and amounts to B's 'second coming'. Thus, a further projection into the future

¹⁰² He also argues, with Derrida, that every term in the word-field of biography (biography, autobiography, story, history, life history, life story, etc.) 'carries traces of other terms' and that the 'meanings of each 'spill over into the meanings of the other' (Denzin, *Interpretive Biography*, pp. 47-48).

¹⁰³ Ursula Brumm, *American Thought and Religious Typology*, translated by John Hoaglund (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p. 27; Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 41.

is implied, for the 'second coming' of an Old Testament patriarch or a civic or military hero creates the anticipation of an even more important 'second coming' and thus feeds into the great millenarian expectations, for the Puritans of the second coming of Christ, and in a secularized context of the coming greatness of America. The present, the moment of the biography and of the biographer, is thus rendered 'intermediate between fulfillment and greater fulfillment'.¹⁰⁴ The biographer, who explains the past and the future, thus writes himself into the center of the biographical stage.

A useful gloss on this process is provided by Michael Gilmore in an analysis of the rhetoric of funeral orations for revolutionary leaders during the time of the American revolution and the early Republic; Gilmore notes how:

[t]he deceased appears less as an individualized figure than as an emblem or symbol contrived for the purpose of instructing an audience. ...By treating the dead as a kind of cultural ideal, the eulogist seeks in effect to compose the collective biography of an entire people. Thus, the true subject of the eulogy is the speaker and his community rather than the character and career of the person nominally portrayed.¹⁰⁵

In such 'collective' biography the importance of the biographer as the one who constructs it is underscored, for he or she is the person who, through selection, arrangement and emphasis, creates the biographical story that is useful for the community. In early twentieth-century Britain Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf confirmed the autonomous status of the biographer as artist; in an American context we may also have to think of the biographer as the potential prophet of an ideal America.

1.5 American Biography and American 'Exceptionalism'

Robert Sayre notes that 'American autobiography is different from the autobiographies of other nations simply in the degree to which Americans are and are not different'. There are overlaps and similarities between the inhabitants of the United States and those of other nations, but the decisive difference is that 'American autobiographers have generally connected their own lives to the national life or to national ideas'. This

¹⁰⁴ Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, p. 130.

'identification of autobiography *in America with America*' goes so far that it has restricted the degree of accomplishment within the genre: 'An American seems to have needed to be an American first and then an autobiographer, and this places some limits on his or her achievement'.¹⁰⁶ I have noted above that, similar to the development Sayre describes for autobiography, American biography has tended to be regarded as inferior to English biography. Crucially, Sayre analyses this problem in terms of exceptionalism.

The concept of 'American exceptionalism', which describes, most basically, 'the American difference, the ways in which the United States varies from the rest of the world',¹⁰⁷ has in recent decades, and especially in the 1990s, been more systematically investigated, defined, and criticized than ever before.¹⁰⁸ The concept can be traced back to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1848). When Tocqueville noted that '[t]he position of the Americans is... quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one', he put this difference down, among other causes, to the 'strictly Puritanical origin' of the American people, 'their exclusively commercial habits, even the country they inhabit'.¹⁰⁹ In the mid-nineteenth century many (though not all) Americans themselves shared a belief in the Puritan origins and commercial orientation of their culture, and they felt that the possibilities implied in the 'empty' continent made them different from the inhabitants of other nations.¹¹⁰ However, there is a problem concerning the question to which extent these

¹⁰⁵ Michael T. Gilmore, 'Eulogy as Symbolic Biography: The Iconography of Revolutionary Leadership, 1776-1826' in Aaron (ed.), *Studies in Biography*, pp. 131-157 (p. 131).

¹⁰⁶ Sayre, 'Autobiography', pp. 149, 147.

¹⁰⁷ Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. especially Byron E. Shafer (ed.), *Is America Different? A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*; Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*.

¹⁰⁹ It is noteworthy that when Tocqueville discusses the exceptional nature of America, his conclusion is that American democracy cannot serve as an example for other nations: 'Let us cease, then, to view all democratic nations under the example of the American people, and attempt to survey them at length with their own features' (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: The Henry Reeve Text as Revised by Francis Bowen*, ed. by Phillips Bradley (2 vols., New York: Vintage Books, 1945), p. 2:38). This is an issue where the use of the concept of American exceptionalism divides between those who agree with Tocqueville, like, a century later, the historian Daniel Boorstin in *The Genius of American Politics* ((Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 1), and those who see 'exceptional' as meaning 'exemplary'.

¹¹⁰ For the pervasiveness of the belief in Puritan origins see Bercovitch, *Rites*, p. 6, and Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, passim. For the 'commercial habits' of the Americans and their derivation from Puritan attitudes see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin University Books, 1930), especially pp. 48-56. For the belief concerning the possibilities of the American continent see e.g. John L. O'Sullivan speaking, in an article in favor of the

beliefs were shared, i.e. to which extent there was a *consensus* as to the nature of American culture and society. The question at stake here is: how – given the diversity of American society – can such a consensus come about? Why would immigrants, members of a displaced indigenous population, the descendants of African slaves, identify with/assent to the values of the ‘host’ culture, when that culture is largely derived from the narrow root of Calvinist Anglo-Saxon New England?

This consensus has two main components, which are inextricably interlinked. On the one hand it is constituted by an actual identification with American values which, although they have been constantly redefined throughout American history, are centered around notions of individualism, egalitarianism, opportunity, and anti-statism (the notion that ‘That government is best which governs least’). On the other hand the consensus is based on a pervasive rhetoric, a system of signs, symbols and correlations which is constituted by linguistic and semiotic structures.

Both sets of components are, however, liable to shifting and can be appropriated and subverted. We have already seen examples of the fluidity and the mutations of concepts like individualism and liberalism. Henry David Thoreau’s appropriation of the slogan ‘That government is best which governs least’, the motto on the masthead of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, is also a case in point: by citing it at the beginning of ‘Resistance to Civil Government’, an essay protesting the Mexican War, he effectively directs the phrase back against its original context, for O’Sullivan, the editor of the *Democratic Review*, was a major promoter of the annexation of Texas.¹¹¹ This is an instance of what Robert Graves calls ‘iconotropy’, the deliberate misinterpretation and appropriation of sacred icons or rites by members of another culture: ‘In iconotropy the icons are not defaced or altered, but merely interpreted in a sense hostile to the original cult’.¹¹² Crucial in Thoreau’s argumentative move is the fact that he does not deny the validity of the original phrase; it is his strategy to show that his

annexation of Texas, of ‘our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions’ (‘Annexation’, *The United States Democratic Review*, 17:85-86 (July-August 1845), 5-10 (p. 5)). For an article in which Puritan origins and westward expansion are explicitly linked, see ‘The Puritan Element in the American Character’, *New Englander and Yale Review*, 9:36 (1851), 531-544.

¹¹¹ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, ed. by William Rossi (2nd ed., New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), p. 226; see O’Sullivan, ‘Annexation’.

own beliefs provide a more appropriate context for it. Werner Sollors demonstrates that newcomers to the United States, but also other groups already present, have tended to adopt typological narratives as models to describe their own experiences of actual or spiritual migration:

Once the New-England Puritans had so deeply ingrained the connections between Bible and process toward a prophesied American destiny by consent, later newcomers and other groups could find typology similarly resonant with their own experiences, interests, and hopes – or phrase their divergent interests and aspirations, including their fire-and-brimstone assaults on Puritanism, in the available rhetorical forms. ...The theologizing experience and the need for new images of group emergence thus found a compelling set of codes and images, a *form*, which immigrants and ethnics could fill with their own, varying contents and adapt to their own situations and expectations. Though I am not suggesting a static notion of a New England-controlled monolithic hegemony, I also cannot comfortably accept the notion that ‘migration experience’ is the category that explains it all – even if New England had never existed.¹¹³

This typological strategy has been constantly recycled and appropriated, but also ironized and inverted, for example by African-American slaves iconotropically placing the United States, rather than the religiously corrupt nations of Europe or the ‘savages’ of the ‘howling wilderness’ (in narratives of Indian captivity), in the role of Egypt (pp. 44-48). Thus, ‘[t]ypological rhetoric may indicate the Americanization of people who use it. Yet it can, alternatively or at the same time, serve to define a new ethnic peoplehood in contradistinction to a general American identity’ (p. 49). However, the strategy of appropriating and using the dominant culture’s rhetoric against itself is a double edged sword: by reiterating the structure it inadvertently reinforces and thus affirms the original ideological framework.

Since Tocqueville, the phrase ‘American exceptionalism’ has been used in very different, although always related ways. Two uses have been particularly important. On the one hand the phrase has been adopted ‘in the context of efforts to account for the weakness of working-class radicalism in the United States’, a weakness which is ascribed to a number of causes.¹¹⁴ Among those are the factor that the (Caucasian) American male was given suffrage rather than having to fight for it; that the American

¹¹² Robert Graves, *King Jesus* (London: Cassell, 1946), p. 355.

¹¹³ Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 56.

political system defined itself in opposition to, but did not arise out of a feudal system (no aristocracy); that the United States are – theoretically – socially egalitarian, i.e. while Americans are not in effect all equally economically successful, the majority believe that they can succeed through hard work and opportunity (a meritocracy); that anti-statism has been a prevalent attitude among Americans: they believe to a much lesser extent than the citizens of European nations that the government is responsible for their social and economic welfare (liberalism). As a result, a lack of social and economic success is understood as the failure of the individual to live up to the American dream of self-made manhood rather than as the responsibility of the politico-economic system.¹¹⁵

Secondly, the concept of exceptionalism has been used to suggest that at the heart of the American national character is the notion of Puritan mission, which was transformed, during the Jacksonian era, into the idea that American democratic individualism is the end-all of all civilization. According to this view, America ‘is exceptional in the sense of being exemplary (“a city upon a hill”), or a beacon among nations’;¹¹⁶ thus the American nation – a microcosm of the world and a macrocosm of the individual¹¹⁷ – has a special destiny to fulfill. This is Deborah Madsen’s summary of this view:

Exceptionalism describes the perception of Massachusetts Bay colonists that as Puritans they were charged with a special spiritual and political destiny: to create in the New World a church and a society that would provide the model for all the nations of Europe as they struggled to reform themselves (a redeemer nation). In this view, the New World is the last and best chance offered by God to a fallen humanity that has only to look to His exceptional new church for redemption. Thus America and Americans are special, exceptional, because they are charged with saving the world from itself and, at the same time, America and Americans must sustain a high level of spiritual, political and moral commitment to this exceptional destiny – America must be as ‘a city upon a hill’ exposed to the eyes of the world.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, p. 33.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 85-6, 19, 83, 71-76. An important exception to American liberal anti-statism was the development of a strong labor movement in the 1930s; this was a result of the successes of the welfare policies of the New Deal in the wake of the Great Depression (see p. 37; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 308).

¹¹⁶ Daniel Bell, ‘The “Hegelian Secret:” Civil Society and American Exceptionalism’ in Shafer (ed.), *Is America Different?*, pp.46-70 (p. 51).

¹¹⁷ See Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, p. 134.

¹¹⁸ Madsen, *Exceptionalism*, pp. 1-2.

The need for this commitment to be constantly renewed immediately calls into existence the practice of the American jeremiad, characterized by Emory Elliott as:

a rhetorical formula that included recalling the courage and piety of the founders, lamenting recent and present ills, and crying out for a return to the original conduct and zeal. In current scholarship, the term 'jeremiad' has expanded to include not only sermons but also other texts that rehearse the familiar tropes of the formula such as captivity narratives, letters, covenant renewals, as well as some histories and biographies.¹¹⁹

A jeremiad will only be produced out of a belief in the possibilities from which there has been a falling off; if that belief is not there, neither will be the exhortation to change as an individual, and as a people, in order to fulfill the promise of America: the 'essence' of the American jeremiad 'is its unshakable optimism. In explicit opposition to the traditional [European] mode, it inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success'.¹²⁰ The ritual of the jeremiad is thus intimately wedded to this second notion of exceptionalism by persuading listeners and readers, in the face of evidence to the contrary, that all Americans are striving towards the same goals and that America is a place of equality and consensus (p. 154). Biographies play an important jeremaic role in this work of persuasion:

In virtually every one of the countless biographies of American heroes... the author insists that 'true individualism' is not something unique – not a Byronic or Nietzschean assertion of superiority – but an exemplum of American enterprise: a model of progress and control that typifies the society as a whole (p. 156).

When Wilson refers disdainfully to the 'jeremaic invocation of America as a by now global "City on the Hill"' in Ronald Reagan's 1989 farewell address, and concludes, in Baudrillardian terms, that 'the postmodernist Reagan represents the catastrophic collapse of such performative rhetoric of mastery into its simulacrous reiteration', he, too, confirms Bercovitch's argument about the pervasiveness of Puritan rhetoric.¹²¹ Wilson himself has to concede this: 'Oddly enough', he continues,

...this prophecy of a sublime 'America' – enjoining a new form of liberty upon a regenerated self, an inventing upward through practices and technologies of self-

¹¹⁹ Elliott, 'New England Puritan Literature', p. 1:257.

¹²⁰ Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 7.

¹²¹ See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, transl. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983).

empowering belief – at some deep-rhetorical level (as Reagan’s outrageously Puritan metaphors recycle) would encode the identity of any American selfhood into *much the same plot*, from William Bradford and Ben Franklin to Yashiko Uchida (in *Desert Exile*) or Richard Rodriguez, who ‘clearly considers himself representative [in *Hunger of Memory* (1982)] – representative not of the Mexican-American but of the [American] middle class’ (pp. 170-171, my italics).¹²²

Wilson’s examples are American autobiographical writers, but identical impulses towards sameness apply to biographical texts, and to many kinds of fiction. As Brumm notes, ‘It is a distinctive trait of American literature... that its characters often are not created as freshly conceived individuals but as based on fixed models, of which the most important are Adam and Christ’.¹²³ Thus, typology extends its homogenizing force into all kinds of writing that portray characters, in other words that imitate the format of life stories – kinds of writing which, as we have seen, tend to have a highly social function in America. In *The Rites of Assent* Bercovitch similarly observes:

Virtually every one of the mid-nineteenth-century biographers of ‘great Americans’ insisted that his subject was not someone unique, but the emblem of American enterprise: a self-reliant man who was therefore, paradoxically, a cultural pattern, the model of a rising nation. The same paradox of representation (self and community entwined, as in a secular incarnation) applied to the countless rags-to-riches stories. However humble their origins, these heroes were not members of the working class, nor were they, after their success, nouveau riche, and certainly they never became upper-class. They were rather, every fatherless son of them, aspiring, self-motivated (even when, like Whitman, they were inspired by Emerson), self-reliant (even when, like Alger’s Sam Barker, they depended on employers), self-educated (even when, like Thoreau, they were Harvard graduates), mobile (even if they decided, like Hawthorne’s Holgrave, to settle down), and independent. And independence, of course, signified not so much an economic state as a state of mind and being, an entire system of moral, political, and religious values. In short, the American hero could represent no particular set of interests because he represented the general good – which is to say a cultural myth.¹²⁴

Bercovitch here deliberately intermixes fictional characters with historical personages: Whitman and Horatio Alger’s Sam Barker, Thoreau and Hawthorne’s Holgrave. Bercovitch’s reiteration of ‘even when’ and ‘even if’ shows the impulse, inscribed both

¹²² Wilson quotes from Shirley K. Rose, ‘Metaphors and Myths of Cross-Cultural Literacy: Autobiographical Narratives by Maxine Hong Kingston, Richard Rodriguez and Malcolm X’, *MELUS* 14 (1987), p. 11, the additions in square brackets are Wilson’s.

¹²³ Brumm, *American Thought*, pp. 198-9.

¹²⁴ Bercovitch, *Rites*, pp. 47-8.

in the self-representation of actual people and in the creation of fictional characters, to reshape individual life stories to fit the familiar plot. The reference to Horatio Alger is likewise significant, for Alger was the author not just of fictional rags-to-riches stories but also of a presidential biography showing the rise of James Garfield '*From Canal Boy to President*', thus creating very similar tales in fictional and non-fictional genres.¹²⁵ According to Wilson's, Brumm's and Bercovitch's accounts, American biographies and autobiographies have been under an almost irresistible pressure from the inside to portray their subjects with reference to a model of middle-class individualism prescribed by the dominant culture, a claim which will need to be tested against the Hawthorne biographies considered in this study. The question of this biographical sameness also raises the issue of truthfulness and historical objectivity in biography, discussed in the next section.

1.6 Biography, Historical Objectivity and Professionalization

The conventions that govern the production of biographical texts have been subject to historical change, and with these conventions the critical expectations that readers bring to examples of the genre. For example, medieval practitioners of hagiography have been denounced as producing life-stories that are 'worthless' as biography, although the biographical rules which they are accused of violating, and even the very concept of 'biography', were not available to them.¹²⁶ Hagiographers did not conceive of themselves as distorting the truth; instead, they were interested in revealing a 'higher truth' than could be expressed through the enumeration of the mere facts of a saint's life. As Parke explains:

¹²⁵ It is significant that a populist writer like Michael Moore needs to do no more than gesture towards the 'Horatio Alger myth' to make a point about the oppressive function of the rags-to-riches fable; see the chapter 'Horatio Alger Must Die' in *Dude, Where's My Country?* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp. 137-155.

¹²⁶ Cuddon notes that there 'was little in the way of biography in the Middle Ages, for, with few exceptions, the lives of the saints were idealized according to predictable patterns' (*Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 83); Parke states: 'Students of biography generally agree that the early Christian era was an unhappy digression from the line of development of modern biography stretching back to Plutarch' (Parke, *Biography*, p. 7).

Sacred biographers saw no necessary contradiction between the worlds of fact and legend. Both fact and legend were for them signs of fundamental truth about the nature of things in relation to the realm of the spirit. These were different evidentiary signs from those which the modern scientific world of the sixteenth century and after would find convincing. But in terms of this period's standards and beliefs, these signs were understood to reveal unimpeachable and indispensably educative truth. The sacred biographers' aim of instruction recognized imagination as an accurate lens to focus on essential, which is to say holy, truths.¹²⁷

Similarly, Nathaniel Hawthorne himself affirmed that he wrote 'Romances' in order to reveal 'the truth of the human heart', as opposed to the genre of 'the Novel', which he considered to be concerned with empirical reality.¹²⁸ 'Modern' biography – at least in theory characterized by skepticism, detachment, and impartiality on the part of the biographer, but also by a belief in the centrality of the human – is largely a product of renaissance humanism, the Reformation, and enlightenment rationalism. Truthfulness has been articulated as one of the main criteria demanded of biographies in biographical theory and criticism since the early eighteenth century.¹²⁹ In 1750 Samuel Johnson declared that it is 'the business of the biographer... to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue'; he also believed that it is 'the *duty* of a biographer to state *all* the failings of a respectable character'.¹³⁰

Notions of how truthfulness could be achieved, and what cost for it would be acceptable, have been strenuously contested: in England, during the nineteenth century, the Johnsonian call for truthfulness was counterbalanced by a tendency to produce panegyric; in the United States, the Johnsonian principles, including the injunction to

¹²⁷ Parke, *Biography*, p. 8. The sixteenth century saw the English Reformation with the crisis of the cult of saints and therefore of English hagiography. It is doubtful, however, to what extent the term 'modern scientific world' can meaningfully be applied to the sixteenth century and it must be remembered that there was no sudden transition from one mode of thinking to another.

¹²⁸ 'When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former – while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve away from the truth of the human heart – has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation' (CE 2, p. 1).

¹²⁹ See the excerpts from Roger North, Conyers Middleton, Samuel Johnson, and James Boswell in Clifford (ed.), *Biography as an Art*, pp. 30, 38-9, 40-9, 50-3.

¹³⁰ Samuel Johnson in Clifford (ed.), *Biography as an Art*, pp. 42, 49.

represent the private rather than the public man, competed with the usefulness of biography in furthering nationalist ideals: 'Even as [critics] argued that biography should avoid eulogy, tell the truth, and seek the private man, they also wanted American biographies that would glorify the nation and its early heroes'.¹³¹ In the early twentieth century psychoanalysis became available as a method that promised to provide biographers with increased access to hidden motives. At the same time, Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf formulated criticisms of Victorian biography that revolutionized the genre. Strachey deplored the usual 'two fat volumes', which tended to comprise a Victorian biography, 'with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design'; instead, he promised, in *Eminent Victorians*, 'to lay bare the facts... dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions'.¹³² However, Michael Holroyd notes that, in spite of its avowed impartiality, Strachey's book was informed by his feelings about the First World War, 'so that its theme became the ironic sifting of those Victorian pretensions that seemed to him to have led civilization into such a holocaust'.¹³³ This tension between declared impartiality and actual bias is a recurring feature in nineteenth- and twentieth-century biography. And yet, although twentieth-century biographical practice was by no means homogeneous, theoretical writings on the genre, especially by biographers themselves, frequently affirm that truthful biography can be accomplished in spite of the need to be selective and to impose a narrative structure. Some biographers, however, opted for dispensing altogether with narrative, and to some degree selectivity, by representing the facts (which, however, need at times to be summarized and are thus inevitably interpreted) in chronological order: examples are Jay Leyda's *The Melville Log* (1951) and *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (1960), and Dwight Thomas and David Jackson's *The Poe Log* (1987).¹³⁴

The impact of selectivity, narrative emplotment and socio-political bias on

¹³¹ Casper, *Constructing*, pp. 35-36, see also pp. 30-46.

¹³² Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 10.

¹³³ Michael Holroyd, 'Introduction', *ibid.*, pp. vii-xii (p. viii).

¹³⁴ In fact Spark contends that Leyda's *Melville Log* is the very opposite of an objective account: '...Leyda arranged his chronology of Melville's hitherto confusing or mysterious life to track a progression from Ahab's family splitting bourgeois individualism to Billy Budd's socially responsible sacrifice on behalf

biographical truth becomes evident when we examine Vernon Loggins's and Walter Herbert's respective accounts of Nathaniel Hawthorne's visit to a Liverpool workhouse in 1856, supported by each with quoted passages from Hawthorne's *English Notebooks*. Loggins, in *The Hawthornes: Seven Generations of an American Family* (1951), mentions the incident twenty pages after his account of Hawthorne's death, in the final chapter which concerns itself chiefly with Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, Hawthorne's youngest daughter. Rose had married George Parsons Lathrop; in time, the couple converted to Roman Catholicism, but became estranged and separated in 1895 with the permission of the church. Rose became engaged in caring for poverty-stricken victims of incurable cancer, eventually establishing her own hospice for which she would later adopt the Dominican rule, becoming Mother Alphonsa (the name which Loggins adopts as the title for his final chapter). From among Nathaniel and Sophia's three children Loggins chooses Rose as the representative of the seventh generation of Hawthornes in America. He uses the passage from Hawthorne's Notebooks to make a statement about Rose's passion for good works, which she herself explicitly linked, in the preface to the second edition of her *Memories of Hawthorne*, to Hawthorne's account of the workhouse visit in *Our Old Home*.¹³⁵

Herbert, on the other hand, in *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-class Family* (1993), uses the incident within the framework of a particular narrative that is central to his interpretation of Hawthorne's personality. This is 'Nathaniel's sense of himself as contaminated at birth and abandoned' because:

[h]is own parents had married following the conception of their first child [Nathaniel's sister Elizabeth], and his father had left him and his sisters destitute. The Manning family then served as an almshouse, performing the traditional function being transferred increasingly from households to public institutions. Nathaniel's own existence was plausibly a consequence of the illegitimate

of family unity and order, ordering Melville's psyche in the process. Every detail of *The Melville Log* was designed to fortify that message' (*Hunting*, pp. 10-11).

¹³⁵ The relevant passage is quoted in Valenti, 'Rose', pp. 60-61: 'The patients of the Servants of Relief for Incurable Cancer, as we call ourselves, are of the class to which belonged the child whom my father found in an English hospital which he visited and of whom he wrote in *Our Old Home*. His words in regard to this little child made a great impression upon me when I read them as a girl; and I was glad to have the latter years of my life devoted to the field of diseased poverty'.

embraces that had produced his older sister, and this whispered awareness was present amid the family charity that had enclosed and sustained him.¹³⁶

Hawthorne's sister Elizabeth had been born only seven months after his parents' wedding. The suggestion that Hawthorne's mother was condemned by her husband's family on account of her 'bridal pregnancy' and that she experienced a sense of guilt and shame which may have filtered into her son's consciousness had been previously made by Baym.¹³⁷ This was, however, very quickly disputed by Erlich, who argued: 'Because a seven-month birth can signify prematurity as well as a "bridal pregnancy," and because I am aware of no evidence that Madame Hawthorne was treated by her husband's family or anyone else as a sinful woman, I would hesitate to build too much on this speculation'.¹³⁸ Erlich's skepticism is not acknowledged by Herbert, who states the 'bridal pregnancy' as a matter of fact in the passage cited here.

There are differences not only in the selection of passages which Loggins and Herbert have decided to quote, but also discrepancies with regard to the exact wording and punctuation. The differences in their respective quotations from the *English Notebooks* are in bold print. This is the passage in Loggins's book:

[Rose] pitied her husband, as she pitied the whole worried world. Often before her mind's eye in recent months had been, she was to say, the pictures of the poor in her father's writings. Why were there so many of these pictures? Why had Hawthorne been impelled by a power stronger than himself to walk in the slums of Liverpool and observe the pains of poverty? One passage in the *English Notebooks* impressed Rose especially – the description of a visit Hawthorne made to the children's ward of a Liverpool workhouse. One **'wretched, pale, half-torpid little thing'** he saw there took **'the strangest fancy'** to him. It appeared to be about six years old, but whether boy or girl Hawthorne did not know. A yellowish matter running from the child's eye was, he was told, the result of scurvy. He had never seen, he said, a creature he was less inclined to fondle. Then he wrote: **'But this little sickly, humor-eaten fright prowled around me, taking hold of my skirts, following at my heels, and at last held up its hands, smiled in my face, and, standing directly before me, insisted on me taking it up! Not that it said a word, for I rather think it was underwitted, and could not talk; but its face expressed such perfect confidence that it was going to be taken up and made**

¹³⁶ T. Walter Herbert, *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-class Family* (Berkeley: California State University Press, 1993), p. 279.

¹³⁷ Nina Baym, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Mother: A Biographical Speculation', *American Literature*, 54.1 (March 1982), 1-27 (pp. 8-11).

¹³⁸ Gloria C. Erlich, *Family Themes and Hawthorne's Fiction: The Tenacious Web* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), p. 188 n.3.

much of, that it was impossible not to do it. It was as if God had promised the child this favor on my behalf, and that I must needs fill the contract. I held my undesirable burden a little while, and after setting the child down, it still followed me, holding two of my fingers and playing with them, just as if it were a child of my own. **It was a foundling, and out of all humankind it chose me to be its father!** And Hawthorne added, **'I should never have forgiven myself if I had repelled its advances.'** Why did the image of this 'humor-eaten fright' haunt Rose? This question she was unable to put aside.¹³⁹

In contrast, this is Herbert's account:

On a visit to an English almshouse Hawthorne, shown the section in which young children were kept, was appalled when one of these **'very unlovely and unwholesome little imps'** became attached to him. **'This little sickly, humor-eaten fright prowled around me, taking hold of my skirts, following at my heels; and at last held up its hands, smiled in my face, and standing directly before me, insisted on my taking it up. ...I held my undesirable burthen a little while; and after setting the child down it still followed me, holding two of my fingers (luckily the glove was on) and playing with them, just as if (God save us!) it were a child of my own'** (*English*, 275). Hawthorne makes no effort to conceal his fierce disgust toward the child, and toward all the filthy and diseased youngsters that are kept at the almshouse. **'It would be a blessing to the world,'** he declares, **'if every one of them could be drowned to-night, instead of being put to bed'** (277).

When his tour returned to the children's ward, **'there was this same child, waiting for me, with a sickly smile about its scabby mouth and in its dim, red eyes. If it were within the limits of possibility... I should certainly have set down its affection to the score of blood recognition; and I cannot conceive of any greater remorse than a parent must feel, if he could see such a result of his illegitimate embraces'** (*English*, 276).¹⁴⁰

The selection of passages that are included or excluded is mostly due to the story the respective biographer seeks to tell; however, there are more basic inconsistencies. In Loggins's book, the sentence about the 'humor-eaten fright' begins with a 'But' which Herbert does not have, and the 'taking it up' is followed by an exclamation mark, whereas Herbert has merely a period; in both instances Loggins is correct, but Herbert accurately quotes 'burthen' as opposed to Loggins's normalized 'burden' and 'insisted on my taking it up' where Loggins has 'me'. More significantly, the sections in parentheses '(luckily the glove was on)' and '(God save us!)', and another one in a

¹³⁹ Vernon Loggins, *The Hawthornes: Seven Generations of an American Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), pp. 318-319.

¹⁴⁰ Herbert, *Dearest Beloved*, p. 279. The page numbers in brackets are provided by Herbert and refer to Randall Stewart (ed.), *The English Notebooks: by Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962).

passage quoted by Loggins but not by Herbert – ‘It was as if God had promised this child a favor on my behalf, (but I wish He had not!)’¹⁴¹ – are missing in Loggins’s book without any indication on his part that he has left something out. Not only do the stories Loggins and Herbert are telling shed a very different light respectively on Hawthorne’s character, it is as if they were referring to entirely different sources. In fact, except for some spelling and punctuation Loggins’s account tallies exactly with the version in *Passages from the English Note-books*, which Sophia Hawthorne had edited.¹⁴² However, Loggins does not mention *Passages* in his ‘Bibliographical Note’; he acknowledges Randall Stewart’s edition of the *English Notebooks* (1941), of which Herbert cites the 1962 reprint. Hence, Loggins either chose to quote from (but neglected to acknowledge) the heavily edited version, in spite of the fact that Stewart’s restored text was available to him, or he made similar editorial decisions as Sophia Hawthorne did in 1869/70. Either decision on his part is odd, considering the considerable clamor surrounding Stewart’s broadcasting of Sophia’s censoring of her husband’s notebooks (see Chapter 3). While the apparently casual attitude to exact citation on the part of both of these biographers is rather alarming, it is the process by which a completely different Hawthorne emerges from each of these accounts which is the more significant issue.

Randall Stewart – as the editor of Hawthorne’s *English Notebooks* well aware of its existence – does not mention the incident in his biography, nor does Arlin Turner; more surprisingly, Raymona Hull and James Mays, whose Hawthorne biographies explicitly concentrate on Hawthorne’s sojourn in England, equally ignore it.¹⁴³ Mellow deals with the visit to the workhouse in a brief paragraph.¹⁴⁴ Edwin Miller is the only Hawthorne biographer besides Loggins and Herbert who devotes significant space to the incident and who quotes extensively, parentheses and all. Apart from Herbert, he is the only one to cite the passage about drowning the children instead of putting them to bed; in fact, he quotes it more completely than Herbert, in whose text the interpolation ‘he

¹⁴¹ Stewart (ed.), *English Notebooks* (1962), p. 275.

¹⁴² See Hawthorne, *Complete Works*, pp. 8:184-185. *Passages from the English Note-books* was originally published in 1870 by Fields, Osgood & Co. after sections had appeared in Fields’s *Atlantic Monthly*.

¹⁴³ Raymona E. Hull, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience, 1853-1864* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980); James O’Donald Mays, *Mr. Hawthorne Goes to England: The Adventures of a Reluctant Consul* (Burley, Ringwood, Hampshire: New Forest Leaves, 1983).

¹⁴⁴ Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*, p. 461.

declares' camouflages (whether intentionally or not is impossible to say) his omission. Miller, in contrast, cites the sentence in its entirety and also gives us the next:

It would be a blessing to the world – a blessing to the human race, which they will contribute to vitiate and enervate – a blessing to themselves, who inherit nothing but disease and vice – if every one of them could be drowned to-night, instead of being put to bed. If there be a spark of God's life in them, this seems the only chance of preserving it.¹⁴⁵

Because he includes Hawthorne's reasons Miller's version sounds far less brutal and abrupt than that of Herbert, who had, in an interpretative act, given Hawthorne's 'fierce disgust' as the reason for his pronouncement. Miller concludes his account of the visit by quoting Hawthorne's remark, 'I wish I had not touched the imp; and yet I never should have forgiven myself if I had repelled its advances' – mentioned also by Mellow and in part by Loggins, but not Herbert – and reads the admission as an instance of Hawthorne's 'customary ambivalence and honesty' (p. 428).

The choice of quoted passages, the commentary, the use of interpretative paraphrasing, and the ordering of the textual 'evidence' all play a crucial role in the re-/construction of the incident; if we add, as we must, the reader's reactions – complicated by the possibility of foreknowledge through other accounts – into the mix, it seems less than far-fetched to read this biographical tangle in Derridean terms, namely that there is no 'reality' for us to get at beyond the words of Hawthorne's accounts. Hawthorne himself had already produced two versions of the incident: the entry in his notebook and later the passage in *Our Old Home* referred to by Rose, which transforms him into 'one member of our party' and 'that gentleman just hinted at' during the encounter with the child, thus creating a significant distancing (CE 5, pp. 300-305). This becomes even more pronounced when he studies this third-person's reactions from outside: '...I watched the struggle in his mind with a good deal of interest, and am seriously of opinion that he did an heroic act, and effected more than he dreamed of towards his final salvation, when he took up the loathsome child and caressed it as tenderly as if he had been its father'. One of the editorial decisions Sophia Hawthorne made for the first published version of the English notebooks was the attempt to undo this distancing and

¹⁴⁵ Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (London: Duckworth, 1991), p. 428.

to restore the lost immediacy.¹⁴⁶ Significantly, all of the biographers who do mention the incident have similarly chosen to quote from the Notebooks rather than *Our Old Home* (even if they link the incident to Rose's reaction to it), preferring the seemingly more authentic first person account. Valenti argues that Rose herself had already deliberately over-interpreted the incident in order to create an overlap between her father's concerns and her own and thus insert her own identity into his biography:

Rose drew from this incident with the child a meaning far beyond any Nathaniel could have conceived. His momentary and uncharacteristic embrace of this orphan could never have been transmuted into a thirty-year commitment as it was for his daughter. ...Rose's interpretation of events recorded in *Our Old Home*... reveals her writerly identity as a biographer.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, the other Hawthorne biographers' 'writerly identities' are bound into their accounts and are revealed by their transformations of the biographical raw materials.

The British critic and biographer Harold Nicolson begins his Hogarth Lectures on the genre, published as *The Development of English Biography* in 1927, by setting up a distinction between 'pure' and 'impure' biography which then becomes his constant reference point. A 'pure' biography adheres to three criteria: it is historically true, it deals with an individual, and it has been 'composed with a conscious artistic purpose'. While all three conditions must be fulfilled, the three most common causes for 'impurity' that Nicolson identifies contravene the criterion of historical truthfulness: 'impure' biography is caused by 'the desire to celebrate the dead', 'the desire to compose the life of an individual as an illustration of some extraneous theory or conception', or by the 'undue intrusion of the biographer's personality or predilections'. Hagiography, he notes, tends to be guilty of at least two of these.¹⁴⁸ The purpose of Nicolson's distinction is to 'narrow[...] down the art of biography to a recognisable and distinct form of narrative' in order to 'indicate what elements go to render any particular biography either "good" or "bad"' (p. 8). It is noteworthy that Nicolson still reiterates

¹⁴⁶ Sophia Hawthorne wrote, in an editorial interpolation: 'As the purpose in publishing these passages from the private note-books is to give to those who ask for a memoir of Mr. Hawthorne every possible incident recorded by himself which shows his character and nature, the editor thinks it proper to disclose the fact that Mr. Hawthorne was himself the gentleman of that party who took up in his arms the little child, so fearfully repulsive in its condition. And it seems better to quote his own words in reference to it, than merely to say it was he' (Hawthorne, *Complete Works*, p. 8:184).

¹⁴⁷ Valenti, 'Rose', p. 61.

his distinction between 'pure' and 'impure' biography more than a quarter of a century later, and with greater emphasis: 'the purity of biography is *infected*', he declares in 1954, by 'these "extraneous purposes"'.¹⁴⁹ However, when tested against actual biographical material Nicolson's simple and straightforward distinction reveals itself as deeply problematic. As we have seen, the process of biographical contamination spreading from the scurvy-ridden workhouse child first into Hawthorne's own accounts and then into his biographies is unstoppable, even when the biographies ignore the incident, for awareness of the incident makes us interrogate and interpret not just *how* it is used in a biography but also its presence or absence itself. It is Nicolson's third criterion, therefore, which poses the greatest difficulty – the demand on the biographer to divorce his or her 'personality or predilections' from the biographical enterprise, for the decision whether the extent to which such predilections intrude is 'undue' is itself necessarily a subjective one.

Nevertheless, Nicolson's definitions have proved to be highly attractive to later commentators. Richard Hankins, in his outline of early American biography (1976), takes up Nicolson's criteria and concludes that:

...the first two hundred years of life-writing in America saw the production mainly of 'impure' biography. So strong has been the tendency to write biographical accounts for ulterior reasons that, although *attempts at* life-writing appeared early in the seventeenth century, America seems not to have produced what Nicolson would call 'pure' biography until the early nineteenth century.¹⁵⁰

This is understood by Hankins as a defect: early American biography 'seems not to have been written primarily to preserve an exact historical record, and it was certainly not written for its own sake or for any psychological interest in the subject'. Instead, during the colonial period it was 'the tool of the preacher and teacher rather than the historian and literary artist', and in the early republican era it was 'dedicated to making the eagle scream, to providing heroes and myths for a nation that had no antiquity, little literature, and few traditions' (pp. 100-1, 101-2).

However, it cannot be stressed too emphatically that the early practitioners of

¹⁴⁸ Nicolson, *Development*, pp. 8-10.

¹⁴⁹ Nicolson in Clifford (ed.), *Biography as an Art*, p. 198, my italics.

¹⁵⁰ Hankins, 'Puritans', p. 95, italics mine.

American biography did not ‘attempt’ to write ‘pure’ biography but failed. On the contrary, ‘extraneous purposes’ or ‘ulterior reasons’ were the very *raison d’être* of such biographical works as Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* (and in fact any Puritan life-writing), narratives of Indian captivity, biographies celebrating the greatness of the founding fathers (such as Mason Weems’s lives of Washington, Franklin and Penn), slave narratives, life stories of indentured servants and of immigrants coming to the ‘promised land’, biographies of artisans or of members of religious sects, campaign biographies (a sub-genre to which Hawthorne himself made a contribution with his *Life of Franklin Pierce*), or a text like Emerson’s *Representative Men*. Some of these works or sub-genres were written for small target audiences; mostly they were a means, on a national or a much smaller scale (for example, within a specific trade, sect, or immigrant group) of expressing solidarity and establishing tradition. Without such ‘ulterior purposes’ these biographies would have been meaningless.

It is important to note here that Hankins argues from within a tradition of thinking about biography that itself emerged during the nineteenth century and of which Harold Nicolson was an influential twentieth-century English exponent. Nicolson and Hankins endeavor to solve the problem of how to theorize biography in a way that is characteristic of much of the criticism of the mid-twentieth century; the emphasis is on value judgment, on determining which biographies would be worthy to be included in a biographical canon. It is important to remember that these classifications were made at a time when biography had very little status as a subject of academic inquiry although it was to some extent practiced by academics; the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ biographies is meant to identify ‘good’ biography as a distinct ‘literary’ form – an ‘art’ – and to give the study of ‘good’ biographies academic respectability.

This approach is a consequence of what Casper calls the nineteenth-century ‘enshrinement of historical “objectivity”’.¹⁵¹ Peter Novick provides a useful definition of this concept, which even at the time of its inception was severely contested and has never ceased to be so:

The assumptions on which it rests include a commitment to the reality of the past, and to truth as a correspondence to that reality; a sharp separation between knower

¹⁵¹ Casper, *Constructing*, p. 8.

and known, between fact and value, and, above all, between history and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history are 'found,' not 'made.' Though successive generations of historians might, as their perspectives shifted, attribute different significance to events in the past, the meaning of those events was unchanging.¹⁵²

The rise of objectivity was in turn a result of the professionalization of history, along with other fields such as literature (but not yet 'American Literature'), in an academic context, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, although Jared Sparks had already rated documentary evidence as of higher truth value for biography than oral tradition and anecdote when he began to compile his Library of American Biography series during the 1830s.¹⁵³ During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, professional – which came increasingly to mean academic – historians strove to dissociate themselves from amateurs, although it took several decades for a comprehensive separation between the two realms to be effected. In biography, this dissociation caused a rift between academic or professional biographers, who prided themselves on producing impartial accounts, and the subjects' descendants, or acquaintances, who were considered to be biased, but at the same time more likely to respect the subject's privacy. On the other hand, gaining the cooperation of descendants was often imperative for professional biographers, for it was usually they who could grant or withhold access to personal documents that were vital to creating a full biographical account (p. 310).¹⁵⁴ The wrangle between Julian Hawthorne and George Parsons Lathrop, fought out publicly in national newspapers, is one example of such a struggle for control over representation.¹⁵⁵

This division into 'serious' history and biography on the one hand, and the dabbling of amateurs on the other, corresponds to some degree to the split of literature and the arts into 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow', that had begun several decades earlier. It is

¹⁵² Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1-2.

¹⁵³ For a discussion of Jared Sparks and his attitude towards 'documentary evidence' as opposed to 'tradition' see Casper, *Constructing*, pp. 135-42 and 148-53.

¹⁵⁴ Case studies of the interactions between biographers and trustees of literary estates can be found in Ian Hamilton's *Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography* (1992).

important to note here that these terms tended to be gendered: 'highbrow' meant masculine, 'lowbrow' was understood in relation to the characteristics of the best-selling sentimental fictions produced predominantly by women and seen as feminine;¹⁵⁶ at the same time, however, a seemingly contradictory development was taking place: 'culture' itself, in the sense of beauty and refinement, became associated with women as the guardians of the redemptive domestic sphere as opposed to the coarse male domains of business and exertion.¹⁵⁷ Hawthorne's publisher James T. Fields, whose list of authors also included Emerson, Thoreau, Whittier, Longfellow and Stowe, played an important part in producing the separation of literary works into popular (or 'lowbrow') and 'literary' (or 'highbrow') categories:

At a time when the paying audience for imaginative writing was expanding (the 1850s is the decade of the new blockbuster bestseller), Fields found a way to identify a certain portion of that writing as distinguished – as of elevated quality, as of premium cultural value; then to build a market for that writing on the basis of that distinction. Fields solidified this differentiated category of the literary not only by printing the contemporary works that *were* the most distinguished, or that *were* the most highly literary (though his eye for such works is impressive); he established it too by devising ways to identify and confirm the literary *as* a difference before the market.¹⁵⁸

As with the market for literature, historiography and biography were bound up in an economy of pecuniary remuneration on the one hand and status rewards on the other. The pledge of 'objectivity' was one means of conferring rank and prestige on academic historians and of distinguishing their output from the efforts of popular historians and biographers. Whereas the latter were subject to the free market, one of the prizes for the

¹⁵⁵ See Maurice Bassan, *Hawthorne's Son: The Life and Literary Career of Julian Hawthorne* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1970), pp. 115-119.

¹⁵⁶ Casper, *Constructing*, p. 309; Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 211.

¹⁵⁷ Trachtenberg, *Incorporation*, pp. 145-7; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (London: Papermac, 1996). As we will see in Chapter 2, when George Santayana and Van Wyck Brooks attacked the 'genteel tradition' in the early twentieth century, the relevant dichotomy had become female cultural refinement versus male business life; they assigned the terms 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' conversely: the 'highbrow' was female, the 'lowbrow' male, and the problem was not so much the inferiority of one in relation to the other but the split within American society itself, which needed to be reconciled (George Santayana, 'The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy' in *American Literature, American Culture*, ed. by Gordon Hutner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 200-212 (p. 201); Brooks, *Early Years*, especially pp. 83, 93).

¹⁵⁸ Brodhead, *School*, p. 55; see also W. S. Tryon, *Parnassus Corner: A Life of James T. Fields, Publisher to the Victorians* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1963), p. 178.

academic professional was tenured employment and thus a degree of economic security, although not necessarily a greater intellectual freedom.¹⁵⁹

In terms of professionalization, literary biography occupied a somewhat different space than the biographies of figures who were not writers. This disparity can be illustrated by examining two nineteenth century biographical series, *The American Men of Letters* and the *American Statesmen* series, both published by Houghton Mifflin of Boston from the early 1880s onwards.¹⁶⁰ The *American Statesmen* series was edited by John Torrey Morse, *American Men of Letters* by Charles Dudley Warner, who had co-authored *The Gilded Age* with Mark Twain; both series took their inspiration from John Morley's *English Men of Letters* series, which included Henry James's *Hawthorne* (1879). Each series, like Sparks's earlier *Library of American Biography*, came to understand itself as presenting, in all its volumes taken together, a comprehensive political or literary history of America (pp. 277, 281-2). For the *American Statesmen* Morse signed up biographers who were predominantly professional historians and frequently even university professors. In contrast,

[a]cademics were not Warner's first choices for the *American Men of Letters*. The 'right' literary biographer needed some familiarity with the subject in question, ideally through personal acquaintance. More important, he needed the proper 'sympathy' to represent the subject's works fairly. The romantic vision of literary biography continued to prevail here; the men who wrote the lives of literati had to be 'men of letters' themselves, able to write *con amore* (p. 278).

Thus, while history had become to some degree a 'hard science', literary biography depended on intuition and sensibility. This disparity is due, on the one hand, to the different ways the fields of history and literature became academicized. On the other hand, and this is a problem recurrently addressed in biographical theory since the nineteenth century, it is sometimes stated that the biography of a literary figure demands an engagement that is different in kind from the way a 'man of action' is dealt with biographically. Literary biography needs in some degree to deal with the dimension of criticism, with explicating and evaluating the literary achievement. An even more complicated issue is whether and how to read the literary writings biographically and

¹⁵⁹ See Novick, *Noble Dream*, pp. 53-4.

¹⁶⁰ Casper, *Constructing*, pp. 271-284.

how to integrate the knowledge gleaned from this reading with other documents which are often considered a more straightforward kind of biographical evidence (such as letters, diaries, wills, laundry bills, etc.).¹⁶¹ Although some commentators assert that there is no essential difference between a literary and a non-literary biographical subject since the evidence we are dealing with is always linguistic, the literary biographer has usually been expected to have different skills than the historian.

In the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century academic context literary biography was associated with the 'generalist' camp, rather than with the philology and research factions within the language and literature departments.¹⁶² There was an opposition between philologists, like Francis James Child and George Lyman Kittredge, who investigated sources and textual parallels and pursued diachronic language studies, and 'generalists' like James Russell Lowell, Charles Eliot Norton, Irving Babbitt and W. C. Brownell, who believed that such research was limited and pedantic. Barrett Wendell makes obvious the difference between these positions when he identifies with Lowell a concern with the 'range of human expression' and an effort to 'understand' the 'spirit' of literature, whereas the 'severe modern scholar' seeks to 'pitilessly analyse its every detail'; at the same time he is anxious to affirm that Lowell 'by no means neglected severe learning'.¹⁶³ Although 'the gulf between [philologists and generalists] was never absolute', the philologists tended to associate their pursuits with specialization, expertise

¹⁶¹ Different positions regarding the difference between literary and non-literary subjects can be seen in the following statements from two recent commentators. Frederick Karl declares that 'we must not muddle the difference between a literary subject and an historical/political/military one. We start from different premises. With the literary subject, we are thrown immediately into psychological analysis and interpretations, for the chief consideration if we attempt to blend subject and work is internal, analytical. With the non-literary figure, the historical-political-social axes are so compelling that backgrounds, cultural developments, cause and effect help preempt stress on individual psychological developmentThe linguistic model for a writer is always more complex than a military or political campaign for a non-literary subject' (Frederick Karl, 'Joseph Conrad' in Meyers (ed.), *Craft*, pp. 69-88 (p. 70)). William McFeeley, on the other hand, observes: 'I am not sure that there is a neat line between literary biography and studies of people involved in other pursuits. For example, both the soldier Ulysses S. Grant and the agitator Frederick Douglass, about whom I have written, wrote with daunting skill. Neither American would normally be thought to be the subject of a standard literary biography, and yet with both I had to contend with fine writing in their autobiographies.... Whether writing about a poet, a painter, a general, or a radical agitator, the biographer is confronting the work of the person contemplated' (William McFeeley, 'Why Biography?' in *The Seductions of Biography*, ed. by Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. ix-xiii (p. x)).

¹⁶² Graff, *Professing*, pp. 66-97.

¹⁶³ Barrett Wendell, *A Literary History of America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), pp. 394-5.

and objectivity – with verifiable facts;¹⁶⁴ the generalists, on the other hand, saw themselves as people who, by means of their cultured intellects, could understand cultural artifacts and interpret them for others. Literary biography was associated with appreciation and criticism and not with the kinds of research the philologists pursued. However, in contrast with the life-and-letters approach practiced by descendants, which tended to link together excerpts from letters and speeches with brief narrative sections (like, for instance, Julian Hawthorne's *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*), literary biographers, whether academics or amateurs, understood themselves as *interpreters* of the subject's historical or cultural significance.¹⁶⁵

The only academic Hawthorne biographer during the early period of professionalization was George Woodberry, whose *Hawthorne* (1902) was published in the American Men of Letters series. Hawthorne had been one of the original subject choices for the series, and James Russell Lowell had been commissioned to write the volume but had failed to produce it (p. 280).¹⁶⁶ Woodberry was a Harvard graduate and had been a student of Charles Eliot Norton and Henry Adams, who, as he wrote, 'were all of Harvard to me, so far as "education" went'.¹⁶⁷ Appointed professor of English and history at the University of Nebraska and later, on Lowell's recommendation, professor of literature at Columbia, Woodberry was also a literary journalist and a poet; he moved easily between the roles of amateur 'man of letters' and academic. According to Michael Burdick, Woodberry's criticism 'reflects [his] belief that the critic should not stress the technical side of his craft but emphasize the importance of literary appreciation' – he was a typical 'generalist'.¹⁶⁸ Woodberry is best known for having written an important biography of Edgar Allan Poe for the American Men of Letters series, published in

¹⁶⁴ Graff, *Professing*, p. 81.

¹⁶⁵ Casper, *Constructing*, p. 310.

¹⁶⁶ Randall Stewart points out that Lowell withdrew from the project because Sophia Hawthorne would not give him free access to Hawthorne's notebooks; see Stewart, 'Mrs. Hawthorne's Revisions of the American Notebooks' in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks: Based upon the Original Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, ed. by Randall Stewart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp. xiii-xxi (p. xiii).

¹⁶⁷ Vincent Freimarck, 'Woodberry, George Edward' in *American National Biography*, ed. by John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (24 vols., New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 23:785-787 (p. 23:785).

¹⁶⁸ Burdick, Michael L., 'George Edward Woodberry', *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Literary Critics and Scholars, 1880-1900* ed. by John W. Rathbun and Monica M. Grecu (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co., 1988), pp. 297-305 (p. 298); Graff, *Professing*, p. 82.

1885; an expanded edition in two volumes was published in 1909, also by Houghton Mifflin. Although Woodberry relied on Rufus Wilmot Griswold's slanderous accounts of Poe, which portrayed Poe as a dissolute drunkard incapable of human affection, for his assessment of Poe's personality, he balanced this with literary criticism that was highly appreciative of Poe's artistic achievement.¹⁶⁹ Woodberry's *Hawthorne* fuses biography with literary criticism; although far less condescending about Hawthorne than Henry James had been, he still charges him with provincialism. He judges that even 'in the best of the tales... there is something countrified in the mode of handling, something archaic and stiff in the literary mould, something awkward, cramped, and bare in the way his art works in its main motions'. He diagnoses 'a lack of urban ease, certainty, and perfection of manner' in Hawthorne's prose.¹⁷⁰ However, Woodberry offsets the criticism by appealing to Christian universals and locating them in a New England context which is then reinterpreted as representative, not only of America but of the present and past world:

The limitation, however, stops there. The world in which the artist works is the universal world of man's nature, just as much as Shakespeare's. He escapes from provincialism here, in the substance, because he was a New Englander, not in spite of that fact, for the spirituality which is the central fact of New England life itself escapes from provincialism, being a pure expression of that Christianity in which alone true cosmopolitanism is found, of that faith which presents mankind as one and indivisible (pp. 156-7).

It is through his combined Puritan, democratic and New England identity, as Woodberry interprets it, that Hawthorne becomes indicative of this universal human nature. Hawthorne combines Puritanism and democracy by looking 'only at the soul' so that 'all outward distinctions of rank, place, fortune, pride, poverty, disappear as unconcerning things'. This approach gives his art 'its universal quality', 'its democratic substance',

¹⁶⁹ Poe biography, from the moment of his death, was strenuously contested: Rufus Wilmot Griswold, wrote a vituperative obituary in the *New York Daily Tribune*, October 9, 1949, which he signed 'Ludwig', and included similar material, titled 'Memoir of the Author' in his edition of Poe's collected works in 1850 (see *Edgar Allan Poe: Critical Assessments*, edited by Graham Clarke (4 vols., Mountfield: Helm Information, 1991), vol. 1). In 1875, the Englishman John Henry Ingram, who greatly admired Poe, sought to reverse this image, in turn suppressing any material that could have thrown a negative light on Poe's character (for a discussion of Ingram's contributions to Poe biography see John Carl Miller, *Building Poe Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977)).

¹⁷⁰ George E. Woodberry, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (American Men of Letters Series, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), p. 156.

and 'its moral prepossession' which are the bases of its embodiment of the 'New England element' and thus the 'race element' (p. 157). While 'race' may have been for Woodberry not 'an ethnic entity but a spiritual quality of mind composed of imaginative memories and experience residual in the mind of man', it is important to recognize his term as an implicit declaration of cultural and ethnic superiority.¹⁷¹ It is precisely through his elision of ethnic differences and his interpretation of New England as exemplary, articulated through his remarks on Hawthorne, that Woodberry performs a rhetorical ritual of consensus by denying America, and the world, a diversity of race or creed. A predilection similar to Woodberry's, on the part of many late nineteenth-century critics, to disparage home-grown literature in general, but to uphold New England culture as representative and superior within an American context, is discussed further in Chapter 2.2.

1.7 'Political Biography': Co-optation and Subversion

While more recent historians of the genre confirm that the predominant motivations of American biographies, even as late as the 1860s, were didactic and nationalistic,¹⁷² the practice of setting up a standard of objectivity, disinterestedness (biography 'written for its own sake') and literariness for biographies and then measuring actual, and especially previous, biographies by it, has become less common. It appears that an understanding has been reached that a prescriptive approach, which criticizes biographies for their non-adherence to a notion of objectivity is not helpful. The pervasive 'impurity' in American biography during its first two centuries suggests that early American biography ought in fact to be very thoroughly investigated rather than disqualified, not only because the practice of colonial and early republican biography has left an imprint on many later American biographies, but also because in their typicality they illuminate, in Hans Robert Jauss's term, the 'horizon of expectations' of contemporaneous readers.¹⁷³ The

¹⁷¹ Burduck, 'Woodberry', p. 302.

¹⁷² Casper, *Constructing*, p. 4; Lowance, 'Biography and Autobiography', passim.

¹⁷³ Jauss states that 'the coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics and authors' (Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetics of Reception*, translated by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University

same applies to 'impure' biographies since the 1860s, which are likewise able to illuminate the social and cultural contexts of their production and consumption. The Nicolson/Hankins approach, described above, marks a characteristic difference to the contemporary, culture-historical stance of, for instance, Scott Casper, who explicitly rejects a prescriptive approach in favor of an epistemological one: he does 'not begin with a definition of "good" biography and test works against it'; instead, he asks questions about the relationship between nineteenth-century American biography and the culture which produced it and which it produced in turn.¹⁷⁴ However, evaluation is still very much at the heart of some contemporary criticism of American biographies, but now what is at stake is not so much the degree of a biography's objectivity as the nature of its placement within a spectrum of political alignment: the question has shifted towards whether a biography is sufficiently 'authority challenging' or merely 'adaptive' to the dominant ideology,¹⁷⁵ whether it is subversive or co-opted. This of course is not merely a recent and unprecedented development: Marxist and leftist reviews of biographies in the 1920s and 30s were concerned with the degree to which these biographies address the problems of capitalism, political engagement, and class allegiance in relation to their subjects. Newton Arvin, the Hawthorne biographer chiefly discussed in Chapter 2, is an important example of this trend.¹⁷⁶

Although it has not received the same amount of critical attention as autobiography, biography is, because of its very popularity, an important cultural force in America, albeit an often pessimistically defined one. Because it has a responsibility towards individuals – the subjects chiefly represented, whether alive or dead, and others who have a stake in the representation, such as surviving relatives and spouses –

of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 22). I acknowledge the importance of Jauss's approach for the genre of biography, but in this thesis the reader of biographies is usually only considered in as much as biographers are themselves readers of biographies.

¹⁷⁴ Casper, *Constructing*, p. 3. Along similarly lines, Sayre argues that 'the study of autobiography in America clearly cannot be confined to studies of masterpieces any more than the study of domestic architecture can be confined to the work of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright' (Sayre, 'Autobiography', p. 148). See also Jane Tompkins's approach to mid-nineteenth century American domestic fictions in *Sensational Designs*.

¹⁷⁵ Shapiro, *Politics*, p. 75.

¹⁷⁶ See for example Arvin's reviews of Albert Mordell's *Quaker Militant: John Greenleaf Whittier*, Bernard DeVoto's *Mark Twain's America* ('Mark Twain Simplified'), or Odell Shepard's *Pedlar's Progress: The Life of Bronson Alcott* ('The Tedious Archangel') in Newton Arvin, *American Pantheon*, ed. by Daniel Aaron and Sylvan Schendler (New York: Delacorte Press, 1966).

biography is a genre with a potential for violence: it can be the literary equivalent of burglary, abduction, and murder.¹⁷⁷ But the genre's responsibilities reach much further: it is the audience that is most decisively affected by biography. As Law and Hughes point out in the quotation introducing this chapter, the bulk of biographies in American bookshops is made up by 'the lives of politicians, figure skaters, film stars, radio personalities, wealthy entrepreneurs, and retired generals', in other words, lives of the successful and famous, or sometimes the notorious. According to Schlaeger, Wilson, and Shapiro, American biographies tend to affirm the values of the dominant culture at the expense of the socially disenfranchised: by presenting successful, self-made individuals as the natural products of the American political, social and economic system rather than as its prodigies and monsters, these biographies neutralize dissent and discourage class struggle. Such biographies work by foregrounding personality as the driving force of success and by representing as mere 'recessive social background' the structures that allow some individuals to rise above the multitude.¹⁷⁸ In such a context, failure is understood as a lack of determination and character strength on the part of the individual who has not been able to succeed. 'If this man has managed to face down the odds, made the best of the opportunities presented to him, and risen from rags to riches or "From Log-Cabin to White House" (the title of a popular biography of president Garfield), why couldn't you?' such biographies ask, turning what is meant as encouragement into an accusation. According to Schlaeger, biography is 'fundamentally reactionary, conservative, perpetually accommodating new models of man, new theories of the inner self, into a personality-oriented cultural mainstream, thus always helping to defuse their subversive potential'.¹⁷⁹ Michael Shapiro observes that American biography:

¹⁷⁷ Burglary: in the climactic scene in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, the biographer is about to rifle through the desk that holds the coveted personal papers of the American poet he reveres, when he is caught by the woman who owns them: '[Her eyes] glared at me; they were like the sudden drench, for a caught burglar, of a flood of gaslight; they made me horribly ashamed' (Henry James, *The Aspern Papers and the Turn of the Screw* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 125); see also Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (London: Papermac, 1995), p. 9. Abduction: see William H. Epstein, '(Post)Modern Lives: Abducting the Biographical Subject' (in Epstein (ed.), *Contesting the Subject*, pp. 217-236). Murder: see letter from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Franklin Pierce, 27th July 1852 (CE 16, p. 568), in which Hawthorne puns: 'I am taking your life as fast as I can – murdering and mangling you. God forgive me; as I hope you will'.

¹⁷⁸ Wilson, 'Producing', p. 167.

¹⁷⁹ Schlaeger, 'Biography', p. 63.

constitutes a textual apology for American institutions and, by implication, a silencing of class contention, individual failure, social dislocation, and other aspects of peoples' [sic] lives which would be disturbing to the peace of mind of one who wishes to think that no one pays a disproportionate price for the success of others.¹⁸⁰

These co-opting effects of biography are firmly linked to the ways in which biographies tend, and are expected by readers, to present a subject as a 'coherent personality'.¹⁸¹ In an inversion of values in comparison to Nigel Hamilton's argument above, Clifford and Schlaeger both argue that biography, 'that most Anglo-Saxon of literary forms', inherently resists theories that challenge notions of individuality, and of personal uniqueness and coherence, such as structuralism and postmodernism, poststructuralism and deconstruction.¹⁸² Instead, biography, by 'placing its faith in the storyteller's arts, manages with surprising consistency to make us believe in the existence of a self'.¹⁸³

This resistance to theory can partly be explained through the inertia of a comparatively popular form of writing which, even if practiced by academics, orients itself towards the marketplace at least as much as towards the estimation of colleagues. However, Schlaeger argues that the increasing popularity of biography over the last three decades or so is in fact actually due to the rise of postmodernism and post-structuralism in Britain and the United States, to which biography is perceived as an antidote: at times, biography and biographical criticism are domains in which suspicion and even hostility towards theory are very fiercely articulated. Leslie Schenk, for example, in an article on literary biography whose deliberately chatty and informal tone ties in with his line of reasoning, argues that biographies cannot explain how writers 'create great art – literature, the greatest of the arts – from the more or less pedestrian facts and events of their lives': 'Art either comes off or it does not. When it does not, we can reason about it; when it does, we cannot'.¹⁸⁴ This statement is reminiscent of Austin Warren's observation that we only 'legitimately seek a biographical explanation' when

¹⁸⁰ Shapiro, *Politics*, p. 58.

¹⁸¹ Clifford, "'Hanging Up'", pp. 44-5; Wilson, 'Producing', p. 167.

¹⁸² Clifford, "'Hanging Up'", p. 43; Schlaeger, 'Biography', pp. 61, 63, 65.

¹⁸³ Clifford, "'Hanging Up'", p. 44.

¹⁸⁴ Leslie Schenk, 'Literary Biographies Today', *World Literature Today*, 73.1 (Winter 1999), 88-92 (p. 91).

‘a good poet writes inferior poetry’ but that ‘the “goodness” is not so to be explained’, and thus echoes the New Critical stance that biography is inadequate and inappropriate as a tool for the understanding of literary texts.¹⁸⁵ For Schenk, literary biography should accompany the author’s works and enhance their appreciation. It should not be a secondary, theorizing form of discourse concerned with explanation; instead a biography can even itself be a work of art. He puts forward Helen Vendler’s *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (1997) as an example of a misplaced concern with minutiae which leads to obscuring the bigger picture:

Helen Vendler... recently endeavored to explain to us how Shakespeare’s sonnets ‘work,’ considering the musical esthetics of repeated vowels, et cetera. Well, yes, there really are several o’s and a’s and i’s and so on in every sonnet, and often alliteration too, but then what? We are told Shakespeare delighted in alliterative, assonantal, and anagrammatic semantic strings. So what else is new? ...To my mind this is like explaining that an automobile consists of tires, pistons, roll-down windows, and power steering, and leaving out what makes the car run, the whole point of its existence. And to think, as in academic deconstructionism, such explanatory theories are vainly considered superior to the text explicated! Biographers rarely attempt such nonsense...¹⁸⁶

Schenk’s antagonism is directed especially towards deconstruction, but it actually is an instance of an inherent hostility against theory per se, which biography is frequently used to articulate. The antithesis of such theoretical ‘nonsense’ is for Schenk the common sense of biographical practice. Nigel Hamilton, whose anti-theoretical position I have discussed above (1.3), usefully illustrates his quite similar point by relating the following anecdote:

Years ago I saw a performance of a favourite Brecht play, *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, in London. Instead of Brecht’s impersonal chorus introducing the play like a Greek tragedy, the lights came on and a well-known English entertainer, Michael Flanders, wheeled himself into the center of the stage. Phrase by phrase he *wooded* the audience, with all the magic of his personality, making theories of *Verfremdungseffekt* seem pompous and ridiculous.¹⁸⁷

Hamilton’s example is remarkably apt in its unintentional implications. Brecht’s dramatic method of the ‘alienation effect’ was meant to be an antidote to Aristotelian

¹⁸⁵ Austin Warren, ‘Emily Dickinson’ in Beaver (ed.), *American Critical Essays*, pp. 105-129 (p. 117). Warren’s remarks on Dickinson biography are further discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁸⁶ Schenk, ‘Literary Biographies’, p. 92.

drama, whose aim was to inspire terror and pity in the spectator and to produce an emotional catharsis; in contrast, Brechtian drama was designed to prevent the audience from immersing themselves in the play and identifying with the characters: 'The audience was not "worked up" by a display of temperament or "swept away" by acting with tautened muscles; in short, no attempt was made to put it in a trance...', as Brecht describes his own method.¹⁸⁸ The – avowedly Marxist – aim was to keep the audience self-aware and to make them think about alternatives to the social relations represented in the play. Brecht's method was thus deeply anti-fascist and anti-totalitarian. In a peculiar inversion, Hamilton, however, dismisses these strategies as 'pompous and ridiculous' and instead asserts that the process of being 'wooded' by the 'magic' of an actor's/biographical subject's/biographer's 'personality' eliminates ideology; he equates theory with totalitarianism (the French Revolution, German fascism, etc.). It is important to note that both Schenk, a United Nations official, and Hamilton, a professional biographer who, besides his book *The Brothers Mann*, has published biographies of JFK and Field Marshall Montgomery, believe that biography should contribute to the readers' appreciation of literature or to their understanding of human nature, and that biographies that emphasize a theoretical approach to the subject or his or her work are bound to fail in this task. Like Saul Bellow, whose remarks on Philip Young's *Hawthorne's Secret* I have discussed in the Introduction, they equate academic with 'square', out of touch with reality, irrelevant; for Hamilton, it is the fact that 'Germans... love to make a *Wissenschaft* of literature' which renders them 'hopeless biographers'.¹⁸⁹ At stake here is an ideal of humanist appreciation coupled with a belief in empiricism, which is frequently expressed through terms like 'common-sense', 'practical', 'rational', and finally 'Anglo-Saxon' (the use of these terms on the part of the literary historian Barrett Wendell is discussed in Chapter 2.2).¹⁹⁰

Exactly the opposite view on biography is suggested by Michael Shapiro who

¹⁸⁷ Hamilton, 'Thomas Mann', p. 106, the italics are Hamilton's.

¹⁸⁸ Bertolt Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect' in *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, ed. by Michael Huxley and Neol Witts (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 99-111 (p. 99).

¹⁸⁹ Hamilton, 'Thomas Mann', p. 106.

argues for the essential role of theory in any ideologically aware approach to biography. He starts off by questioning the biographies of 'American heroes', like Benjamin Franklin or George Washington, which he enjoyed reading as a child and which he now recognizes as 'hiding the structural economies of personal success versus failure and the individual and collective costs borne for the paths some lives are able to take'.¹⁹¹ As an antidote to this unreflective biographical process, Shapiro posits an ideal, redemptive biographer who recognizes the constraints and agendas inherent in the very codes which constitute biographical discourse and which threaten to draw him or her into reproducing existing forms of authority. The biographer attempts to negotiate this hazard by questioning the language at her or his disposal, and by turning towards biographical writing in 'a language that is aware of itself:'

Such a writer tends to produce a text in which the biographical code is intermingled with a critical code, a text that uses rhetorical gestures that open up the authority of the text in which they appear, and also open up the problem of how textuality or linguistic production in general has the effect of either summoning or installing authority or calling it into question (p. 73).

Another register at which to engage against the strategies through which biography affirms the dominant ideology is suggested by Parke. She proposes that by highlighting an individual's positioning in relation to political, cultural, social, and racial or ethnic affiliations, biography can be a means of producing or consolidating (imaginary) empowering communities. Parke makes this case for 'minority biographies', in which issues like race and gender are foregrounded, for example African American, Asian American, Chicano, or Feminist biographies. Minority biographies are forced to look at the subject not just as a person (implicitly understood as white and male), but as a female person, or a black person, etc.¹⁹² This means that, rather than being a typical exponent of the American dream of self-made personhood, the individual is representative of a very specific social constellation, and thus much more useful as a figure with whose life to compare one's own. In her discussion of Feminist biography,

¹⁹⁰ At the end of the entry on 'empirical' and 'empiricism' in *Keywords* Williams notes: 'When the words are... qualified by national adjectives – 'the English empirical bent', 'the notorious Anglo-Saxon empiricism' – the argument usually goes beyond serious reach' (Williams, *Keywords*, p. 117).

¹⁹¹ Shapiro, *Politics*, p. 55.

¹⁹² Parke, *Biography*, p. 94.

Parke points out:

Feminist biography counterbalances a lives-of-the-great notion of history not only by taking women as its principal subjects, but also by narrating history as group movements rather than acts of individuals. ...A record of traditional success may then even count as a liability in choosing a female subject for biography, since familiar notions of greatness are understood to carry, of necessity, the biases of the dominant culture's institutional and ideological values. The template of feminist biography characterizes the individual's life as metonymically representative of larger group structures and conditions affecting the subject as a member of this group (p. 93).

If a figure who has achieved conventional success within an American framework of expectation is an unsuitable, because compromised, biographical subject, then a figure who has failed within this framework can acquire great paradigmatic value. Although we would expect Hawthorne to belong consistently to the conventionally successful category of biographical subjects, it will be seen in Chapter 2 that his life has, in fact, during certain periods, been represented as a useful failure very much according to Parke's terms. Also, presenting a figure as part of a group cuts through what Parke considers the compliant and complacent tendencies of American biography. Paradoxically, the biographical subject is rendered as less of an individual (i.e. a mythically representative American), but at the same time as more of an individual person, with ultimately greater representative value.

I make a distinction between 'individual' and 'individual person' because there exists a problem, as I have noted above, regarding the vocabulary of individuality versus individualism. The word 'individual' in an American context is loaded: it does not simply mean 'a single person, animal, plant, or thing considered as a separate member of its species or as having an independent existence: a person (*coll.*)', as *Chambers English Dictionary* (7th edition) defines it. It has all the connotations of self-reliance and non-conformity. In America, as Robert Sayre points out, individualism is not opposed to, it is an *expression of ideological conformity*.¹⁹³

Another strategy of undercutting biography's conformity-inducing tendencies is for the biographer to take on a radically subjective pose. According to Parke, 'feminist biography actively acknowledges, embraces, and often celebrates the subjectivity of

¹⁹³ Cf. Sayre, 'Autobiography', p. 152.

biography, arguing that subjectivity is a liability only when it remains unacknowledged or unconscious'.¹⁹⁴ One example in which biographical authority is deliberately surrendered in favor of a fundamental subjectivity is Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976). Here, the life-story of Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid, comes into view through the fractured surfaces of the daughter's radically unstable first-person narration about her own acculturation to America as a second generation immigrant. At the same time as authority is surrendered, however, the biographer attains greater freedom of expression when subjectivity becomes acknowledgeable; autobiography, or biographies with a strong, openly autobiographical element, are seen as more successful in using alternative linguistic and rhetorical strategies.

Schlaeger, Wilson, Shapiro, and Parke are all, explicitly or implicitly, suggesting the same thing: biographies affect readers for good or ill; therefore, the pursuit of biography, as author or reader, is not a disinterested activity. This belief is at variance with Harold Nicolson's declaration, discussed above, that 'ulterior purposes' on the part of the biographer cause an adulteration of the biographical work. Many theorists of biography who uphold the possibility that the author can remain uninvolved at the same time emphasize the need for selectiveness and narrative shaping on the part of the biographer.¹⁹⁵ In contrast, these four theorists of biography suggest that language eludes authorial control and defies intention; that the meaning of the historical or biographical text is not simply shaped but actually produced by the narrative strategies it employs, and that these strategies are in turn determined by the author's consciously or unconsciously held ideological assumptions – that there is, therefore, no such thing as an ideologically nonaligned text.

I have noted above that evaluation of biographies, no longer so much in terms of 'good' or 'bad', but now in terms of 'co-opted' or 'subversive', continues to be practiced by theorists of biography. In this context, Shapiro proposes that 'biographical codes' should be read:

not to find out about who wrote them or how faithful they are to the 'facts' but how it is that they contain meanings, how certain representational practices do

¹⁹⁴ Parke, *Biography*, p. 94.

¹⁹⁵ See, for instance, Leon Edel, *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), pp. 14-15.

their work, a work that can be arranged along a continuum of political challenge versus pious inscription of some aspect of entrenched power and authority.¹⁹⁶

He is uninterested in the referentiality of biography and instead opts for a textualist approach. For Schlaeger, on the other hand, finding out about ‘who wrote them’ is a crucial aspect of biographical analysis; while acknowledging the textual nature of biographical evidence, he argues for an approach to biography that is radically biographical and subjective:

With biography the warning of an ‘intentional fallacy’ is grossly misplaced. As a craft as well as a topic for analysis it demands a radically hermeneutical and person-centred approach. Everything in biography and about biography is interpretation of individuals. There is no meaningful talk about a ‘life’ beyond interpretation. For biographers and their subjects ‘life’ *is* interpretation, not interpretation of a reality beyond. ...In terms of a ‘Life’, subjectivism – both in the writer and his/her subject – is a *conditio sine qua non*.¹⁹⁷

Both Shapiro’s and Schlaeger’s approaches can be easily traced back to post-structuralist and, in particular, Derridean ideas and are in direct opposition to the widely held notions about biography’s inherently anti-theoretical and commonsensical nature. Many other pairs of oppositions have evolved or been construed, as we have seen: ‘pure’ versus ‘impure’; ‘objective’ versus ‘subjective’; referential/historicizing versus textualist/formalist, ‘authority challenging’ versus ‘adaptive’. It is the moments of such collision and strife in biographical theory and practice, but also some instances of surprising harmony between writers (sometimes separated by decades during which we might have expected attitudes to change significantly), which will be highlighted and interpreted – through the example of competing or concurring lives of Nathaniel Hawthorne – in the following three chapters.

¹⁹⁶ Shapiro, *Politics*, p. 67.

¹⁹⁷ Schlaeger, ‘Biography’, p. 58.

CHAPTER 2:

'ALL THAT ISOLATES, DAMNS':

HAWTHORNE BIOGRAPHY AND THE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY, 1915-1941

The essential sin, ...[Hawthorne] would seem to say, lies in whatever shuts up the spirit in a dungeon where it is alone, beyond the reach of common sympathies and the general sunlight. All that isolates, damns; all that associates, saves.¹⁹⁸

Many people find their way to the *general* through the *personal*. In that sense biographies have their right. And, that being so, better should they be written without great distortions (small ones are quite unavoidable).¹⁹⁹

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Newton Arvin's *Hawthorne* (1929) and its participation in the cultural criticism practiced by a group of intellectuals who articulated themselves most cohesively from the mid-1910s to the 1920s; foremost among them were Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, Randolph Bourne, Lewis Mumford and H. L. Mencken. Because of their commitment to an indigenous literary culture the members of this group are frequently called the 'Young Americans', likening them to the Young Americans club, centered around Evert Duyckinck and associated with John O'Sullivan's *Democratic Review*, which played a major part in the promotion of literary Americanism during the 1830s and 40s.²⁰⁰ Together with Brooks, Mumford, and others, Arvin collaborated in a program of literary criticism that eventually culminated in F. O. Matthiessen's identification of mid-nineteenth-century New England as the locus, and of a handful of men as the agents, of an 'American Renaissance'. The chapter will consider, broadly, the period between the appearance of Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age* in 1915, and of

¹⁹⁸ Newton Arvin, *Hawthorne* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), p. 59.

¹⁹⁹ Leon Trotzky, quoted from Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. x (where it is used as a motto).

²⁰⁰ Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy*, pp. 62, 186; Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community: The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, & Lewis Mumford* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* in 1941.

This period, which cannot be tidily separated from what came before or after, was marked by the United States' victorious, yet psychologically costly, participation in one world war and the uncertain outcome of another into which they had just entered, by the questions, challenges and hopes thrown up by the Russian Revolution, by an inter-war era that saw Red Scares, the 'Roaring Twenties', the Great Depression and the New Deal, and by the first shadows of the Cold War; it witnessed immense technological, economic and social changes, shifts in the structures of knowledge and experience which made a deep impact on the lives of individuals and communities throughout the United States. The work of the critics mentioned above, and of many of their peers, offers a peculiarly consistent response to the fabric of American life during the second and third decades of the twentieth century,²⁰¹ but it must be considered in its intellectual context, and in particular in relation to the responses of other groupings of intellectuals, such as the leftist literary historians and critics Vernon L. Parrington, Granville Hicks and V. F. Calverton at one end of the spectrum, and the Southern Agrarians at the other.

For over a decade after the first world war, intellectuals of all political shadings tended to perceive themselves as alienated within American culture and society. But more than that, they diagnosed a loss of community in America as a whole, a split within American society for which they sought to devise, if possible, a comprehensive remedy, occasionally envisaged in terms of a Hegelian synthesis or, in the case of the Agrarians, for example, an organic unity. Some of these intellectuals believed that an engagement with literature – and specifically 'American literature' – could suggest solutions to the social problems of America. In particular they considered that the American literary past could be useful, or 'usable', in restoring or constructing a harmonious and communal American society in which intellectuals could find for themselves a clearly definable place. In this context, certain periods of the American past – the colonial period, the mid-nineteenth century, or the Gilded Age – were recurrently identified as eras in which

²⁰¹ Guy Reynolds points out that: 'What is surprising, given [the] increased critical activity [in the second and third decades of the twentieth century], is how often the critics were in agreement' (*Willa Cather in Context: Progress, Race, Empire* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 27).

current concerns, and ways of addressing them intellectually and creatively, had their origin or reached significant crises that could shed light on present predicaments. The object of this examination of a previous era was to turn it into what Van Wyck Brooks called a 'usable past', a process which demanded a rediscovery, and, if necessary, a radical rewriting of (literary) history. Brooks called for this revision explicitly on behalf of contemporary American writers, who, with no literary tradition to feed on and from which to derive a sense of identity, were, in his eyes, doomed to mediocrity and failure. In his extremely influential essay 'On Creating a Usable Past' he declared:

The present is a void, and the American writer floats in that void because the past that survives in the common mind of the present is a past without living value. But is this the only possible past? If we need another past so badly, is it inconceivable that we might discover one, that we might even invent one?

Discover, invent a usable past we certainly can, and that is what a vital criticism always does.²⁰²

This notion of a 'usable past', the question how the literature and the figures of writers from the past could be utilized to make an impact on the present and, crucially, to create a better future, was taken up again and again by the twentieth-century Young Americans and the following generation of young critics. Immediately implicit in the incitement to 'discover' or 'even invent' a past are the possibilities of literary biography as an instrument for its construction. Indeed, by the time he was calling for a 'usable past', Brooks himself had already written two biographies of writers, of John Addington Symonds (1914) and H. G. Wells (1915). When he turned to the lives of three American authors – Mark Twain, Henry James and Ralph Waldo Emerson – in the early 1920s, biography became the primary vehicle for his cultural criticism in which the question of the social and cultural function of literature – the creation of a 'vital criticism' – played a central role.

However, this call for an 'invention' of the past immediately raises the question about the truthfulness of biographies produced in response to it. The 1920s and 30s constituted a chapter of the continual conflict within the genre between 'pure' and 'impure' biography outlined in Chapter 1. Brooks went so far as to assert that 'the spiritual past has no objective reality; it yields only what we are able to look for in it' (p.

²⁰² Brooks, 'Usable Past', in *Early Years*, pp. 219-226 (p. 223).

220). Newton Arvin thought that ‘disinterested analysis’ was not incompatible with what he called ‘interpretative biography’, while opponents of ‘impure biography’, like the biographer Bernard DeVoto or the academic Everett Hunt, considered it ‘propaganda’ or ‘cant’.

A number of influences had begun to change Anglo-American biographical practice profoundly during the second and third decade of the twentieth century, putting an end to Victorian piety in biography and making available new methods of understanding and representing subjects. Freud’s theoretical writings on psychoanalysis and his case studies, in which his method was largely biographical, were beginning to make an impact on biographical practice. Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* (1918), itself already informed by the Freudian quest for unconscious motives, was seminal; with the brevity of its four lives of Victorian worthies, its use of irony and its method of highlighting representative moments rather than aiming for comprehensiveness, it came to serve as a prototype for many subsequent British and American practitioners, among them Van Wyck Brooks himself. But many of these American imitators were, as Mumford notes, ‘humorless debunkers’, producing, in the twenties, ‘whole series of negative tributes to our classic writers; and in the case of shallower critics, professorial or popular, this attitude established a sort of inverse genteel tradition’.²⁰³ And Robert Spiller observes:

Much of the biographical ‘de-bunking’ of the twenties was pure sensationalism and has been conveniently forgotten; but it served a useful scholarly purpose. Once a stereotype was shattered, the conscientious literary historian could reexamine the facts and construct a new and probably more accurate portrait. The sum of these portraits by many hands has led to a wholly new view of American literary history.²⁰⁴

While Spiller accords these biographies the value of shattering stereotypes – clearing the way for the real work to be done – his formulation of an opposition between ‘sensationalism’ and ‘conscientious’ literary history sets up a dichotomy that the more serious practitioners of this kind of biography would have located elsewhere. What

²⁰³ Lewis Mumford, *The Golden Day: A Study in American Literature and Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. xiii.

²⁰⁴ Robert E. Spiller, *The Oblique Light: Studies in Literary History and Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. viii.

Spiller's formulation does not take into account is that some of the 'debunking' biographies were produced out of a genuine concern to address certain aspects of American culture, and that their authors, moreover, believed that biography was the appropriate medium through which to voice these issues. It is important to note that Strachey cared about his subjects, who, he affirmed, were 'too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past'.²⁰⁵ Nor, as we will see, did Brooks intend to caricature Twain and James; on the contrary, it is his primary strategy to enable an identification with his subjects, to let his readers know 'that others have desired the things we desire and have encountered the same obstacles'.²⁰⁶ As Michael Holroyd reminds us, the word debunker 'originally meant someone who took the bunkum or humbug out of a subject – not such a bad thing, after all'.²⁰⁷ Writing in 1927, Virginia Woolf contrasts the 'clumsy and laborious' Victorian biographers who were 'dominated by the idea of goodness' with what she calls 'The New Biography'.²⁰⁸ Now:

the author's relation to his subject is different. He is no longer the serious and sympathetic companion, toiling even slavishly in the footsteps of his hero. Whether friend or enemy, admiring or critical, he is an equal. In any case, he preserves his freedom and his right to independent judgment. Moreover, he does not think himself constrained to follow every step of the way. ...He chooses; he synthesizes; in short, he has ceased to be the chronicler; he has become an artist (p. 127).

Thus, biography began to move beyond its status as a merely secondary, subservient or meta- genre and professional or academic biographers themselves were licensed, by the writings of theorists like Woolf, and Strachey, and, some decades later, Leon Edel, to consider their craft with heightened self-confidence.

Alongside Strachey, André Maurois had a significant influence on the development of biography in the United States. Maurois's method, in his lives of Percy Bysshe Shelley (*Ariel* (1923)), and Benjamin Disraeli (1927), was that of employing a seemingly omniscient narrator with access to the subject's thoughts and to unrecorded conversations, a method which makes the genre overlap with fiction. O'Neill notes that

²⁰⁵ Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, p. 10.

²⁰⁶ Brooks, 'Usable Past', p. 226.

²⁰⁷ Michael Holroyd, "'On the Border-line between the New and the Old:'" Bloomsbury, Biography, and Gerald Brenan', in Law and Hughes (eds.), *Biographical Passages*, pp. 28-43 (pp. 33-4).

²⁰⁸ Virginia Woolf in Clifford (ed.), *Biography as an Art*, p. 126.

Ariel 'was very successful in [the United States], but it had a very bad effect in that it tempted writers of biography to use conversation to heighten interest; and very frequently that conversation had no basis in fact'.²⁰⁹ Woolf, too, stresses the difficulty, which the new biographical freedoms impose, of finding the right balance between 'truth of fiction' and 'truth of fact':

[T]he biographer's imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life. Yet if he carries the use of fiction too far, so that he disregards the truth..., he loses both worlds; he has neither the freedom of fiction nor the substance of fact.²¹⁰

Two years before his own Hawthorne biography appeared Newton Arvin showed himself enthusiastic about the new biographical possibilities when he reviewed Lloyd Morris's *Romantic Rebel: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne*, which follows Maurois's approach:

It was high time that so significant a career in the history of American literature should be reexamined with the eyes of the twentieth century and narrated for a generation that knew not Joseph. It was high time... that the greater freedom in the handling of his materials now conceded to the biographer should be put to advantage in the use of this particular material – so rich as it is in psychological implications and appeals to disinterested analysis.²¹¹

At that point, the latest Hawthorne biography had been Caroline Ticknor's *Hawthorne and His Publisher* (1913), which still firmly belonged to the group of nineteenth-century memoirs by family members and acquaintances, for Ticknor was the daughter of William D. Ticknor, James T. Fields's partner in the publishing house of Ticknor and Fields, and the book, which is much more concerned with her father than with Hawthorne (the frontispiece is an etching of Ticknor by S. A. Schoff), is obviously an attempt to do for her father what Fields had done for himself in *Yesterdays with Authors*: establish his share in Hawthorne's fame. In the Hawthorne section of his *Yesterdays with Authors* (1871), which was published separately in 1876 as *Hawthorne*, James T. Fields famously recounts how he visited Hawthorne a few months after the latter had been sacked from the Salem Custom House; he relates how, when Hawthorne

²⁰⁹ O'Neill, *History*, p. 184.

²¹⁰ Woolf, cited from *Biography as an Art*, p. 127.

²¹¹ Newton Arvin, 'New Pigment for an Old Canvas' in *American Pantheon*, pp. 69-73 (pp. 70-1).

despondently exclaimed: 'Who would risk publishing a book for *me*, the most unpopular writer in America?', he answered 'I would', and thus became the godfather of *The Scarlet Letter*.²¹² Caroline Ticknor in turn emphasizes those episodes in Hawthorne's life during which William Ticknor played a prominent role – in particular, of course, her father's tragic death while accompanying the ailing Hawthorne on a journey intended to promote the latter's convalescence. She asserts in her preface: 'The annals of literature contain the record of various memorable friendships which have existed between authors and publishers. ...Yet it is doubtful if among all such notable friendships, any can rival that of Hawthorne and Ticknor'.²¹³ Moreover, Ticknor's is a life-and-letters biography, a book that puts some sparse narrative flesh on the bones of the *Letters of Hawthorne to William D. Ticknor, 1851-1864*, which she had had published in 1910. Ticknor takes Hawthorne's literary fame completely for granted and is plainly not interested in evaluating or criticizing his works, nor indeed in relating her father's and Hawthorne's lives in any way to American life in 1913.

Arvin, in stressing the need for a new, and more relevant life of Hawthorne, was not merely praising Lloyd Morris's effort, he was also creating a space for the book he himself was already working on.²¹⁴ He commends Morris's book for making two significant contributions to Hawthorne scholarship: firstly, Morris had consulted the actual manuscripts of Hawthorne's notebooks and love letters, documents whose published versions were very heavily edited;²¹⁵ secondly, Morris's more thorough investigation of Hawthorne's sojourn in Europe, a 'task [which] ha[d] been dodged or scamped by other biographers', had ceded some genuinely new information. Arvin criticizes Morris's omission to engage with Hawthorne's literary achievement and his underestimating 'the unmistakably *fugitive* character' of the relationship between

²¹² Fields, *Yesterdays*, p. 49.

²¹³ Caroline Ticknor, *Hawthorne and His Publisher* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1913), Preface.

²¹⁴ Cf. Barry Werth, *The Scarlet Professor: Newton Arvin, A Literary Life Shattered by Scandal* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2001), p. 35.

²¹⁵ Morris had accessed the manuscripts of Hawthorne's notebooks in the Pierpont Morgan Library, of which Sophia Hawthorne's heavily edited and expurgated *Passages* were the only published editions. In 1932 Randall Stewart made his name as a scholar by producing a new edition of the *American Notebooks* from the original manuscripts, see Chapter 3. Morris also consulted Hawthorne's original letters to Sophia, only some of which had previously been printed, also heavily edited, in *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*, and in a limited edition of sixty-one copies for the Society of the Dofobs, Chicago, 1907.

Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody.²¹⁶ He later addressed these last two perceived deficiencies in his own book by providing a critical evaluation of Hawthorne's works and an exposition of what he considers Hawthorne's essentially 'fugitive' or 'centrifugal' relation to his environment.

In May 1929, in a review of Lewis Mumford's life of Melville, Arvin referred to biography as 'our decade's favorite literary form', and in 1935 Edward Hayes O'Neill noted that the 'period between 1919 and 1935 was the most prolific in the history of biographical writing in America'.²¹⁷ My aim in this chapter is to show which roles biographies of nineteenth-century American writers, and in particular of Hawthorne, were made to play in the context of bringing the nineteenth-century literary past to bear on the early twentieth-century present – and not just an objectively reconstructed past, but a past 'discovered' and organized for the purpose of rescuing American writers – and thus America itself – from debilitating mediocrity and intellectual starvation.

Five book-length Hawthorne biographies were published during the period under investigation in the present chapter. After an interval of fourteen years, the longest hiatus in the production of Hawthorne biographies, the late nineteen-twenties saw the appearance of three lives in as many years: in 1927 Lloyd Morris's *The Rebellious Puritan* and Herbert Gorman's *Hawthorne: A Study in Solitude*, published in the Murray Hill Biographies series, and in 1929 Newton Arvin's *Hawthorne*. These were followed, in 1932, by *Romantic Rebel*, a Hawthorne biography for young readers written by Julian Hawthorne's daughter Hildegard; this was the last full-length biography produced by a member of the Hawthorne family, although Manning Hawthorne, Julian Hawthorne's son, produced, between 1937 and 1940, a series of articles on aspects of Hawthorne's life.²¹⁸ *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Modest Man* by Edward Mather (really Edward Arthur

²¹⁶ Arvin, 'Pigment', pp. 71, 73.

²¹⁷ George Monteiro, 'Newton Arvin Reviews Mumford', *Melville Society Extracts*, 97 (June 1994), 7-9 (p. 8); O'Neill, *History*, p. 179. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*: 'In the year 1929, at the height of the biographical "boom," there were published in the United States 667 new biographies; in 1962 exactly the same number appeared, the population in the meantime having increased by something like 50 percent' (*New Encyclopædia Britannica*, p. 23:193).

²¹⁸ Manning Hawthorne's help, especially in facilitating access to family documents, is acknowledged by several generations of Hawthorne biographers, including Randall Stewart, Louise Hall Tharp (*The Peabody Sisters of Salem*), Edward Wagenknecht, Arlin Turner, Raymona Hull and Gloria Erlich.

Mather Jackson) was published in 1940.²¹⁹ Of these biographies, the focus will be on the work of Newton Arvin, who was encouraged by Van Wyck Brooks to use Hawthorne as a biographical subject,²²⁰ and whose *Hawthorne* in turn provided F. O. Matthiessen with a vocabulary and a way of thinking about Hawthorne which can be seen to resurface again and again in *American Renaissance*. Arvin's *Hawthorne* will be analyzed alongside Gorman's and Morris's Hawthorne biographies and Lewis Mumford's life of Herman Melville, also published in 1929, with which it shares important underlying assumptions about the relationship between the American artist/intellectual and American society.

2.2 The Changing Canon

During the second and third decades of the twentieth century, Hawthorne's writings, with the exception (sometimes, but not always) of *The Scarlet Letter*, were frequently characterized as 'starved and abstract', 'anemic', as 'plainly not of the first order'.²²¹ Robert Spiller summed up the consensus when he observed in 1928: 'A sense of unfulfillment, almost of failure, seems unavoidably associated with the name and work of Nathaniel Hawthorne'. And yet, he continues, 'Hawthorne's position in that small company of pioneers who first brought distinction to the literature of America remains unquestioned. It might almost be said that... his place is preeminent even in this limited circle'.²²²

This verdict is seemingly identical to the way Hawthorne had been seen by the previous generation, the so-called 'genteel critics', and yet subtly different. Then,

²¹⁹ The back flap of the first edition informs us that '[a]ppropriately enough, Edward Mather is descended from the same family tree as the famous Cotton and Increase Mather – the Mathers of Toxteth' (Edward Mather, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Modest Man* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1940). This choice of pen name clearly reflects the British Mather's intent to insert himself into a distinguished American genealogy and thus to establish himself in a pseudo-familial relationship with Hawthorne himself by emulating his Puritan descent.

²²⁰ Werth, *Scarlet Professor*, p. 35.

²²¹ 'Starved and abstract' (Santayana, 'Genteel Tradition', p. 203); 'anemic' (Brooks, *Early Years*, p. 109; Vernon Lewis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginning to 1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1930), p. 2:446); 'plainly not of the first order' (Arvin, *Hawthorne*, pp. 206-7).

²²² Spiller, 'The Mind and Art of Nathaniel Hawthorne' in *Oblique Light*, pp. 151-159 (p. 151).

Hawthorne's writings had also been damned with faint praise: Henry James, in his *Hawthorne* (1879), compared *The Scarlet Letter* unfavorably to the Scotsman John Gibson Lockhart's *Adam Blair*, a novel few people, today, will claim to have read; Barrett Wendell charged Hawthorne's works with 'monotony, provincialism, a certain thinness'; and in 1909 W. C. Brownell confessed to finding the majority of Hawthorne's tales 'dull', while Woodberry, as we have already seen, had characterized Hawthorne's literary manner as 'countrified', 'archaic' and 'stiff'.²²³ These critics were making these assessments from within a context when Hawthorne 'was the American author whose greatness seemed most incontestable, and who best displayed the literary virtues the then-prevailing canon constituted itself around'.²²⁴ It was not Hawthorne's status as one of the best American authors which they called into question, but America's ability to produce first-rate literature in the first place. James famously ascribed Hawthorne's limitations to 'the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life', and Wendell reached his assessment when comparing Hawthorne's works with contemporary English literature.²²⁵ In contrast, and this is the crucial difference, the new assessment of Hawthorne in the 1910s and 20s did not deplore that American literature was not more like English literature, or that American society was not more like English society. The twentieth-century 'Young Americans' saw American culture and society as deeply flawed and therefore incapable of producing a great literature as yet, but they wanted the literature produced in the United States nevertheless to be distinctly American, and they saw great merit in such American authors as Walt Whitman or Theodore Dreiser, whom critics like Wendell, Brownell or Irving Babbitt regarded as stylistically sloppy and morally misguided.

The late nineteenth-century literary canon had been established predominantly in the literary marketplace rather than in the academy, largely through the agency of literary magazines and of publishers (like James T. Fields), whose marketing strategies were partially responsible for the ways particular authors were categorized in the minds

²²³ Henry James, Jr., *Hawthorne* (English Men of Letters series, London: Macmillan, 1879), p. 114; Barrett Wendell, *A Literary History of America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 434; W. C. Brownell, *American Prose Masters*, ed. by Howard Mumford Jones (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1963), p. 52; Woodberry, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 156.

²²⁴ Brodhead, *School*, p. 8.

of the reading public.²²⁶ The authors chosen to be included as subjects in Houghton Mifflin's American Men of Letters series indicate which authors were deemed central by the publishers: the advertisement for the series in the back pages of the 1903 edition of Woodberry's *Hawthorne* lists William Cullen Bryant, Cooper, George William Curtis, Emerson, Benjamin Franklin, Hawthorne, Irving, Longfellow, Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Poe, George Ripley, William Gilmore Simms (deliberately chosen to represent the South),²²⁷ Bayard Taylor, Thoreau, Noah Webster, Whittier and Nathaniel Parker Willis, with biographies of Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Lothrop Motley, Francis Parkman, and William H. Prescott announced as forthcoming. Willis was the brother of the best-selling author 'Fanny Fern' (Sara Payson Willis), who, characteristically, was herself not considered a suitable subject for the series. There is an obvious bias towards male, white, New England authors, which did not, however, as far as the publishers were concerned, conflict with the series' intention 'to present in a group of lives of American men of letters a biographical history of our literature'.²²⁸ It is also noteworthy that Whitman was deliberately excluded from the series by its editor Charles Dudley Warner, because Warner did not consider Whitman to have the qualities of a 'Man of Letters'. The publishers Houghton Mifflin, however, would have liked to include the poet because of 'a continuous and permanent interest in him', which had already manifested itself in several Whitman biographies produced during the 1890s.²²⁹ It was only after Warner's death that a Whitman biography by Bliss Perry (1906) was finally included in the series. This omission of Whitman, and the fact that only a small number of the American Men of Letters volumes actually sold well, shows that the prescriptions of literary editors and academics did not necessarily correspond to the estimates of the reading public: 'The least popular volumes in the Men of Letters series were precisely those that reflected the publisher's and editors' desire for representativeness: now-forgotten magazinist Willis and southerner Simms' (p. 280).

It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that American literature

²²⁵ James, *Hawthorne* (1879), p. 43.

²²⁶ Brodhead, *School*, p. 55.

²²⁷ Casper, *Constructing*, p. 277.

²²⁸ Woodberry, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, advertisement in back pages.

²²⁹ Casper, *Constructing*, p 391 n.8. See Appendix B.3.5.

began to be taught in American universities and even then rarely systematically; separate courses only developed around the turn of the century.²³⁰ Barrett Wendell, author of one of the first comprehensive American literary histories (1900), was, characteristically, Professor of *English* at Harvard College, and his literary history is careful to demonstrate the interdependency of American literature with English literature, a strategy which, however, according to Kermit Vanderbilt, ‘disguised his underlying streak of stubborn Americanness’.²³¹ This showed itself most clearly in the importance Wendell ascribed to American humor, and in particular his admiration for Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*; these assessments render him a precursor of critics like Constance Rourke and Bernard DeVoto, who viewed ‘humor’ as a characteristically American type of literary expression.²³² Wendell, who, like Woodberry, had been a student of James Russell Lowell and Charles Eliot Norton, exemplifies a paradoxical attitude on the part of many late-nineteenth century advocates of American literature, whether amateur or academic: while they did promote American literature by describing it, they did not think highly of what many later critics have considered its native properties: ‘they did not question the assumption that whatever was of value in it was a product of New England and therefore predominantly British in spirit’.²³³

Wendell’s discussion of Whitman is illustrative of this tendency. Whitman puzzles Wendell, and his disapproval is usually tempered by something like grudging admiration: for example, ‘Crossing Brooklyn Ferry’ is written in a rhythm ‘which sounds as if hexameters were trying to bubble through sewage’ – a phrase that particularly irked Lewis Mumford –, and yet ‘Whitman has here accomplished a wonder’.²³⁴ Wendell tries to have it both ways by simultaneously claiming and rejecting Whitman as a representative American author, and he couches his critique of Whitman, characteristically, in terms of the collision between Anglo-American empiricism and European theory: ‘American democracy did not spring from abstract philosophising; it

²³⁰ Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 211-212.

²³¹ Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy*, p. 137.

²³² See Fritz Fleischmann, ‘Barrett Wendell’ in Rathbun and Grecu (eds.), *Critics and Scholars, 1880-1900*, pp. 283-292 (p. 291).

²³³ Graff, *Professing*, p. 212.

²³⁴ Wendell, *Literary History*, p. 473; Mumford, *Golden Day*, p. vii.

had its origin in the old conceptions of liberty and rights as maintained by the Common Law of England'. Of the democratic ideals arising from the French Revolution – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity – it is 'the ideal of liberty' by which the '*practical* enthusiasm of American democracy has been chiefly excited', whereas the

theoretical democracy of Europe... has tended rather to emphasise the ideal of fraternity, which seems incidentally to include a sound thrashing for any brother who fails to feel fraternal; and still more this European democracy has tended increasingly to emphasise the dogma of human equality.

Thus, equality is an ideal which 'seems hardly to accord with the teachings either of *natural law* or of any *recorded experience*' (all p. 467, italics added for emphasis). This European ideal, linked through the word 'dogma' with the notion of unfreedom, is, according to Wendell, hostile to any notion of 'excellence'. Whitman is positively un-American in his emphasis on equality:

Though he would hardly have assented to such orthodox terms, his creed seems to have been that, as God made everything, one thing is just as good as another. ...and people who share Whitman's ideal are apt to disregard as superstitious any argument, however impressive, which should threaten to modify their faith in equality. It is a superstition, they would maintain, ...that kings, nobles, and gentlemen are in any aspect lovelier than the mob. It is a superstition that men of learning are intellectually better than the untutored. It is a superstition which would hold a man who can make a chair unable consequently to make a constitution. It is a superstition that virtuous women are inherently better than street-walkers. It is a superstition that law is better than anarchy. There are things, to be sure, which are not superstitions. Evil and baseness and ugliness are real facts, to be supremely denounced and hated; and incidentally, we must admit, few arraignments of the vulgarity and materialism which have developed in the United States are more pitiless than those which appear in Whitman's 'Democratic Vistas.' The cause of these hurtful things, however, he is satisfied to find in the traces of our ancestral and superstitious devotion to outworn ideals of excellence. We can all find salvation in the new, life-saving ideal of equality (p. 468).

Perceptible in this mocking enumeration is an anxiety on Wendell's part about the redundancy of the cultured upper middle class, to which he himself belongs, which is implied by the populist tendencies in contemporary American society: any 'man who can make a chair' can be a legislator, a university education does not mean intellectual pre-eminence and authority. Tellingly, his analogies link culture with a notion of aristocracy, the conception of 'cultural "leadership"' which the generalist critics had

taken up from Arnold,²³⁵ and place intellectuals in a conceptual opposition with ‘the mob’. Whitman’s in fact very Jacksonian ideal of equality, which the conservative Wendell here declares un-American, is illustrated by the structure of his poetry, especially in ‘Song of Myself’ and ‘Crossing Brooklyn Ferry:’

In an inextricable hodge-podge you find at once beautiful phrases and silly gabble, tender imagination and insolent commonplace, – pretty much everything, in short, but humour [sic]. In America this literary anarchy, this complete confusion of values, is especially eccentric; for America has generally displayed instinctive common-sense, and common-sense implies some notion of what things are worth. One begins to see why Whitman has been so much more eagerly welcomed abroad than at home. His conception of equality, utterly ignoring values, is not that of American democracy, but rather of European. His democracy, in short, is the least native which has ever found voice in this country. The saving grace of American democracy has been a tacit recognition that excellence is admirable (p. 471).

Wendell continues, equivocatingly: ‘In temper, then, Walt Whitman seems less American than any other of our conspicuous writers. It does not follow that in some aspects he is not very American indeed’ (p. 471).

In contrast, it is Hawthorne who is for Wendell unproblematically the quintessential American writer, ‘the most indigenous’ of ‘all our men of letters’ (p. 430); he is ‘the least imitative, the most surely individual’ American writer, who ‘expresses the deepest temper of that New England race which brought him forth’ (p. 435).

Like the American Men of Letters series, Wendell’s history shows a strong proclivity towards white, male New England writers, and he freely admitted in a letter to William James: ‘In sentiment it is Tory, pro-slavery, and imperialistic; all of which I fear I am myself’.²³⁶ His longest and climactic section is called ‘The Renaissance of New England’. This canonizing of male, predominantly east-coast and frequently New England authors is a tendency which, however differently from Wendell subsequent literary historians defined their task, has remained prevalent until the most recent paradigm shift in American literature. It culminated, of course, in Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* and was also practiced by Newton Arvin, critics whose literary politics could in all other respects not have differed more strongly from Wendell’s literary Toryism.

²³⁵ Cf. Graff, *Professing*, pp. 81-82, 83. See also Trachtenberg, *Incorporation*, p. 155.

Around the turn of the century, American literature was thus, in spite of the mid-nineteenth-century efforts to establish a native American literature, still not generally recognized as separate from English literature, and if it was, it tended to be considered far inferior in quality. This was largely due to the anglophile, Tory attitudes of many of the generalist academic critics and men of letters in positions of cultural dominance. This is the group called 'genteel' by George Santayana in 'The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy', and whose members Brooks attacks in 'On Creating a Usable Past' for depriving the young intellectuals and writers of his generation of a viable American tradition. However, as Kermit Vanderbilt points out, those among the 'genteel' critics who sought to profess *American* literature, like Wendell and Woodberry, were themselves 'an embattled group facing an entrenched opposition within the academy that was inhospitable to American literature as a worthy subject of historical and philological enquiry'.²³⁷

Two simultaneous but interconnected currents helped to raise the estimation of American literature, the professionalization of American Studies, under the auspices of the American Literature Group of the Modern Language Association, and on the other hand the passionate interest taken by insurgent independent or journalistic critics like Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, or H. L. Mencken.

The reputations of some of the American Men of Letters subjects had already declined by the time their biographies were published during the 1890s and 1900s, but Longfellow and Irving, for example, who had been the cornerstones of the nineteenth-century canon, likewise began to disappear from sight when the 'genteel' canon came under revision during the 1910s and 20s. This revision was due to a number of factors, and is reflected in literary histories of the period. Mumford praises John Macy's *The Spirit of American Literature* (1912) as 'the first public rectification of a long series of provincial appraisals' like Barrett Wendell's, who had failed to appreciate Whitman.²³⁸ Macy criticizes 'accepted handbooks and histories of American literature [which] pay

²³⁶ Quoted from Fleischmann, 'Barrett Wendell', p. 289.

²³⁷ Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy*, p. 185.

²³⁸ Mumford, *Golden Day*, p. xii.

too much attention to doubly dead worthies, whose books are not interesting, and miss or but timidly acknowledge contemporary excellence'.²³⁹ He makes the unusual choice of including William as well as Henry James and calls Jonathan Edwards a 'dreadful bore' (p. vii). He commends Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman above Bret Harte (ibid.) and denounces the literary pantheon chosen by the National Institute of Arts and Letters for excluding women (pp. vii-viii). However, he shirks redressing this balance in his own literary history; the subjects of his sixteen monographic chapters are all white men: Irving, Cooper, Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Whittier, Poe, Holmes, Thoreau, Lowell, Whitman, Twain, Howells, William James, Lanier, and Henry James. In his first chapter Macy praises Theodore Dreiser (p. 17), who is frequently the touchstone of critics' attitudes towards the relationship between politics and literature. Dreiser was abhorred by humanists (like Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More) and Agrarians, and admired by 'literary Americanists' and many leftists – a position which he shares with Whitman.

V. F. Calverton praised Dreiser as 'one of the first of the American novelists to reveal a freedom from the colonial complex'. He contended that Dreiser 'was not concerned with English critics and English styles... He was saturated with the American environment and expressed it in whatever he wrote. ...He belongs to the tradition of Walt Whitman and Mark Twain and not to that of Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne'.²⁴⁰ In contrast, the humanist critic Irving Babbitt, remonstrated in 'The Critic and American Life' that in *An American Tragedy* Dreiser 'has succeeded in producing... something genuinely harrowing; but one is harrowed to no purpose. One has in more than full measure the tragic qualm but without the final relief and enlargement of spirit that true tragedy succeeds somehow in giving...'.²⁴¹ It is the absence of catharsis, the fact that the reader is not purged of the negative emotions (fear and pity) induced by Dreiser's novel, that bothers Babbitt; this recalls Hamilton's obtuse objection to Brechtian drama discussed in Chapter 1. In the same essay Babbitt deplores the 'present

²³⁹ John Macy, *The Spirit of American Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1913), p. vii.

²⁴⁰ V. F. Calverton, *The Liberation of American Literature* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1932), pp. 408-409.

²⁴¹ Irving Babbitt, 'The Critic and American Life', first published in *The Forum*, February 1928; reprinted in Zabel (ed.), *Literary Opinion*, pp. 1:133-145 (p. 1:139).

preposterous overestimate of Walt Whitman' (p. 1:140).

Macy, however, still based his estimation of American writers on English and European models. In 1914 Randolph Bourne deplored the slavish acceptance of Arnoldian ideals on the part of American critics and declared:

The only remedy for this deplorable situation is the cultivation of a new American nationalism. We need that keen introspection into the beauties and vitalities of our own life and ideals that characterizes the French. ...There are 'classics,' not in the English and Arnoldian sense of a consecrated canon, dissent from which is heresy, but in the sense that each successive generation, putting them to the test, finds them redolent of those qualities which are characteristically French, and so preserves them as a precious heritage. This cultural chauvinism is the most harmless of patriotisms; indeed it is absolutely necessary for a true life of civilization. And it can hardly be too intense, or too exaggerated.²⁴²

Bourne, who opposed the United States' participation in the First World War, was calling for a corresponding attitude in America, a 'harmless' 'cultural chauvinism' that would nurture the fragile plant of home-grown literature. Mumford likewise explains the necessity for a distinctly American rather than an Anglo-centric canon:

Before we Americans could recover what Mr. Van Wyck Brooks had happily called a 'usable past', it was necessary to have a fresh sense of confidence in our own creativity, past, present, and potential; and this meant that we must accept some better criterion for our performance than its approximation to standard European models.²⁴³

These attitudes are equivalent to Emerson's in 'The American Scholar', and to Melville's exhortation in 'Hawthorne and His Mosses' in 1850, to '[I]et America first praise mediocrity even, in her own children, before she praises... the best excellence in the children of any other land. Let her own authors, I say, have the priority of appreciation.' Melville had declared, with his tongue very much in his cheek: 'I was much pleased with a hot-headed Carolina cousin of mine, who once said, – "If there were no other American to stand by, in Literature, – why, then, I would stand by Pop Emmons and his 'Fredoniad,' and till a better epic came along, swear it was not very far

²⁴² Randolph Bourne, 'Our Cultural Humility', first published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1914; cited from Zabel (ed.), *Literary Opinion*, pp. 1: 68-72 (p. 1:71).

²⁴³ Mumford, *Golden Day*, p. viii.

behind the Iliad.” Take away the words, and in spirit he was sound’.²⁴⁴ With the same tenacity as that praised here by Melville did critics like Brooks, Mencken and later Matthiessen, whose final book was a Dreiser biography, resolve to stand by contemporary authors like Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, or past authors like Hawthorne, whose output they did not necessarily consider first-rate, but whose Americanness they considered the foundation for building a national literature that could encourage and invigorate future American writers.

It was with the First World War that the resurgence of literary Americanism, understood as a literary patriotism, properly began. As part of the war effort, university departments were called upon to establish ‘patriotism inducing subjects’, amounting, as Fred Lewis Pattee observed, to the equivalent of ‘a kind of educational Monroe Doctrine’; by 1925 the battle for American literature courses in literature departments had been ‘completely won’.²⁴⁵

Although written by an Englishman, D. H. Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) struck a cord in the United States. Lawrence chose a small group of American writers – Franklin, Crèvecoeur, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Dana and Whitman – as representative, and his portrayal of Hawthorne is completely different from the way the ‘genteel’ critics had viewed him. Lawrence writes: ‘That blue-eyed darling Nathaniel knew disagreeable things in his inner soul. He was careful to send them out in disguise’.²⁴⁶ The quality Lawrence praises most in Hawthorne is his ‘duplicity’ (p. 106), a clear indication as to what qualities the revised canon cherished in its writers: literary difficulty and complexity. The rediscovery of Melville likewise reflects this shift. Macy, although not including Melville in his literary history, had praised *Moby-Dick* as a ‘madly eloquent romance of the sea’ (p. 16) and Brooks listed finding out ‘What happened to Herman Melville?’ as one of the ‘real task[s] for literary historians’.²⁴⁷ Significantly, the Melville revival manifested itself most decisively in the publication of two full-length Melville biographies during the 1920s: Raymond

²⁴⁴ Herman Melville, ‘Hawthorne and His Mosses’ in *American Literature, American Culture*, ed. by Gordon Hutner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 93-102 (p. 98).

²⁴⁵ Cited from Graff, *Professing*, pp. 130, 212.

²⁴⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 89.

²⁴⁷ Brooks, ‘Usable Past’, p. 226.

Weaver's *Herman Melville: Mariner and Mystic* (1921), and Mumford's *Herman Melville: A Study of His Life and Vision* (1929). Another Melville biography, John Freeman's *Herman Melville* (in the English Men of Letters series) was published in England in 1926. Weaver's book was in fact the first full-length Melville biography ever to be published, thirty years after Herman Melville's death.

Paul Lauter asserts that this revival of Melville was ideologically motivated. He declares:

I want to argue that, in the main, 'Melville' was constructed in the 1920s as part of an ideological conflict which linked advocates of modernism and of traditional high cultural values – often connected to the academy – against a social and cultural 'other,' generally, if ambiguously, portrayed as feminine, genteel, exotic, dark, foreign, and numerous. In this contest a distinctively masculine, Anglo-Saxon image of Melville was deployed as a lone and powerful artistic beacon against the dangers presented by the masses; creating such an image entailed overlooking issues of race, eroticism, democracy, and the like, which have become commonplaces of contemporary Melville criticism.²⁴⁸

Lauter asserts that '[i]ndeed, Melville's major role for 1920s (and 1930s) critics is the artist as hero, standing apart from, in fact above, his society' (p. 10). This is not true, however, of Mumford's analysis of Melville, for Mumford perceives as Melville's final achievement the 'building up of a new ego, a surer and more central, a social and participating self, which is the task of our own time for both men and communities'.²⁴⁹

It was only in the early 1920s, coincidental with the Melville revival, that American Literature emancipated itself as a distinct academic subject. Looking back, in 1957, to the mid-nineteen twenties when his own history of American literature, *The Golden Day* (1926), was published, Mumford contrasts the present 'overpopulated city of books' on American literature and culture with an 'almost virgin wilderness' in the 1920s:

For those who are now immersed in 'American Studies,' the absence of anything like an appreciative attitude toward American literature and art before the present generation must seem almost incredible. ...At the time *The Golden Day* [no italicization] appeared, there were, so to say, no Vernon Parrington, no F. O. Matthiessen, no Constance Rourke, no Perry Miller, no Robert Spiller, no *Makers and Finders* Series, no full length studies of Emily Dickinson and William James,

²⁴⁸ Paul Lauter, 'Melville Climbs the Canon', *American Literature*, 66.1 (March 1994), 1-24 (p. 6).

²⁴⁹ Mumford, *Herman Melville*, p. 367.

no five-foot bookshelf of Melville biographies, no fresh dissertations on Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Alcott, Poe, Longfellow, Hawthorne.²⁵⁰

The American Literature Group (ALG) within the English Language section of the Modern Language Association was formed in 1921. Robert Spiller's notes as Acting Secretary of the 1923 meeting of the ALG make it clear that the project of the historical contextualization of literature was at the heart of the initial emancipation and organization of the field of American studies, and that biography played a central part in that project: 'Professor Pattee suggested rewriting official biographies because of their prejudiced matter; Professor Hubbell told of teaching literature by backgrounds, Dr. Mabbott recommended biographical and bibliographical studies of local authors'.²⁵¹ He later recalled: 'From then on, American literature as a scholarly discipline was on the offensive and the note of apology began to fade' (p. 260).

Brodhead notes that the canon revision:

exactly coincides with the rise of a new formation of the professoriate – a professoriate trained not so much in general humane learning as in field-specific expertise.... And we might at least speculate that their new version of the past also served, as the earlier one had its genteel sponsors, to underwrite their own new cultural authority. If there is anything the second or modern American canon is that the first or genteel canon was not, it is difficult. ...*This* version of our literature requires the aid of expert assistance to bring it home to the common mind – and so helps support the value of expertise more generally.²⁵²

Lauter observes that as the criteria for inclusion in the canon shifted towards what was perceived as literary complexity, certain groups were excluded: 'In the twenties processes were set in motion that virtually eliminated black, white female, and all working class writers from the canon'. He adds: 'Since women were seen as the preservers of gentility and women writers as its promoters, the change in literary taste helped ensure their exclusion from the canon'.²⁵³ Attendant on this exclusion of women writers as subjects of academic inquiry was a freeze on the numbers of biographies taking them as subjects; where biographies of women writers were produced it was usually done by female biographers (see Appendices B.1 and B.2.2, which show the

²⁵⁰ Mumford, *Golden Day*, p. vii.

²⁵¹ Spiller, *Oblique Light*, pp. 257-258.

²⁵² Brodhead, *School*, p. 5.

examples of Stowe and Dickinson). Thus, while interest in the so-called 'American Renaissance' flourished, the contemporary 'Renaissance' in Harlem went practically unnoted by the 'Young Americans' and those who enlisted under their banner. It is noteworthy that critics interested in one of these excluded groups (women, African Americans, or proletarian writers) were more likely to extend their interest to others; consider, for instance, V. F. Calverton, a communist literary historian editing an anthology of black American writing,²⁵⁴ or the number of women biographers taking up a figure like Frederick Douglass since the late 1950s (see B.1 and B.2.2). Brooks himself, as the main editor of *The American Caravan*, included the Communist, African-American-identified play *Hoboken Blues; or, The Black Rip Van Winkle*, by the Jewish writer Mike Gold in the anthology, possibly, as William Maxwell suggests, because it fitted in with 'Brooks's recommendation that folk materials made the U. S. past more usable'.²⁵⁵ On the whole, however, while new areas of American literature (e.g. Melville) were being opened up in the academy, many doors were closed and remained so for a long time. As Russell Reising argues, the 'usable past' that was chosen by the new arbiters of American literature, academic or independent, caused other possible literary pasts to be considered 'unusable' and to become 'unused'.²⁵⁶

Hawthorne remained a central figure in the revised canon of the 1920s, but under very different terms. He was one of relatively few authors who were transmitted to the new canon, albeit in a largely negative way. Hawthorne was seen as *the* author who wrote about the past, who gave New England a history and a tradition. Even when critics were aware that he was not himself a Puritan they saw him as the writer with the strongest link to Puritanism, not only because of his ancestors, but also because he used a literary

²⁵³ Paul Lauter, 'Race and Gender in the Shaping of the American Literary Canon: A Case Study from the Twenties', *Feminist Studies*, 9.3 (Fall 1983), 435-463 (pp. 435, 440).

²⁵⁴ V. F. Calverton (ed.), *Anthology of American Negro Literature* (New York: The Modern Library, 1929).

²⁵⁵ Van Wyck Brooks, Alfred Kreymborg, Lewis Mumford and Paul Rosenfeld (eds.), *The American Caravan: A Yearbook of American Literature* (New York: Literary Guild of America, 1927), pp. 548-626; William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, New Left: African American Writing and Communism between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 115; for a discussion of the play see pp. 112-120.

²⁵⁶ See Russell Reising, *The Unusable Past: Theory and the Study of American Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986).

form, allegory, that was closely linked to the Puritan world view and the typological method. His perceived preoccupation with sin and guilt were likewise seen by many as residual Calvinism. At this time, Puritanism was not very well understood; until the researches of historians like Perry Miller recovered its historicity the term was often removed from its historical context and forced to take on different meanings. A residual Calvinism was widely seen by progressive critics, and especially Mencken, as the scourge of American life, and as the root cause, by way of its perceived continuity with the current culture of industrialism, of religious fundamentalism and the Prohibition. What many of the accounts of Hawthorne's works have in common is the description of Hawthorne as a latter-day, shadowy and ineffectual Puritan. George Santayana wrote in 1911:

The three American writers whose personal endowment was perhaps the finest – Poe, Hawthorne, and Emerson – had all a certain starved and abstract quality. ...[T]he genius of Poe and Hawthorne, and even of Emerson, was employed on a sort of inner play, or digestion of vacancy. It was a refined labor, but it was in danger of being morbid, or tinkling, or self-indulgent. ...Their mind was like an old musicbox, full of tender echoes and quaint fancies.²⁵⁷

Brooks's assessment of Hawthorne in *America's Coming-of-Age* was almost identical; Hawthorne is praised as one of the most talented writers, but the real stress is on the flaws and limitations of his art:

No other talent is of so shining a purity as Hawthorne's, – scarcely one other so light, so inevitable, so refined, so much a perfectly achieved intention. ...The Puritan conscience in Hawthorne is like some useful but inartistic Roman vessel of glass which has been buried for centuries in the earth and which comes forth at last fragile as a dragonfly's wing, shot through with all the most exquisite colours. ...

This leads one almost to forget that Hawthorne's range is limited, that his gift is meagre and a little anaemic, that his poetry is not quite the same thing as wisdom.²⁵⁸

And in Mumford's *The Golden Day* (1926), which singles out Emerson ('The Morning Star'), Thoreau ('The Dawn'), Whitman ('High Noon'), Hawthorne ('Twilight'), and Melville ('Night') – the same five writers Matthiessen, who referred to the publication

²⁵⁷ Santayana, 'Genteel Tradition', p. 203.

²⁵⁸ Brooks, 'America's Coming-of-Age' in *Early Years*, pp. 81-158 (pp. 108-109).

of Mumford's book as 'a major event in my experience',²⁵⁹ later seized upon in *American Renaissance* –, the Hawthorne section, which is the briefest, is called 'Twilight' and its final thought mentions Emerson, Whitman, and Melville, but not Hawthorne himself. Mumford strikes a similar note as Santayana and Brooks:

In Hawthorne... the conviction which produced a *Paradise Lost* or a *Pilgrim's Progress* [no italics] still glowed with a white intensity; but its heat was gone. Hawthorne was silver; the silver of moonlight; the silver of fine goblets; the tarnished silver of ancient and abandoned houses, locked in moldy drawers.²⁶⁰

These three evaluations all associate Hawthorne with a melancholy aesthetic of decay and Brooks and Mumford both detect a residual Calvinism in his psychological makeup. This reflects the fact that although Hawthorne was still subjected to the same degree of faint praise the kind of value given to him to make him part of the new canon had changed. For the 'genteel' critics, Hawthorne had been, in a sense, the best of a bad lot as judged in terms of their Anglophile criteria. Now Hawthorne's perceived characteristics – the peculiar aloofness of his personality, his Puritan ancestry and affiliation with New England, the idiosyncrasy of his literary output and in particular his tendency towards allegorical modes of writing, and finally his perceived obsession with sin and guilt – were found to provide a particularly cogent and relevant vocabulary with which to address the predicament of the young American intellectual who found that 'in our national life today... *he is not wanted*', as Harold Stearns believed in 1921.²⁶¹ In fact, it was Hawthorne's very 'starvedness' that rendered him an *exemplum* for the alienated intellectuals and writers of the 1910s and 20s.

2.3 The Alienation of American Intellectuals

Richard Hofstadter states that the first traces of what he considers an intrinsic anti-intellectualism in American society can be found in attacks on Jefferson during the 1796 election campaign, which frequently focused on his interest in science and denounced him as an impractical 'philosopher', and in the opposition between John Quincy Adams

²⁵⁹ Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. xvii.

²⁶⁰ Mumford, *Golden Day*, p. 68.

²⁶¹ Harold Stearns, *America and the Young Intellectual* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), p. 21.

(Harvard professor), and Andrew Jackson (hero of the Indian war and man of the people) during the 1820s (pp. 157-160).²⁶² After Jackson's overwhelming victory in the 1828 elections Jacksonian individualism became the dominant ideology, even though a disenchantment with Jacksonianism itself set in with the Civil War. Hofstadter observes:

The first truly powerful and widespread impulse to anti-intellectualism in American politics was, in fact, given by the Jacksonian movement. Its distrust of expertise, its dislike for centralization, its desire to uproot the entrenched classes, and its doctrine that important functions were simple enough to be performed by anyone, amounted to a repudiation not only of the system of government by gentlemen which the nation had inherited from the eighteenth century, but also of the special value of the educated classes in civic life (pp. 155-156).

This notion that the 'common man' did not need any special education in order to fulfill any function in the state was perpetuated beyond the Jacksonian era in popular biographies of politicians that stressed the motif of the rise from humble origins to high political office, for example in William Thayer's biographies of Lincoln (*The Pioneer Boy* (1863)) and Garfield (*From Log-cabin to White House* (1882)), and Horatio Alger's life of Garfield (*From Canal Boy to President* (1881)); the emphasis was on strength of personality as opposed to advantages of education that came from being born into a wealthy family. However, intellectuals did not feel alienated, they embraced Jacksonian egalitarianism as an opportunity to define their own vision of America, although Transcendentalists and Abolitionists tended to be Whigs (p. 156). Despite its apparent anti-intellectual impulses the 'Young Americans' of the 1830s and 40s firmly embraced literary Americanism as an expression of Jacksonianism. John L. O'Sullivan's *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* was simultaneously one of the foremost mouth-pieces of Jacksonianism and a highly important organ for the promotion of a native literature; it managed to enlist contributions from many distinguished writers, such as Bryant, Thoreau, Whittier, Whitman, Poe, Longfellow, Lowell, Simms, the historian George Bancroft, Orestes Brownson and published, between 1837 and 1845,

²⁶² Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), pp. 147, 157-160.

twenty-three pieces by Hawthorne himself.²⁶³ Among these, Hawthorne himself and Bancroft were perhaps the most tenacious adherents of the Democratic party.²⁶⁴

It is important to note that definitions of liberalism versus conservatism do not run along the same fault lines as the opposition of intellectual versus anti-intellectual, or even correspond to the divisions between political parties in America. This fact enables complex and apparently contradictory identifications on the part of twentieth-century critics, historians and biographers between their own political convictions and those that they perceive in individuals, groupings or parties of the nineteenth century.

American intellectuals began to see themselves as alienated during the Gilded Age. Although Jackson's personal reputation had by then declined, Jacksonian *laissez-faire* was perceived as running amok; big business, urbanization, industrialization, immigration, and universal suffrage (excluding 'only' women – black men had got the vote in 1868) all caused these intellectuals, who mostly belonged to the patrician class, to feel they were under threat. The foremost protesters of this alienation included Charles Eliot Norton of Harvard and James Russell Lowell (the teachers of Woodberry and Wendell), Francis Parkman and Henry Adams. Alan Trachtenberg writes in *The Incorporation of America*:

[T]heir conception of the marginal role of cultivated intelligence within modern society would become in the twentieth century a common perception among many American academic intellectuals. For they were the first group of writers and thinkers, chiefly literary and political, to view themselves as alienated, and to describe and judge their times against the measure of their own alienation. In doing so, they were led by the force of their perceived circumstances toward

²⁶³ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1945), p. 372; Gale, *Hawthorne Encyclopedia*, p. 359.

²⁶⁴ It is significant that Lilian Handlin in her Bancroft biography (1984) describes Bancroft as creatively and intellectually stunted through this adherence. She writes: 'Living in an era when the connection between scholarship and the marketplace was intimate enough to allow an American with a German Ph.D. to run for governor of Massachusetts and become a spokesman for territorial expansion, he successfully seized the opportunities that came his way. In so doing Bancroft behaved as intellectuals did then and still do now, exploiting images and symbols to define political identities, popularize programs, and broaden the social and cultural imagination of his generation. But he also paid a price, since the very versatility and adaptability to pressures that advanced his careers also subverted his talents. Atrophied critical faculties, credulity, incessant rationalization, and selective visions – the penalties of a seemingly charmed existence – reduced an able man and great historian to one of the lesser luminaries of the era. Therein lies the ultimate significance of his career' (Lilian Handlin, *George Bancroft: The Intellectual as Democrat* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. xvi).



cultural criticism, a new kind of writing in which these conservative writers seized on the emerging popular and political culture.²⁶⁵

As we have seen (see Introduction), these cultural critics would seek to enshrine in their idea of culture the notion of a past, harmonious social order:

Contrary to the objections often heard today, recent academic Marxists and feminists were not the first to 'politicize' literature and criticism: the cultural critics of the nineteenth century turned literary criticism into a kind of social and political action by other means. Culture, defined as universal values of 'sweetness and light,' was pressed into service to save society from engulfment by the 'machinery' of private interest and opinion and the acrimonious contentions of democratic politics.²⁶⁶

These conservative critics felt that 'Culture' was being cheapened and eroded, and with it their position as the arbiters of culture.

In contrast to this patrician rejection of American society Brooks, Bourne and the other Young Americans sought a model based on participation. During the early 1910s, the progressivist movement provided some hope. Two features of progressivism were important: the notion that the state should regulate the economy more strongly and the sense that in order to work out how best to do that it would need the participation of experts/intellectuals. During Woodrow Wilson's presidency intellectuals felt that they had greater political influence and regarded Wilson as one of them. They believed that by the implementation of progressivist ideas the world was gradually becoming a better place. This belief was shattered by the United States' entry into the First World War, which deeply disillusioned those many intellectuals who, like Randolph Bourne, opposed participation in the war.

During the late 1910s and early 1920s many artists and intellectuals first left small town America for the big cities and then left the United States for Europe. Lewis Mumford comments with reference to those intellectuals and artists who chose to remain in the United States:

Make no doubt of it: those who stayed behind needed either a double thickness of skin, or they needed the narrow convictions and the faith in the immediate activities of the country that the industrialist exhibited. Failing such toughness,

²⁶⁵ Trachtenberg, *Incorporation*, p. 154.

²⁶⁶ Graff and Robbins, 'Cultural Criticism', p. 423.

most of them were forced to retreat into a private world that received little sustenance from the community immediately around them.²⁶⁷

In the mid nineteen-twenties the anti-intellectual climate seemed particularly hostile: the decade was marked by the 'Red Scare' that culminated in the execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in 1927, the Scopes trial of 1925, Prohibition, and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. From persecuting blacks, the Klan had changed focus towards immigration and was now a nationwide organization; it was evidenced how widespread support for the Ku Klux Klan was when they were able to stage a 40,000 strong parade down Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue in 1925, which was attended by a million people.²⁶⁸ The Klansman was the antithesis of the intellectual, but, as Robert Moats Miller notes, what they shared with the intellectuals was the desire to belong to a community: 'The Klan illuminates the need of mediocre men to flee to the mysticism of the primitive collectivity, and serves, therefore, to remind us that Americans are implicated in the totalitarian temper of the modern world' (p. 215).

The episode in the twenties which for many intellectuals seemed to manifest most clearly the conflict between themselves and the fundamentalist tendencies in American society was the 'monkey trial' in Dayton, Tennessee, also in 1925. The Tennessee legislature had passed a law in 1920 that forbade the teaching of evolutionary theory in public schools and colleges. In 1925 the American Civil Liberties Union asked John Scopes, a young biology teacher in Dayton, to violate the anti-evolution law in order to test its validity. Scopes was arrested in May 1925 and tried in July in a widely publicized trial. He was defended by the Chicago lawyer Clarence Darrow, while William Jennings Bryan, a Southern Democrat politician prominent for his fundamentalist views, had offered to undertake the prosecution. Scopes was found guilty – he had violated the law by teaching Darwinism – and fined \$100, the minimum fine.²⁶⁹ As Frederick Hoffman points out, 'it was more than a mere violation case; it became a

²⁶⁷ Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865-1895* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), p. 8.

²⁶⁸ Cf. e.g. Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*, pp. 117-141 and passim; Robert Moats Miller, 'The Ku Klux Klan,' in John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner & David Brody (eds.), *Change and Continuity in Twentieth-Century America: The 1920's* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), pp. 215-255.

²⁶⁹ See Tindall and Shi, *America*, pp. 1097-1098; Frederick J. Hoffmann, *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 313-314.

crisis in the struggle of modernists and liberals against fundamentalists, represented at the trial by Clarence Darrow on one side and William Jennings Bryan on the other' (p. 314). Darrow and Bryan had each used the case to publicize his own views, and Darrow had succeeded in turning Bryan's literal-minded Bible interpretations into a national laughing stock and broadcasting evolutionary theory, which the fundamentalists had sought to suppress, all across the nation. H. L. Mencken covered the trial for the *Baltimore Sun* and lost no opportunity to ridicule Southern attitudes and to deride Bryan. But while Scopes's conviction meant a Pyrrhic victory for the fundamentalist cause, the implicit triumph for liberal and leftist intellectuals was likewise accompanied by unease, because the Dayton affair had shown up the pervasiveness of anti-intellectual views among significant parts of the American population. Hofstadter writes:

The evolution controversy and the Scopes trial greatly quickened the pulse of anti-intellectualism. For the first time in the twentieth century, intellectuals and experts were denounced as enemies by leaders of a large segment of the public. No doubt, the militant fundamentalists were a minority in the country, but they were a substantial minority; and their animus plainly reflected the feelings of still larger numbers, who, however reluctant to join in their reactionary crusade, none the less shared their disquiet about the trend of the times, their fear of the cosmopolitan mentality, of critical intelligence, of experimentalism in morals and in literature.²⁷⁰

The fact that these were, for the time being, the death throes of this particular kind of right-wing fundamentalism, that the Scopes trial, although won by the anti-evolutionists, only showed up the ludicrousness of their position, that the Klan declined very quickly in the late 1920s, does not mean that intellectuals did not feel under siege. Hofstadter reminds us that:

it would be a serious failure of the imagination not to remember how scared the intellectuals of the 1920's were. Perhaps not quite so much appeared to be at stake as in the McCarthyist crusade of the 1950's, but the sense of oppressive danger was no less real (pp. 129-130).

If the Dayton trial had shown up the polarization of American society between fundamentalists on the one hand and liberals and leftists on the other, the trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti and their execution in 1927 despite strenuous attempts, on the part of intellectuals of different political shadings and of leftists of different

²⁷⁰ *Anti-Intellectualism*, p. 130.

degrees of learning, to have them acquitted or pardoned, made it clear that lives were at stake in this conflict, for it was widely perceived that the two men were on trial for being radicals and immigrants rather than for murder.

The Great Depression after the 1929 stock market crash radicalized many of the leftist intellectuals who had been comparatively apathetic during the 1920s and confirmed others in their endorsement of socialist and Communist views. In 1932, fifty-two intellectuals, including two Hawthorne biographers (Newton Arvin and Robert Cantwell), published an open letter advocating support for the Communist presidential candidate William Z. Foster.²⁷¹ However, Roosevelt's 'New Deal' also gave rise to a return to patriotism during the 1930s, as many leftists approved of the increased involvement of the government to regulate the economy. Hofstadter describes the resulting changes in biographical practice in the 1930s:

Writers took a fresh and more respectful interest in the American past. For example, whereas a major feature of biographies conceived or written in the twenties had been the task of depreciation – as in W. E. Woodward's cranky assault on Washington, Edgar Lee Masters's merciless assessment of Lincoln, and Van Wyck Brooks's extraordinary critical tour de force on Mark Twain – the characteristic biographical work of the thirties and forties was the type of lavish, tender, full-scale biography whose most massive and sentimental monument was Carl Sandburg's life of Lincoln.²⁷²

However, the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact left many radicals and leftists deeply disillusioned and in need of reorienting themselves and redefining their political creeds during the Second World War and the post-war era.

2.4 The Uses of Biography: 'all that associates, saves'

Against their perceived alienation the Young Americans, in contrast to the largely anti-democratic 'genteel' critics, mobilized a set of democratic or socialist ideals. It seems almost impossible to overestimate the importance of Van Wyck Brooks for American criticism during the quarter century following the publication of *America's Coming-of-*

²⁷¹ See Richar H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), pp. 76-66.

²⁷² Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*, p. 413.

Age (1915). The book was rejected for publication at Scribner's by W. C. Brownell, who thought it 'premature'.²⁷³ It is here that Brooks formulates his thesis that American culture suffers from a split into 'Highbrow' and 'Lowbrow' components which need to be reconciled.

For Brooks and Waldo Frank, Arvin and Mumford, the Puritan, the pioneer and the industrialist exemplified different stages in the same deplorable historical development, culminating in the present sterile culture of soulless industrialism. Brooks argues in *America's Coming-of-Age*:

It was the Puritan conception of the Deity as not alone all-determining but precisely responsible for the practical affairs of the State itself, which precluded in advance any central bond, any responsibility, any common feeling in American affairs and which justified the unlimited centrifugal expediency which has always marked American life. And the same instinct that made against centrality in government made against centrality in thought, against common standards of any kind. The imminent eternal issues the Puritans felt so keenly, the equally imminent practical issues they experienced so monotonously threw almost no light on one another; there was no middle ground between to mitigate, combine, or harmonize them.²⁷⁴

It is crucial to note that, in contrast to the Gilded Age generation of anglophile critics and professors, the Young Americans were willing to invest their hopes in a future America. Their critical and biographical writings tended to be jeremiads. Mumford, for example, devotes the eponymous chapter of his study, *The Golden Day*, to the period of 1830 to 1860, and singles out the very same writers that Matthiessen a decade and a half later saw as responsible for the 'one extraordinarily concentrated moment of expression' that constitutes the heart of the American Renaissance: Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Melville. This period, Mumford says,

was the climax of American experience. What preceded led up to it: what followed, dwindled away from it; and we who think and write to-day are either continuing the first exploration, or we are disheartened, and relapse into some stale formula, or console ourselves with empty gestures of frivolity.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Claire Sprague, 'Editorial Note' in Brooks, *Early Years*, pp. 79-80 (p. 79).

²⁷⁴ Brooks, *Early Years*, pp. 83-84.

²⁷⁵ Mumford, *Golden Day*, p. 43.

Elsewhere he declares that ‘the Golden Day’ was ‘a fulfilment of the past and a starting point for the future.’²⁷⁶ This statement, ironically, considering Mumford’s hostility towards Calvinism, repeats the pattern of Puritan typology: the fact that writers have succeeded as artists in the past implies the possibility that they will be able to do so in the future. Claire Sprague sums up this notion of American promise in relation to Brooks’s thought:

American promise functions as a kind of escape clause in Brooksonian cultural nationalism. It makes the defective present bearable. What wasn’t would be. And what was could be altered.... The reconstruction of the past and the shape of the future became inextricably tied in Brooks’s cultural critique.²⁷⁷

Similarly, Randolph Bourne wrote in 1916, in his influential essay ‘Trans-National America’:

All our idealisms must be those of future social goals in which all can participate, the good life of personality lived in the environment of the Beloved Community. No mere doubtful triumphs of the past, which redound to the glory of only one of our trans-nationalities, can satisfy us. It must be a future America, on which all can unite, which pulls us irresistibly toward it, as we understand each other more warmly.²⁷⁸

In ‘On Creating a Usable Past’ Brooks makes it clear why biography is so useful in establishing this kind of understanding that would bring about a better future:

Knowing that others have desired the things we desire and have encountered the same obstacles, and that in some degree time has begun to face the obstacles down and make the way straight for us, would not the creative forces of this country lose a little of the hectic individualism that keeps them from uniting against their common enemies? And would this not bring about, for the first time, that sense of brotherhood in effort and in aspiration which is the best promise of a national culture?²⁷⁹

In 1920, the year his biography of Mark Twain was published, Brooks wrote in an essay for the *Freeman*: ‘What counts in biography is not the causes of the character but the significance of the character itself, or rather, since the biographer is of equal importance with the subject, the impact of one character on another’. James Vitelli comments on

²⁷⁶ Mumford, *Brown Decades*, p. 114.

²⁷⁷ Sprague, ‘Foreword to the 1993 Edition’ in Brooks, *Early Years*, pp. xvii-xxxv (pp. xxii-xxiii).

²⁷⁸ Randolph Bourne, ‘Trans-national America’ in *The Radical Will: Randolph Bourne; Selected Writings, 1911-1918*, ed. by Olaf Hansen (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), pp. 248-264 (p. 264).

²⁷⁹ Brooks, *Early Years*, p. 226.

this: 'This statement can stand as Brooks's explanation of his intention to show the significance of Mark Twain to his generation'.²⁸⁰

In *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (1925) Brooks argues that by expatriating himself from the United States and thus losing access to the 'Sacred Fount' of his understanding of human character, 'the sort of understanding that is born only of race', James crippled himself morally, and thus artistically, as a writer. Because he inherently understood Americans, he was able to describe generalized human nature; when he lost this understanding through removing himself from 'his own soil', he lost 'his instinctive judgment of men and things'.²⁸¹ This claim was provocative, especially for admirers of Henry James, but the James biography was less influential and controversial than *The Ordeal of Mark Twain*, published five years earlier. According to Sprague, the James book is more important for what it tells us about Brooks in the 1920s than for its thesis – the tendency of most Henry James criticism has been to see James's expatriation as the source of his excellence as a novelist and to consider him anything but a failed artist.²⁸² *Ordeal*, however, has been extremely important: its extreme provocativeness has fostered debate and the hunt for new evidence,²⁸³ but its chief claim, the dividedness of Mark Twain, has remained a central concern in Twain biography, as Justin Kaplan's *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain* (1966) and the more recent *Inventing Mark Twain: The Lives of Samuel Langhorne Clemens* (1997) by Andrew Hoffman attest. Brooks's analysis of Mark Twain's predicament is devastating: Twain is represented as stunted by an imposed and internalized conformity to social expectations, and by his wish to succeed economically and socially in a culture which exacts the price of intellectual mediocrity for this kind of success. Twain's mother, his wife and his social circle are the villains of the piece; they are attacked as examples of overrefined gentility. Brooks believes that Twain could, and should, have been an American Rabelais, Cervantes, or Swift, but failed.²⁸⁴ The accidents, caused by Twain's 'absent-mindedness', that killed one, and nearly a second, of his children, are interpreted by Brooks as acts of subconscious

²⁸⁰ Cited from James R. Vitelli, *Van Wyck Brooks* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 93, Vitelli's comment *ibid.*

²⁸¹ Brooks, *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), pp. 103-105.

²⁸² Sprague, editorial note in Brooks, *Early Years*, p. 286.

²⁸³ Cf. Brooks, *Early Years*, pp. xviii, xxvii, 246-247, 286.

vengeance against the constrictions of his domestic and social life: ‘And in that hour the “old Adam,” the natural man, the suppressed poet, registered its tragic protest, took its revenge, against a life that had left no room for it. Truth comes out in the end’.²⁸⁵ Significantly, this episode is omitted in the 1933 revised edition. In his 1957 autobiography Brooks concedes that he had undervalued Twain’s literary achievement in *Huckleberry Finn*, but maintains that, when he reexamined Twain for his *Makers and Finders* series, he ‘still felt... [Twain] had made the great refusal and that *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* was substantially just’.²⁸⁶

Brooks was one of the first American biographers to introduce Freudian psychoanalytic notions as tools to understand and explain his subject – the example just cited shows his use of the concept of the ‘return of the repressed’ –, but his real focus is on social, economic, and cultural conditions. Both Twain and James are represented as consummately talented, but thwarted by the life-choices they make: Twain, because he longs to participate in America’s money-grabbing, but spiritually bankrupt culture, James, because he has fled from it. The same split in American culture, between ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’, that Brooks had diagnosed in *Wine of the Puritans* and *America’s Coming-of-Age* is held responsible for preventing Twain and James from becoming the artists they should have been.

Striking about *Ordeal* is the extent to which Brooks’s prose, and thus his interpretation, is foregrounded, for example in the use of extended metaphors: in the central chapter, titled ‘Those Extraordinary Twins’, Twain, the lion, who jumps through the hoops when under the watchful eye of civilization, ‘discloses his claws’ in mocking and lethal revolt ‘when the trainer turns his back’.²⁸⁷ Brooks was nothing if not personally engaged in the writing; he paid a heavy psychological price for thinking the Twain and James life-stories through to their dispiriting conclusions: after completing *Ordeal* he suffered from a severe bout of depression, and during the composition of *Pilgrimage* he experienced a two-year breakdown. His life in the late 1920s was marked

²⁸⁴ Brooks, *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (new and revised edition, New York: AMS Press, 1977), p. 269.

²⁸⁵ Brooks, *Early Years*, p. 250.

²⁸⁶ Brooks, *Days of the Phoenix: The Nineteen-Twenties I Remember* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1957), p. 174.

²⁸⁷ Brooks, *Ordeal*, pp. 219, 224, 241.

by nervous breakdowns which, several times, led to hospitalization.²⁸⁸ Brooks's third American biography, *The Life of Emerson* was published in 1932, but had been largely completed in 1926, at around the same time that he persuaded Newton Arvin to take up Hawthorne as a biographical subject.²⁸⁹ In his memoirs, Brooks explains that he had intended his Emerson biography to be the third volume of a 'biographical trilogy', the "exemplary" study' designed to resolve the predicament shown up by his two previous 'cautionary' lives. The Twain book had constituted the 'thesis', *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* the 'antithesis', and *The Life of Emerson* should have provided 'the "synthesis" of Hegel' by constructing in the figure of Emerson 'the image of a literary model, a whole and central figure, in American terms'. Emerson had seemed the ideal subject, 'for no other had thrown so much light on the natural history of the writer and the art of conserving, developing and expending his powers'. In the end, however, Brooks has to concede that Emerson 'was too remote from the modern American scene' to be made usable in this particular way. Brooks's crucial concerns are with the failure of 'our literary life' and with 'the true nature of the writer's success'. For, he declares, 'as, year after year, I saw our writers stumbling about in the dark, failing in the same old ways or giving up the fight, I wondered why American critics remained so incurious about it, indifferent as they seemed to everything but technical questions'.²⁹⁰ This is an indictment of both formalist literary criticism, which, by the time he wrote *Days of the Phoenix* had gained ascendancy, and of the scholarly and historicist approaches to literature, for their failure to make their findings relevant to contemporary writers. Brooks's three American lives clearly constitute instances of 'American biography', for, by using figures he considers representative of larger tendencies, Brooks engages with the perceived failure of the American writer.

For Brooks, Mumford, Frank, and other leftist critics it was writers like Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis – much more than the expatriates T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, whom the Agrarians admired – who exemplified the contemporary American creative artist. That is not to say, however, that they

²⁸⁸ See Sprague's editorial notes in Brooks, *Early Years*, pp. 246, 285 n.1; see Vitelli, pp. 111-113.

²⁸⁹ Werth, *Scarlet Professor*, pp. 34-35.

²⁹⁰ Brooks, *Days of the Phoenix*, pp. 172-173.

unreservedly admired those writers; for the critics, it is precisely the limitations of those authors which show them as representative of the limitations of American culture. Sinclair Lewis is one example of a writer who had failed representatively, and whose failure is described in terms very similar to those applied to Hawthorne during this period. In January 1931, deploring the fact that Lewis had received the Nobel Prize for Literature, Mumford wrote:

[T]o define Mr. Sinclair Lewis's specific virtues is to acknowledge his limitations. He has been immersed in his milieu; he knows its dreadful human limitations; he has rebelled against them; but he has not mustered sufficient personal force of culture to overcome them in himself.²⁹¹

Similarly, Robert Cantwell, author of the radical proletarian strike-novel *The Land of Plenty* (1934), wrote of Lewis's works in October 1936, in the *New Republic*:

It was a mistake of his critics to see in those novels evidence of that intellectual awakening and skeptical self-criticism which has become known as America's coming-of-age. For Lewis is the historian of America's going-to-pieces – or at least of the going to pieces of her middle-class – with no remedy to offer for the decline that he records; and he has dramatized the process of disintegration as well as his own dilemma, in the outlines of his novels, in the progress of his characters, and sometimes, and most painfully, in the lapses of taste and precision that periodically weaken the structure of his prose.²⁹²

Cantwell uses Brooksonian terms, but inverts them to reflect his own proletarian-identified agenda. It is noteworthy that Cantwell was likewise attracted to Hawthorne and would later choose him as a biographical subject in *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years* (1948) (see Chapter 3). Finally, in his autobiographical *A Threshold in the Sun*, Lloyd Morris, the author of *Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne*, describes Lewis as 'one of the most typical Americans of his time', as so 'thoroughly representative' that he 'illustrated better than many another writer the tragic intellectual history of the generation.'

For he, too, was guilty of making the great refusal – though he stated it in the noblest terms. Despair is absolute when heart and mind celebrate the glories of the past only because the future holds no prospect but desolation. In Lewis' work the tone of elegy was unmistakable. In it, America appeared to be contemplating,

²⁹¹ Lewis Mumford, extract from 'The America of Sinclair Lewis' in Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), pp. xxiv-xxvii (p. xxvi).

²⁹² Robert Cantwell, 'Sinclair Lewis' in Zabel (ed.), *Literary Opinion*, pp. 2:494-501 (p. 2:501).

ruefully and resentfully, the shards of its traditional culture, the dissolution of its ancestral, epic dream.²⁹³

These assessments of Sinclair Lewis by one Melville biographer and two Hawthorne biographers describe Lewis in terms very similar to those in which Hawthorne was being discussed during this period. Lewis, like Hawthorne, is seen as the author whom America let down, and whose flawed books bear witness to that disappointment.

Twelve years after its publication, Arvin praised *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* as 'perhaps the most remarkable piece of interpretative biography in our literature'.²⁹⁴ He was defending Brooks's book against Bernard DeVoto's aggressive rebuttal of *Ordeal, Mark Twain's America* (1932).²⁹⁵ DeVoto calls his own book an 'essay in the correction of ideas' (p. ix) and devotes almost an entire chapter, titled 'The Critics of Mark Twain', to the effort of dismantling Brooks's thesis, attacking Frank's and Mumford's representations of the pioneer as indicative of the spiritual impoverishment attendant on American individualism, in the process (pp. 40-41).

DeVoto himself celebrates Twain as a frontier humorist and seeks to rescue him from Brooks's negative assessment as a failed artist. He dismisses approaches which he disdainfully classifies as 'academic criticism and politico-psychological criticism', as 'worthless' (p. 218). He claims complete objectivity for his own critical/biographical project; for example, he has not included anything that was not verifiable: 'Many people have told me anecdotes about Mark Twain. I have used none of them' (p. 323). Thus,

I have arrived at no simple, unified formula for the explanation of Mark Twain, and... I have refused to answer a good many questions on the ground that a factual answer is impossible and I dislike theoretical ones. I do not believe in simplicities about art, artists, or the subject of criticism. I have no theory about Mark Twain. It is harder to conform one's book to ascertainable facts than to theorize, and harder to ascertain facts than to ignore them. In literature, beautiful simplicities usually result from the easier method, and, in literature, the armchair assertion that something must be true is the begetter of unity. One who is not content with assertion must usually be prepared to do without the unity also (pp. xii-xiii).

²⁹³ Lloyd Morris, *A Threshold in the Sun* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), p. 214.

²⁹⁴ Newton Arvin, 'Mark Twain Simplified' in *American Pantheon*, pp. 135-141 (p. 135).

²⁹⁵ Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1932).

In his description of current criticism he puts his finger exactly on Brooks's concerns, which he himself, as he stresses, does not share:

[T]he criticism of literature in America is so frail, so capricious, so immature a force, that discussion has moved away from what a great man wrote, to what he was or was not, what he should have been, what America has failed to be, and what the reformation of society might achieve if the world were amenable to pretty thoughts (p. xi).

In particular, and in pointed and deliberate contrast to Brooks and his followers, DeVoto is not interested in whether Twain has fulfilled his potential as a writer or not: 'Whatever he might or should have written has, for me, no importance whatever. I am completely uninterested in what psychology, politics, economics or evangelism may reveal about him' (p. xi).²⁹⁶

DeVoto is thus among the foremost spokesmen of the backlash against 'interpretative' biography in the early 1930s. The force of this backlash can be judged by the *New York Times* coverage of the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of America in December 1934. Out of the five items reported on in the article two concern biography. The first accuses contemporary biography of irresponsibility and of a lack of solid scholarship:²⁹⁷

Dr. Henry Seidel Canby, editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, asserted that there was a lack of good modern biography. Most of it, he said, consisted of jazz creations, designed more to amuse than to instruct the reader. / 'Few of the modern biographies will survive,' he declared. 'I think that the great majority of the biographies of the last ten years are notably careless as compared with those of thirty years ago' (ibid.).

Everett Hunt, the subject of the second item, combines an indictment of partisan or psychoanalytic biography with a criticism of what he perceives as specialisms, in general:

²⁹⁶ In 1970, Ernest Earnest judged Brooks's method in terms very similar to DeVoto's: 'The importance of *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* is that it is so typical of the literary criticism of its era. Instead of being a scholarly attempt to discover and evaluate the evidence, it is propaganda: the marshalling of selected evidence to support a doctrinaire thesis. It was part of the contemporary war on Puritanism, business, and the alleged American hostility to the artist' (Earnest, *The Single Vision: The Alienation of American Intellectuals* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 20; cited from Reynolds, *Willa Cather*, p. 177 n.8).

²⁹⁷ 'Sees US Heading for Dictatorship', *New York Times*, 30 December 1934, p. 11.

Professor Everett Hunt of Swarthmore College accused biographers and historians of the modern school of bias. / 'The communist interpreters of literature,' he said, 'will distort history for propaganda purposes. The psychologists will discover so many Puritan suppressions among our authors that we may soon desire to give a Puritan training to any youth suspected of literary talent.' / He declared that scientific and vocational specialists were making inroads that would reduce life to mere profit-taking and asserted that the duty of literature was to protect the emotions (ibid.).²⁹⁸

The reference to 'Puritan suppressions' hints that Hunt may well have Hawthorne, or at least the work of the Young American biographers with their rejection of Puritanism in mind. DeVoto and the speakers at the MLA meeting attack Brooks and his method on the grounds of being unhistorical and interested merely in his own thesis rather than the objective truth. DeVoto's objective biographer will avoid the pitfalls of interpretation, oversimplification, and jargon. Consequently, his product will leave the impressionable cold, but, as a repository of sheer knowledge, the more useful:

His result lacks brilliance. It is without the ingenious nonsense of the interpreter. It is without the certainty of the ignorant and the psychological – the certainty that is the unmistakable hallmark of the theorist's cocksureness. It is without the ingenious nonsense of the interpreter. It is without the invective of the debunker, without the contrived, humanitarian unity of the hopeful, without the passion of the generous. It is without teaching, without preaching, without hope for a better world.... It will not make life seem easier to optimists and has no bearing on reform or revolution. It is only an intelligent man's effort to deal with facts. ...Like other controlled and tested knowledge, it is usable.²⁹⁹

In his review, titled 'Mark Twain Simplified' and originally published in the *New Republic*, Arvin mockingly rephrases DeVoto's assertions about his biographical method: 'In short, the business of criticism and biography (in Mark Twain's case as elsewhere) is to accept the accomplished fact without comparison or qualification, and to

²⁹⁸ Interestingly, a third point that stuck out to the *New York Times* reporter was Randall Stewart's emphasis on Hawthorne's patriotism as gleaned from Hawthorne's English notebooks: 'Dr. Randall Stewart of Vanderbilt University, who is editing the third and fourth volumes of Hawthorne's notebooks, told the American literature group that Hawthorne was so strongly American that he could not refrain from comparing everything with things American, even in his private notes. He said that Hawthorne spoke of the Crimean crisis in one note and declared that should a war rise between England and America he would gladly resign his consular office and return as a naval commander to help capture England'.

²⁹⁹ DeVoto, extract from 'The Skeptical Biographer' (first published in *Harper's Magazine*, January 1933), cited from Clifford (ed.), *Biography as an Art*, pp. 144-150 (p. 150).

explain it without analysis'.³⁰⁰ This is quite obviously a test-case for Arvin: the contested ground is not merely the truth about Mark Twain; the issue most at stake is how to write biography. DeVoto and the speakers at the MLA meeting on one hand, and Arvin and Brooks on the other, enact the familiar opposition between 'pure' and 'impure' biography, between 'objectivity' and 'propaganda'. Norman Denzin provides some more terms in which this opposition is often expressed. He notes that: 'Traditionally, users of the objective approaches' (such as DeVoto) 'have judged their efforts in terms of the norms of validity, reliability, truth, falsity, bias, data, hypotheses, theory, ...and generalizability.... Interpretive approaches reject these norms of evaluation and regard biographical materials from within a literary, fictional framework'.³⁰¹ For Arvin, biography that does not engage in social interpretation is pointless. According to Arvin, DeVoto effectively renders life and literature irrelevant to one another; he enacts precisely the separation that Brooks and Arvin find so crippling. In contrast, Brooks's biographer does not only provide a vital service to his community, he also achieves self-validation by explaining the community to itself through the subject. As Brooks had declared, '[w]hat counts in biography is... the impact of one character on another'.

2.5 'Hawthorne's Tragedy, and America's': Newton Arvin's *Hawthorne*

Arvin guides us into his *Hawthorne* by using as his motto a passage from Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age*, which describes Hawthorne as 'this most deeply planted of American writers, who indicates more than any other the subterranean history of the American character'.³⁰² The phrase resurfaces again in *American Renaissance*, where F. O. Matthiessen proposes that 'the cultural value of the province [New England] is that, however restricted in its range, it has sent its roots far down, as Brooks discerned in calling Hawthorne the "most deeply planted..." etc.³⁰³ The self-evidence with which Matthiessen metonymically equates Hawthorne with New England is typical of this group of cultural critics. The man and the place form two sides of a triangle for which

³⁰⁰ Arvin, 'Mark Twain Simplified', p. 138.

³⁰¹ Denzin, *Interpretive Biography*, p. 49.

³⁰² Brooks, *Early Years*, p. 109.

³⁰³ Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. 210.

Hawthorne's writings constitute the third, and the figure thus drawn becomes congruent with America itself. This equation is based on the assumption, familiar to us from the nineteenth-century critics considered earlier, that it is by knowing and representing, artistically and personally, his specific environment that Hawthorne acquires universal value. Brook's own formulation had already hearkened back to someone like Wendell, who had considered Hawthorne 'the most indigenous' of 'all our men of letters' (p. 430), and the one who 'expresses the deepest temper of that New England race which brought him forth' (p. 435), and like Woodberry, who had declared that Hawthorne's New England identity rendered him representative 'of that faith which presents mankind as one and indivisible'.³⁰⁴ Evident here is the conviction, on the part of these critics, that New England is somehow more quintessentially American than the rest of the nation, and that Hawthorne epitomizes this American identity through his 'descent' (see Chapter 1.1) from Puritan forebears and through his literary preoccupation with Puritanism. In contrast, the Southern Agrarians, as we will see below and in Chapter 3, claimed this quintessential American identity for the South.

Arvin's choice of motto makes it clear that he perceives himself firmly as part of the Brooksonian tradition and the 'usable past' project, and in fact in his later Whitman biography (1938) the word 'usable' and the concept of Whitman's usability are used self-consciously to incorporate Whitman into a radical/socialist tradition.³⁰⁵ However, equally crucial in Arvin's seizing on this particular characterization of Hawthorne as 'subterranean' is the element of something hidden, furtive, not expressed because not expressible. But the quotation from Brooks is also characteristic of the 'usable past' project itself; it identifies Hawthorne as at once unique and characteristic, the '*most* deeply planted', 'who indicates *more than any other...*'. Hawthorne emerges as the most representative man, the ultimate subject for a biography. Tellingly, the – for Arvin and many others in the 1920s and 30s – most representative man is understood as a failure.

At the time Brooks wrote those words there had not been a Hawthorne biography produced by a twentieth-century biographer for twentieth-century readers. When Arvin's own life of Hawthorne was published, it in fact followed closely on the heels of two

³⁰⁴ Wendell, *Literary History*, pp.430, 435; Woodberry, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, pp. 157.

³⁰⁵ Arvin, *Whitman* (London: Macmillan, 1938), p. 260.

other Hawthorne biographies. Herbert Gorman and Lloyd Morris were exact contemporaries (1893-1954) and their lives of Hawthorne, which were both published in 1927, were the first to be produced by members of the generation of young intellectuals attempting to negotiate the transition from genteel to modernist culture.

Gorman was the author of 'the first book-length study of Joyce and his work', *James Joyce: His First Forty Years* (1924),³⁰⁶ with which Joyce was sufficiently pleased to authorize him to write his biography and to promise him exclusive access 'to any personal documents I may possess'.³⁰⁷ But by the time Gorman's Joyce biography was due to appear after many delays in 1939, the relationship had turned sour and Joyce dictated to Paul Léon an acerbic letter to Gorman asking him to omit several 'incorrect and misleading' passages.³⁰⁸ Gorman began his career as a reporter in Springfield, Massachusetts, and worked from 1918 to 1928 for newspapers in New York City, during which period he wrote his Hawthorne biography (p. 3:93 n.1). Apart from the Joyce biography and *A Study in Solitude*, he wrote biographies of Longfellow (*A Victorian American*, 1926 – O'Neill describes this as 'a product of the Strachey school, done in extremely bad taste'),³⁰⁹ Alexandre Dumas (*The Incredible Marquis*, 1930) and Mary Queen of Scots (*The Scottish Queen*, 1932). He also produced a number of novels, including a supernatural tale with the title *The Place Called Dagon*, published the same year as his Hawthorne biography, which, in H. P. Lovecraft's synopsis, 'relates the dark history of a western Massachusetts back-water where the descendants of refugees from the Salem witchcraft still keep alive the morbid and degenerate horrors of the Black Sabbat'.³¹⁰ Judging by the fact that in his survey chapter on biographers O'Neill devotes four pages to Gorman, more than he gives to most biographers, it is clear that O'Neill considered Gorman's work highly representative of the kinds of biography produced at

³⁰⁶ Hugh Witemeyer, "'He Gave the Name': Herbert Gorman's Rectifications of *James Joyce: His First Forty Years*", *James Joyce Quarterly*, 32.3-4 (Spring-Summer 1995), 523-532 (p. 523).

³⁰⁷ James Joyce to Herbert Gorman, 24 January 1931 (Richard Ellman (ed.), *Letters of James Joyce* (vol. 3, London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 512). Both Morris and Gorman were personally acquainted with Joyce (cf. Morris, *Threshold*, pp. 242-243; Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (new and rev. ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 567); the relationship between Gorman and Joyce is documented in Ellman's edition of Joyce's letters.

³⁰⁸ Richard Ellman (ed.), *Letters of James Joyce* (3 vols., London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 3:443-445.

³⁰⁹ O'Neill, *History of American Biography*, p. 207.

³¹⁰ Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), p. 74.

this time (pp. 207-210). F. O. Matthiessen sums up *A Study in Solitude* as ‘a brief piece of hackwork for the Murray Hill biographies, which simply compressed the chief facts of its subject’s life from the far more fertile volumes of Julian Hawthorne’.³¹¹

Gorman’s book has no preface, no acknowledgments, and no bibliography, which means that Gorman gives us almost no indication which materials he has used, although it emerges that apart from *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife* he was aware of James T. Fields and Henry James and that he used Hawthorne’s own writings (of which he includes a chronological ‘check list’) as source materials. Whereas we know that Lloyd Morris chose to quote from the manuscripts of Hawthorne’s notebooks in the Pierpont Morgan Library rather than Sophia Hawthorne’s editions, it seems almost irrelevant which versions Gorman consulted, given the way he treated his materials. The defects of the book are obvious. The words ‘solitude’, ‘loneliness’, or variations thereof appear on almost every single page: ‘Nathaniel Hawthorne walked arm in arm with solitude’.³¹² ‘[I]t was impossible for him to appear anywhere without the specter of solitude fondly hanging to his arm’ (p. 16). ‘His youth and early manhood were passed in such surroundings that he was flung directly into the arms of solitude’ (p. 17). ‘He lived in the Past, as it were, and the Past is, after all, a solitary place peopled only with ghosts’ (p. 18), etc. Gorman frequently picks up a phrase from Hawthorne’s own writings, or someone else’s on Hawthorne, and then continually recycles it. Thus, for example, Hawthorne’s pronouncement from the dedication of *The Snow Image* (1851) to Horatio Bridge, ‘I sat down by the wayside of life’ (CE 11, p. 5), combined with his naming the house he bought in Concord in 1852 ‘The Wayside’ – its former owners, the Alcotts, had called it ‘The Hillside’ – is used to explain anything from social behavior (*Study*, pp. 37, 41, 58, 110), to political opinion (cf. pp. 158-159), to literary method (pp. 99, 102). The same explanation is thus applied to different events, which inevitably leads to stereotyping, reductiveness and falsification.

Worthy of note, however, is the fact that Gorman begins his book by briefly describing Hawthorne’s socio-economic and intellectual context in a way unprecedented

³¹¹ Matthiessen, ‘Nathaniel Hawthorne’ in F. O. Matthiessen, *The Responsibilities of the Critic: Essays and Reviews by F. O. Matthiessen*, selected by John Rackliffe (New York: Oxford University, 1952), pp. 209-211 (p. 211).

³¹² Herbert Gorman, *A Study in Solitude* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1966), p. 15.

in any previous Hawthorne biography, but completely familiar to us from the writings of Brooks, Frank, or Mumford. He posits 1830 as a watershed date, before which 'the New England scene had degenerated into a despondent and fossilized spectacle'. He ascribes this situation to 'the so-called Puritan tradition' having outlasted itself and turned into a mere shell, to 'the incursion of a more elaborate material development, with the first faint hints of commercial intercourse as possible Big Business' and to 'the tardy realization of the arts as forces in themselves' (pp. 9-10). These phrases precisely reiterate the new Young Americans' interpretations of mid-nineteenth century American culture, and bear a remarkable resemblance to the opening pages of Mumford's eponymous chapter in *The Golden Day*.³¹³ Gorman speaks of a 'sudden outburst of literary expression' after 1830, and of 'the New England Renaissance' or 'this Renaissance of the mind in New England' (pp. 10, 19, 20), echoing Wendell and Mumford and foreshadowing Matthiessen – compare Matthiessen's reference to the 'one extraordinarily concentrated moment of expression' between 1850 and 1855 as an 'American Renaissance'.³¹⁴ This reminds us to what extent a shared vocabulary was created by the writings of the Young Americans, but also that they themselves had inherited much of it from the 'genteel' critics; even writers who, like Gorman, were not immediately part of the group absorbed and perpetuated it. An echo of Brooks's comment on Hawthorne as 'the most deeply planted' American writer can be heard when Gorman declares that Hawthorne 'was never a part of the social surface of his environment although the roots of his personality sank deeper into that environment, perhaps, than those of any of the more vivid figures of the period' (p. 16). The contemporary issue against which Gorman registers his strongest protest as a symptom of modern Protestant fundamentalism is Prohibition. He perceives a direct lineage between the persecutors during the 1692 witch trials (at which Hawthorne's great-great-grandfather, John Hathorne, was one of the judges), and the contemporary temperance legislation:

³¹³ Mumford, *Golden Day*, pp. 40-45.

³¹⁴ Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. vii. However, the title *American Renaissance* was in fact suggested by Harry Levin (see Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1958), p. vii). Matthiessen's favored title had been 'Man in the Open Air', a phrase from

Gallows Hill in Salem is the Golgotha from whence come streaming all the spearmen of intolerant American reform. The men who put the nooses about the necks of the distraught 'witches' were the progenitors of the more sly and less stark prophets of prohibitions who bluster through American life to-day (p. 23).

While it is hardly accidental that he uses the word 'prohibitions', it becomes even more apparent what Gorman has in mind when he later insists that 'Hawthorne obviously drank (he mentions liquor time and again in his note-books and letters) but so did everybody else in New England' (pp. 78-79). Prohibition may seem an incongruous issue for a Hawthorne biographer to focus his opposition on, and the last statement is of course historically false.³¹⁵ One can, however, see how significant and contentious a matter it was from the fact that it decided the outcome of the 1928 presidential election.³¹⁶ It is clear that Gorman was using his Hawthorne biography to comment on contemporary issues; however, this topicality is not the same as Brooks's idea of 'usableness'.

Lloyd Morris was a biographer, novelist, dramatist, critic, journalist (who interviewed Benito Mussolini), cultural historian and postal censor during both World Wars. He is 'perhaps best known', as his obituary in the *New York Times* states, for a series of books in which, 'in a style both picturesque and learned, he described the effects of such innovations as the automobile, movies, radio, and the airplane on the life of America'.³¹⁷ Morris entered Columbia University in 1911, where he was taught by Brander Matthews, John Dewey, John Erskine (who in turn had been taught by George Woodberry), and Carl Van Doren. Like Gorman, Morris moved in modernist circles during the 1920s; he was part of the American expatriate set which included Hemingway and Stein while he was writing his Hawthorne biography. He plainly aligns himself with the twentieth-century Young Americans' critique of the 'genteel' professors when he

Whitman, and Levin himself admits that that may have been the better title, but the 'publisher wanted something more descriptively categorical'.

³¹⁵ Ian R. Tyrrell observes: 'An analysis of the origins of the temperance agitation in America must begin with and concentrate on New England.... The first temperance societies emerged in Massachusetts in 1813, and the first national temperance society, the American Society of the Promotion of Temperance, was founded by New Englanders in Boston in 1826' (*Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 12).

³¹⁶ See K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 258-259.

³¹⁷ 'Lloyd Morris, 60, Author, is Dead', *New York Times*, August 10, 1954, p. 19.

describes Paul Elmer More as ‘that master of exquisite and refined dullness’, Brownell as merely ‘an analyst of style’, and notes that for Irving Babbitt ‘Rousseau was the devil and all romantics were fiends’.³¹⁸

As already mentioned, Morris’s *The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne* adopts Maurois’s biographical method. It features sudden shifts to present tense narration for dramatic emphasis, invented dialogue, and internal monologues which seamlessly fuse quotations from the writings of Hawthorne and others with Morris’s own interpretations, speculations and narrative conveniences. Morris’s method can be observed most clearly in the prologue and epilogue that frame the biography proper; the epilogue reproduces Emerson’s journal entry of the day after Hawthorne’s funeral, the prologue gives us his thoughts – as Morris imagines them – as he sits down and thinks about Hawthorne before putting pen to paper.³¹⁹ In the prologue Emerson

³¹⁸ Lloyd Morris, *A Threshold in the Sun* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), p. 97.

³¹⁹ Passages from Emerson’s famous journal entry are frequently referred to in Hawthorne biography, mostly because it comments, succinctly but also personally, on a wide range of Hawthornean themes: it throws sidelights on Hawthorne’s character, his politics, his loneliness, as perceived by one of Hawthorne’s most eminent contemporaries. Hubert Hoeltje even draws conclusions from Emerson’s description of the ‘noble & serene’ aspect of the corpse (Hubert H. Hoeltje, *Inward Sky: The Mind and Heart of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1962), p. 561). I quote Emerson’s comments in full for ease of reference later on: ‘Yesterday, 23 May, we buried Hawthorne in Sleepy Hollow, in a pomp of sunshine & verdure, & gentle winds. James F. Clarke read the service in the Church & at the grave. Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Agassiz, Hoar, Dwight, Whipple, Norton, Alcott, Hillard, Fields, Judge Thomas, & I, attended the hearse as pall bearers. Franklin Pierce was with the family. The church was copiously decorated with white flowers delicately arranged. The corpse was unwillingly shown – only a few moments to this company of his friends. But it was noble & serene in its aspect – nothing amiss – a calm & powerful head. A large company filled the church, & the grounds of the cemetery. All was so bright & quiet, that pain or mourning was hardly suggested, & Holmes said to me, that it looked like a happy meeting.

‘Clarke in the church, said Hawthorne had done more justice than any other to the shades of life, shown a sympathy with the crime in our nature, &, like Jesus, was the friend of sinners.

‘I thought there was a tragic element in the event, that might be more fully rendered – in the painful solitude of the man – which, I suppose, could not longer be endured, & he died of it.

‘I have found in his death a surprise & disappointment. I thought him a greater man than any of his works betray, that there was still a great deal of work in him, & that he might one day show a purer power.

‘Moreover I have felt sure of him in this neighborhood, & in his necessities of sympathy & intelligence, that I could well wait his time – his unwillingness & caprice – and might one day conquer a friendship. It would have been a happiness, doubtless to both of us, to have come into habits of unreserved intercourse. It was easy to talk with him – there were no barriers – only, he said so little, that I talked too much, & stopped only because – as he gave no indication – I feared to exceed. He showed no egotism or self-assertion, rather a humility, &, at one time, a fear that he had written himself out. One day, when I found him on the top of his hill, in the woods, he paced back the path to his house, & said, “*this path is the only remembrance of me that will remain.*” Now it appears I waited too long.

‘Lately, he had removed himself the more by the indignation his perverse politics & unfortunate

remembers details of the funeral the previous day, the flowers, then goes on to ponder Hawthorne's reticence and loneliness, and his own disappointment in Hawthorne's writings. Then Morris's Emerson moves on to thoughts which we look for in vain in the journal entry:

In Hawthorne's life, Emerson reflected, the Puritan tradition of his ancestors had been an active force. He had sought to liberate himself from his origins and his environment, but they and not he had determined the character of that effort for emancipation. In Hawthorne the Puritan had become an artist. Perhaps the Puritan spirit would have its final flowering in art. Perhaps only the Puritan could express, in art, the America from which he had sprung.³²⁰

This is pure Morris with a hint of Mumford's and Brooks's reading of Hawthorne's personality and significance. It shows us what interests Morris, not Emerson, about Hawthorne's character, for it would never have occurred to Emerson to think about Hawthorne in this way. What Morris omits to recycle, on the other hand, are Emerson's thoughts on Hawthorne's, as he regards them, deplorable politics.

The most striking passages in Morris's book concern the emotional impact produced by Hawthorne on Horatio Bridge and Herman Melville:

He had been introduced to Bridge one evening, and had been confused by the excitement with which the introduction was acknowledged. During the whole evening Bridge had never left his side; when others joined them, he became abruptly silent but never took his eyes from Nathaniel's face.... His extraordinary attraction for this new acquaintance had embarrassed Nathaniel. He knew that his classmates considered him handsome; he was aware that his face was not without beauty and his body not without grace; but no one had ever sought as positively to win his regard. For Bridge had not attempted to conceal his admiration; as their acquaintance ripened into intimacy Nathaniel learned what it is to be loved (pp. 39-40).

This is pure fantasy, complete with 'shy [and] wistful glance[s]', sparkling eyes and 'romantic devotion' (ibid.). In his interpretation of Melville, on the other hand, Morris anticipates, and maybe influences, Arvin's and Edwin Haviland Miller's later readings of the Hawthorne-Melville relationship:

friendship for that paltry Franklin Pierce awaked – though it rather moved pity for Hawthorne, & the assured belief that he would outlive it, & come right at last' (*Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, selected and edited by Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 526-527).

³²⁰ Morris, Lloyd, *The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne*, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969, pp. 3-4.

Nathaniel must have been frequently embarrassed by Melville's impulsive abandonment of reticence; the tone of Melville's remarks must have been more disturbing than their meaning, for the meaning was usually all but incomprehensibly vague. Melville's... malady was undoubtedly an intolerable loneliness; a hopeless awareness of the necessity for a companionship so intimate and understanding that it could have been satisfied only by love. Melville's marriage was scarcely happy; it is probable that he was unsuited to marriage and it is likely that he was incapable of being physically attracted to women. In his work the almost complete absence of women is notable, as is the almost total absence of sex.³²¹

Newton Arvin's Hawthorne biography begins with the graduation of Hawthorne's class from Bowdoin College and concludes with Hawthorne's funeral. In keeping with his interpretation of Hawthorne's life, Arvin frames his biographical narrative by evoking two ceremonies in which his subject does not confront the public in person: in the first he is the student who refuses to take a commencement part 'to which his reasonably high scholarship entitled him', in the second he is the corpse.³²² This start to the book immediately highlights a major problem with Arvin's biography: as Stewart noted in 1948, Hawthorne had in fact not been offered a part in the commencement celebrations because his dislike of declamation had led him to neglect this academic discipline; this arrangement suited him, as a letter to his sister Elizabeth (CE 15, pp. 194-195, excerpts quoted by Stewart) shows, but he had not been in the position to refuse.³²³ The relevant excerpts from the letter had been published in Lathrop's *Study of Hawthorne*, and had thus been easily available to any biographer since 1876.³²⁴ Similarly, when Arvin follows Lewis Mumford's suggestion that the character of Ethan Brand is a portrait of Melville, Stewart merely had to verify the date of the story, which preceded the acquaintance between the two men, to prove the impossibility of this scenario (see Introduction). While DeVoto's pure-biography mode, which eschews the 'hope for a better world', is

³²¹ Morris, *Rebellious Puritan*, p. 248. Arvin, in 1950, was the first Melville biographer to read Melville's attachment to Hawthorne as one of homosexual longing, and his interpretation is expanded by Miller in his Melville biography of 1975 (see Edwin Haviland Miller, *Melville* (New York: Persea Books, 1975), pp. 179-191 and especially the chapter 'A Bond... Passing the Love of Woman', pp. 234-250).

³²² Arvin, *Hawthorne*, p. 4.

³²³ See Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 18.

³²⁴ Lathrop, George Parsons, *Study of Hawthorne* (St. Clair Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1970), pp. 120-121.

in danger of being ultimately sterile, clearly an interpretative approach to biography like Arvin's needs to be exercised in combination with conscientious research.

The simple title of Arvin's book, *Hawthorne*, points to its subject's status as a household name. The question 'Which Hawthorne?' simply does not arise. Again, this is in keeping with Arvin's view of his subject: Hawthorne's fame is for Arvin never in question; the real issue is how exactly this fame is to be interpreted within the context of the American literary and social landscape. Arvin was well aware that he was writing about an already well known figure and consequently put himself under additional pressure to say something new about his subject. The way Arvin goes about telling Hawthorne's story supports this: he appears to presuppose that his reader is aware of many of the facts of Hawthorne's life and in fact supplements the story rather than telling it from scratch. While the book is intelligible without prior knowledge of its subject, its reader benefits from having read previous Hawthorne biographies and indeed Hawthorne's own writings, for only then will he or she recognize many of the allusions to incidents or personages relating to Hawthorne's life, or the unmarked paraphrases from Hawthorne's writings. These include references to 'the malediction of the poor witch, Rebekah Nurse' (p. 12), or to the "'five-dollar school'" (p. 14), or Arvin's remark that to 'a Salem boy, in the very early nineteenth century... it might well have seemed... that to be a writer of storybooks was little better, little less degenerate, than to be a fiddler' (p. 7).³²⁵ Thus, Arvin deals with the problem of prior, rival Hawthorne biographies by assuming that they have already been digested by his readership and by signaling that his own project will go beyond them. But more importantly, this shorthand strategy provides him with the space to do what he perceives as his real task, namely to formulate Hawthorne's representational value for his own generation.

The kinship between the analyses of American society on the part of Brooks, Bourne, Mumford, Arvin, and later Matthiessen, can perhaps best be traced through their respective uses of a shared vocabulary. Words like 'isolation,' 'separation,' 'dispersal,' 'fragmentation,' 'division,' along with expressions denoting outward movement and

³²⁵ The first two of these remarks are shorthand for episodes related in much greater detail in Morris's *Rebellious Puritan*, see pp. 22-24, 32; the third is of course a paraphrase of a passage in 'The Custom-House' (CE 1, p. 10).

retreat recur frequently in their texts, as do their opposites, such as 'centrality,' 'community,' 'integration' and 'participation'. The first cluster of terms is usually used to describe the present state of American society and culture, the second to define the community ideal these critics seek to realize. A particularly crucial and frequently used concept is that of the 'centrifugal' versus the 'centripetal', which is also circulating through the critical writings of his fellow intellectuals, such as, as we have seen, Brooks's account of Puritanism in *America's Coming-of-Age*, Bourne's vision of a transnational America, or even Sinclair Lewis's recurring references to cream separators (i.e. centrifuges) as a symbol of mindless progress in *Main Street*. In the pivotal chapter of the book, 'The House of Pride,' which sums up Hawthorne's literary achievement, Arvin makes the important claim that 'Hawthorne's tales and novels can be called an elaborate study of the centrifugal. They are a dramatization of all those social and psychological forces that lead to disunion, fragmentation, dispersion, incoherence'.³²⁶ Matthiessen picks up on the term in his review of Arvin's *Hawthorne* and then recycles it repeatedly in *American Renaissance*.³²⁷

Arvin's social agenda is built straight into his style. His manner is erudite, but also conversational, invoking not authority but solidarity. Matthiessen criticized what he called Arvin's 'addiction to the academic habit of long series of rhetorical questions and exclamations,'³²⁸ but in fact these questions to the reader create a sense of dialogue and complicity.

Although highly respected as a critic during the 1930s and 40s, and in spite of his Melville biography winning the National Book Award in 1951, Newton Arvin has been a largely forgotten critic since his death. He has, however, been the subject of a recent biography by Barry Werth (2001) which investigates the scandal of Arvin's dismissal from Smith College in 1960 after his home had been raided for gay pornography, whilst his *Herman Melville* has lately been republished (2002) by Grove Press in their 'Great Lives' series. Arvin's critical method was biographical and all his published books except for a posthumous collection of essays and reviews are biographies: his subjects

³²⁶ Arvin, *Hawthorne*, p. 185.

³²⁷ Matthiessen, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne' in *Responsibilities*, passim; see Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, pp. 180, 228, 337.

³²⁸ Matthiessen, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne' in *Responsibilities*, p. 211.

were Hawthorne (1929), Whitman (1938), Melville (1950), and Longfellow (posthumously 1963). Arvin was throughout his life a political radical. He organized the La Folette platform for the 1919 election in Northampton, Massachusetts, where he taught – the hometown of the successful presidential candidate, the Republican Calvin Coolidge. In 1927, together with his colleague at Smith College, Granville Hicks, he ‘organized a public meeting... to protest Judge Thayer’s denial of the last plea for Sacco and Vanzetti’.³²⁹ In 1932, along with Malcolm Cowley and Granville Hicks and fifty more ‘artists and scholars’, who also included Robert Cantwell, Newton Arvin ‘signed a letter in support of the revolutionary Communist Party and of the presidential candidacy of William Z. Foster’.³³⁰

While it was possible, if not without danger, for Arvin to be a public radical, his homosexuality had to remain in the closet. This is comparable to the way in which, in a volume of tributes to F. O. Matthiessen compiled by friends after his suicide in 1950, Matthiessen’s socialist politics and involvement with many radical and leftist organizations, even at a time of anti-communist witch-hunting, are mentioned by many of the contributors with pride, whereas his sexuality is not referred to at all,³³¹ ‘it was not until a quarter of a century later that his homosexuality became public knowledge’, notes David Bergman.³³² Remarkably, David Reynolds, who historicizes Whitman’s homosexuality with great sensitivity in *Walt Whitman’s America* (1995), remarks in a survey of Whitman biographies that Newton Arvin ‘dismissed’ ‘the poet’s homosexuality’ as ‘a “peculiar” tendency’.³³³ Reynolds does not take into account the constraints on Arvin during a time when it was dangerous to be a known homosexual.³³⁴

³²⁹ Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy*, p. 344. See also Werth, *Scarlet Professor*, p. 40; Werth describes the uproar caused in the town by their effort on behalf of the two men: Their “diplomatic little resolution – so tactfully, so politely, so meechngly worded,” as Hicks wrote, provoked a near riot when it was presented at a citywide meeting in the high school auditorium. For three hours, irate townspeople denounced the organizers as disloyal subversives’.

³³⁰ Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988, p. 3.

³³¹ Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Huberman, *F. O. Matthiessen (1902-1950): A Collective Portrait* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950).

³³² David Bergman, *Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 85.

³³³ Reynolds, ‘Bibliographical Essay’, p. 253.

³³⁴ For an account of anti-homosexual bias in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century see Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.: A*

In fact, although the Smith College pornography scandal happened in 1960, three decades after *Hawthorne* and two decades after *Whitman*, and only nine years after receiving the National Book Award for his Melville Biography, Arvin's homosexuality cost him his job and his career. Jonathan Katz points out that the Northampton case was symptomatic of widespread tendencies rather than merely a localized event: 'Antihomosexual hysteria in Washington at the same date as the Northampton events suggests the larger political context in which it [sic] must be understood'.³³⁵

The need to remain 'in the closet' also affected the ways in which homosexual academics could express themselves professionally in their critical writings. Bergman disagrees with William E. Cain's assessment that 'the "facts of Matthiessen's sexual... life... do not have much direct bearing at all" on his work'. Instead he argues that Matthiessen:

kept his social identity and his scholarly reputation separate only because the social atmosphere in which he worked necessitated such a division. Any attempt to bring them together would have given a rare opportunity to those who wished to discredit him and his work. He understood quite clearly how dear a price he paid for his discretion and how it distorted what he said and how he spoke.³³⁶

Matthiessen himself believed that the need to hide had an impact on his academic work, as can be seen in a letter from Matthiessen to Russell Cheney (30th January 1930), in which he writes:

My sex bothers me, feller, sometimes when it makes me aware of the falseness of my position in the world. And consciousness of that falseness seems to sap my confidence of power. Have I any right in a community that would so utterly disapprove of me if it knew the facts? I ask myself that, and then I laugh; for I know I would never ask it at all if isolation from you didn't make me search into myself. I need you, feller; for together we can confront whatever there is. But damn it! I hate to have to hide when what I thrive on is absolute directness.³³⁷

Documentary History (revised ed., New York: Meridian, 1992), pp. 65-128. Katz also demonstrates a direct link between the anti-communist witch-hunts of the 1950s and the persecution of homosexuals (pp. 91-119).

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 582-3 n.135.

³³⁶ Bergman, *Gaiety Transfigured*, p. 85; Bergman's reference is to William E. Cain, *F. O. Matthiessen and the Politics of Criticism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 48, the omissions are Bergman's.

³³⁷ *Rat and the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney*, ed. by Louis Hyde (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1978), p. 200.

It is significant that only a few months before this letter Matthiessen had written a positive review of Arvin's *Hawthorne* for the *New Republic*, titled 'The Isolation of Hawthorne'.³³⁸ Matthiessen's language in this letter echoes both the terms of Arvin's *Hawthorne* and of his own review: it is isolation from Cheney that makes him 'search into' himself, and thus perform precisely the movement Arvin had characterized as 'centrifugal'; togetherness, on the other hand, enables him to 'confront whatever there is'. It is significant that Matthiessen views his same-sex relationship with Cheney as enabling confrontation – a centripetal, Whitmanesque motion –, rather than, as Arvin had interpreted Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne's relationship, as 'fugitive'. However, such a confrontation is not envisaged as entailing a disclosure of their sexuality to the community at large. Matthiessen, like Arvin, is very much aware that such a disclosure would cause severe personal and professional consequences without a great revolution within American society, a revolution which Arvin courageously attempts to theorize in *Whitman*.³³⁹

One indication of the homophobia prevalent in American academic culture at this time is an essay by Mark Van Doren titled 'Walt Whitman, Stranger', first published in the *American Mercury* in July 1935. Here, Van Doren argues that Whitman's homosexuality invalidates his notion that 'adhesiveness' could be a wide-reaching model of democracy: 'His democratic dogmas – of what validity are they when we consider that they base themselves upon the sentiment of "manly love", and that manly love is neither more nor less than an abnormal and deficient love?'.³⁴⁰ Importantly, both Arvin and Matthiessen came to Whitman's defense: Arvin in his Whitman biography and Matthiessen when he reviewed Mark Van Doren's editorship of *The Portable Whitman* and called Van Doren's assessment in 'Walt Whitman, Stranger' a 'preposterous oversimplification', repeatedly insisting on the importance of Whitman's political and social views.³⁴¹ Arvin's aims in the Whitman biography are to reclaim him

³³⁸ *New Republic*, 61 (1930), p. 281, reprinted in Matthiessen, *Responsibilities*, pp. 209-211.

³³⁹ That this revolution has still not been completed was highlighted earlier this year when opposition to gay marriages in the United States was expressed at the highest government level; see for example Joseph Curl, 'California Gay "Marriages" Pushing Bush to Act', *Washington Times*, 19 February 2004.

³⁴⁰ Mark Van Doren, 'Walt Whitman, Stranger' in Mark Van Doren, *The Private Reader* (New York: Henry Holt, 1942), p. 82.

³⁴¹ Matthiessen, 'Whitman: His Poetry and Prose' in *Responsibilities*, pp. 218-223 (p. 222).

from Van Doren's dismissiveness and, more importantly, to render Whitman usable both as a proto-socialist and as a figure who successfully theorizes an amalgamation of homosexuality and democracy. However, Arvin has to couch this defense itself in highly defensive terms. He quotes Van Doren and then continues:

It is a painful judgment to radical democrats who do take Whitman seriously on these political grounds, but it is a judgment that cannot be dismissed light-mindedly. For one thing the fact of Whitman's homosexuality is one that cannot be denied by any informed and candid reader of the 'Calamus' poems, of his published letters, and of accounts of his unbiased acquaintance: after a certain point the fact stares one unanswerably in the face. The man Whitman was at least as unmistakably homosexual as any of the great Greek or Renaissance writers and artists. ...[S]ome of his poems are the astonishingly direct expression of it. They have a serious interest on this account, but so far as they are this primarily, they represent an experience that quite certainly neither can nor ought to be important or decisive for the mass of mankind.³⁴²

So far, Arvin seems to be in overall agreement with Van Doren. However, he continues:

Does all this mean that Whitman's whole prophecy as a democratic poet – and especially as the poet of 'universal democratic comradeship' – is invalidated by having its psychological basis in a sexual aberration? Not, surely, unless the personal origin of political, of ethical, of philosophic ideas in general is to be taken as the test of their validity. It is hardly customary, and it would certainly be uncritical, to dispose of the ideas in the *Republic* because there was a homosexual strain in Plato.... Not its obscure and private origins but its general and public bearing is the test of a great creative conception, and from this point of view, what really interests us in Whitman is not that he was a homosexual, but that, unlike the vast majority of inverts, even of those creatively gifted, he chose to translate and sublimate his strange, anomalous emotional experience into a political, a constructive, a democratic program (p. 275).

The tone of defiance is unmistakable if one is aware that Arvin himself was all those things he says of Whitman, but equally evident are the rhetorical and psychological contortions necessary for Arvin to be able to perform this appreciation, which require him to characterize his own sexuality as an 'aberration' and himself as an 'invert' in the process.

This strategy of masking and yet expressing one's own identity, it can be argued, is foreshadowed in *Hawthorne*. Barry Werth suggests that 'Arvin was able, through his celebrated writings, to smuggle his outcast sensibility into mainstream American culture.

Arvin's first great theme, as a writer, was the secrecy that marks so many private lives'.³⁴³ One of the central passages of Arvin's *Hawthorne*, and one which critics and reviewers of the book unfailingly seize upon, even if they disagree with aspects of his thesis, describes the interrelation between secrecy, isolation and guilt in Hawthorne's psyche and its manifestation in his writings:³⁴⁴

[Hawthorne's] imagination, instead of playing freely and flexibly over the intricate facts of human existence... was entangling itself in the briars of a special and abnormal existence; was looking at the world from a distorted angle and through colored lenses. ...Certainly the process... was to overcast the play of his imagination with a cloudy and obfuscating sense of the presence of guilt at the heart of all human relations.... Guilt was to become, out of all right proportion, his monotonous theme. It was to stain his whole view of human personality. And was this but the consequence of his having Puritan blood in his veins and the gloomy dogmas of the Puritans in his hereditary memory? ...No: there are more things to sunder Hawthorne from the Puritans than to link him with them; and if, like them, he brooded on the black fatalities of human error and vice, it was the result... of his own sober consciousness of separation from the ways of his fellow men – a consciousness in which the sense of guilt luxuriates like noisome growths in a swamp. Mark the form that guiltiness habitually takes in the representation of it, and you will be in no doubt of its origin. The essential sin, he would seem to say, lies in whatever shuts up the spirit in a dungeon where it is alone, beyond the reach of common sympathies and the general sunlight. All that isolates, damns; all that associates, saves.

Unlike Gorman and Morris, and unlike Randall Stewart twenty years later, Arvin thus rejects Puritanism as a major influence on Hawthorne's psychological makeup. His description also marks a departure from Brooks's and Mumford's representations of Hawthorne as a fragile, silvery relic of Puritanism and endows Hawthorne with a great robustness of suffering. Arvin continues:

No theme... had seemed to plumb greater depths in Hawthorne's imagination than that of the dark connection between guilt and secrecy. Crime itself, no matter how monstrous, seemed to him less hideous than its concealment; and a comparatively

³⁴² Arvin, *Whitman*, p. 274.

³⁴³ Barry Werth, 'The Scarlet Professor', *The New Yorker*, 74.30 (10 May 1998), 56-67 (p. 57).

³⁴⁴ Cf. Herbert Gorman, 'Hawthorne Viewed as the Victim of Long Isolation: Mr. Arvin Argues That Solitude, Not Puritan Blood, Gave Him a Distorted Vision of Life', *New York Times*, October 6, 1929, p. BR3. Even Randall Stewart, who, as we will see in the next chapter, is in fundamental disagreement with Arvin, cannot help echoing the final sentence, albeit in his own neo-orthodox terms: 'In story after story Hawthorne shows the varieties of maladjustment, of estrangement. That which unites in "holy sympathy" is good; that which divorces and estranges is evil' (Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 252).

trifling misdeed became to his vision the deadliest of evils if it remained hidden and unconfessed.³⁴⁵

We can only guess how much this passage will have resonated with someone like Matthiessen, who, hating secrecy and thriving on directness, felt that his critical and creative powers were undermined by his awareness of the ‘falseness of... [his] position in the world’.

It becomes clear how common a strategy it was to stow away secret concerns and anxieties on board a biography when we consider Michael Holroyd’s suggestion that Lytton Strachey’s ‘homosexuality defined his treatment of a number of his subjects’.³⁴⁶ In *Queen Victoria* (1921), for example – a book which was widely read in the United States in the years immediately following its publication³⁴⁷ –, the Prince Consort becomes the representative figure of the ‘secret homosexual’, as Holroyd notes:

Although the prince was a mirror of manly beauty in the eyes of the queen, his constitution was not strong, and ‘owing either to his peculiar upbringing or to a more fundamental idiosyncrasy,’ Strachey wrote, ‘he had a marked distaste for the opposite sex.’ By this Strachey intended to indicate that Albert was a secret homosexual. This is the key to several passages that point to Albert’s melancholy and isolation. Strachey sees in Albert something of his own loneliness.³⁴⁸

Arvin does not claim Hawthorne as a fellow ‘secret homosexual’ at any point in the biography, nor does he discuss Melville or Bridge in anything like the terms made available to him by Morris. In seeking to make Hawthorne a more widely representative figure he may not have believed, at this stage, that homosexuality could be the key to such a representativeness. He was also at this stage still working out whether it was possible for him to adapt to social expectations, marrying a former student of his, Mary Garrison, in 1932.³⁴⁹ In line with his later conception of Whitman, Arvin himself aims to ‘translate and sublimate his strange, anomalous emotional experience into a political, a constructive, a democratic program’.

The key to Hawthorne’s representative value is, for Arvin, the evaluation of

³⁴⁵ Arvin, *Hawthorne*, pp. 58-59.

³⁴⁶ Holroyd, ‘On the Border-line’, p. 34.

³⁴⁷ See James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America’s Literary Taste* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 313.

³⁴⁸ Holroyd, ‘On the Border-line’, p. 35.

³⁴⁹ For an account of Arvin’s marriage see Werth, *Scarlet Professor*, pp. 57-82.

Hawthorne as a writer. Arvin asks whether Hawthorne was a truly 'great' writer and employs two criteria to make his judgment. Firstly, the great writer 'must have shared fully and directly some central spiritual experience of his people and his time, must have been moved by desires not merely personal or fugitive, and have won some typical triumph or gone down in some typical defeat'; secondly, this experience must be 'embodied, artistically, in the idiom of personality' and the 'facts of human character' must be reproduced with 'fullness and truth' (pp. 181-183). Arvin's verdict is that while Hawthorne was indeed representative of his environment he did not manage to create living, breathing characters. This *is* the typical defeat, the same that Arvin's contemporaries ascribed to Sinclair Lewis. Hawthorne is unable to fully realize his own capability as a writer. He is thwarted by his environment.

He failed to participate, we have said; but it would be truer to say that he participated by failing to participate. This is the paradox of his career, and the secret of his otherwise unaccountable significance as a writer. ...His very estrangement from his fellows was but emblematic of their own estrangement from one another or their collective estrangement from the main body of human experience. ...Hawthorne's feeling that he could become 'a man among men' merely by measuring coal in Boston Harbor or digging potatoes at Brook Farm is emblematic of the illusion most Americans have suffered from, that they could achieve social integrity by learning to 'coöperate', and attain harmony by striving for standardization. He failed in this, as we have seen, but at least his failure was not merely private; at least it had the stateliness of the typical.³⁵⁰

Arvin's book on Hawthorne resonates strongly with Matthiessen. In his review Matthiessen writes that Arvin 'has done a great service to our letters by reiterating Hawthorne's significance, by revealing that beneath a surface which so often seems to modern readers disappointingly thin, is contained an essence which we cannot afford to forget'; Arvin 'has presented an absorbing picture of Hawthorne's tragedy, and America's'.³⁵¹ Over ten years later, in *America Renaissance*, Matthiessen sums up the associative usefulness of biography, and especially how Hawthorne's life has been rendered useful by Arvin:

That Arvin's words can rise to such a pitch of feeling is evidence of another function that has been fulfilled by Hawthorne's art. In recording the tragic

³⁵⁰ Arvin, *Hawthorne*, pp. 204-205.

³⁵¹ Matthiessen, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne', p. 211.

implications for humane living of a whole phase of American development, the novelist has helped free us from our reckless individualism in pointing to the need for a new ethical and cultural community. By understanding him, the goals of our own society become more clear.³⁵²

2.6 The Agrarian Response, Leftist Literary Histories, and the Problem of Criticism

One group of American intellectuals in particular reacted very differently to the Dayton trial than the Northern and Western liberals and radicals: those were the Southern Agrarians, a group that was centered around Vanderbilt University. Among its members were the poets John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allan Tate and Robert Penn Warren. They objected to some of the same aspects of American culture as the Young Americans – such as a perceived loss of community in American life – but from a Southern and Tory point of view: they were opposed to empiricist science, technological progress and industrialization and sought to return to an organicist agrarian society. In the event of the Scopes trial they were firmly on the side of the anti-evolutionists, in fact the trial had been one of the factors decisive for the production of the manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* (1930). To clarify the intent of the book, Robert Penn Warren had suggested it should be called *Tracts Against Communism*, while Allan Tate had 'wished to label it plainly as a defense of religious humanism'.³⁵³ They identify themselves as anti-communist and religiously orthodox; the use of the word 'defense' implies the notion that they felt under siege, as does of course the title of the book itself.

The watershed between the 1920s and 30s also saw the production of a number of progressivist and communist literary histories, of which the most important was Vernon Lewis Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* (3 volumes, 1927-30). According to Graff, Parrington sought to 'combine synthetic vision with precise scholarship' and *Main Currents* 'reinforced the link between the academic study of

³⁵² Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. 343.

³⁵³ Louis D. Rubin, Jr., 'Introduction to the Torchbook Edition' in *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), pp. vi-xviii (p. xvii).

American literature and the progressive social outlook of the nonacademic critics'.³⁵⁴ Parrington's, V. F. Calverton's and Granville Hicks's literary histories all came under fire for discounting the aesthetic dimension of literature when analyzing its social impact.

As we have already seen, Calverton, in *The Liberation of American Literature* (1932) inverts Barrett Wendell's assessments of Whitman and Hawthorne. For Calverton, Whitman is the truly representative American author, whereas Hawthorne,

despite the fact that he has been described by Louis Bromfield as 'the most subtly American' of our nineteenth-century writers, was far less American than most critics have been inclined to believe. While *The Scarlet Letter* undoubtedly dealt with an American theme, and was saturated in the Puritan background of an earlier century, its rhythm was as much English as it was American. Its shadowy, ghost-like characters did not spring life-like from the American soil, did not communicate the flesh and blood of the American environment. It certainly marked no definite break with the English tradition in the sense that the works of Whitman and Twain did – or those of Anderson, Lewis and Hemingway today. In fact, Hawthorne was one of the few writers of his time who participated little if at all in the cry for Americanness which characterized his age, and living in such comparative solitude as he did he was not even stirred by the impact of the frontier (274).³⁵⁵

And Hicks's assessment of Hawthorne in *The Great Tradition* is lifted directly from Arvin's biography.³⁵⁶

In his favorable review of Arvin's biography in the *New Republic* the young F. O. Matthiessen dismisses Gorman's and Morris's books as 'unnecessary'. Morris's biography, he says, offers 'no evaluation of Hawthorne's writings', which he considers 'a singularly unfruitful venture in this case'; Gorman's 'add[s] nothing to a critical estimate that ha[s] not already been better said by Henry James, Woodberry, or Brownell'. In contrast, Arvin's book, he says, 'goes right to the top of contemporary literary biography, and stands with Lewis Mumford's *Melville* as the rich, many-sided type of criticism which we should have'.³⁵⁷ Clearly, Matthiessen calls for no division of labor between the biographer and the critic; on the contrary, his reason for the dismissal

³⁵⁴ Graff, *Professing*, p. 215.

³⁵⁵ V. F. Calverton, *The Liberation of American Literature* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 274.

³⁵⁶ Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature since the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

³⁵⁷ Matthiessen, *Responsibilities*, p. 211.

of Gorman and Morris is that their lives make no contribution towards a critical assessment of Hawthorne's works. In the 'Prologue' to his *Herman Melville* Mumford explains that: 'In a great degree, Herman Melville's life and work were one. A biography of Melville implies criticism; and no final criticism of his work is possible that does not bring to it an understanding of his personal development'.³⁵⁸ Arvin reviewed Mumford's *Melville* in *The New Student* and said, 'there are not more than a half-dozen modern biographies which combine, as this does, an illuminating survey of the social and historical background, an intensely imaginative insight into the man's personal life, and a "creative" criticism of his literary performance'.³⁵⁹ If we take into account that Van Wyck Brooks's method was also primarily biographical, it is clear that when these critics think of biography the notion of literary criticism is always already implied.

Matthiessen, however, makes sure that his method in *American Renaissance* is not misunderstood as a simple equating of life and works:

My prime intention is not Sainte-Beuve's: to be 'a naturalist of minds,' to relate the authors' works to their lives. I have not drawn upon the circumstances of biography unless they seemed essential to place a given piece of writing; and whenever necessary, especially in the case of Melville, I have tried to expose the modern fallacy that has come from the vulgarization of Sainte-Beuve's subtle method – the direct reading of an author's personal life into his works.³⁶⁰

This commitment to criticism marks the most important difference between Arvin and Matthiessen on one hand, and critics like Parrington, Hicks, and, most extremely, Calverton, on the other. Even Randall Stewart, who otherwise indicts Arvin's *Hawthorne* for what he considers shoddy scholarship, praises Arvin's 'acute and discriminating analysis of the tales and novels' and concludes: 'Mr. Arvin has written some literary criticism of lasting value'.³⁶¹

Matthiessen welcomes the possibility of using 'extrinsic' methods. His portrayal of the collapse of boundaries between disciplines is extremely similar to claims by the New Historicism in the early eighties that such a collapse is a new thing:

³⁵⁸ Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 4.

³⁵⁹ Monteiro, 'Arvin Reviews', p. 8.

³⁶⁰ *American Renaissance*, xii.

Both our historical writing and our criticism have been greatly enriched during the past twenty years by the breaking down of arbitrary divisions between them, by the critic's realization of the necessity to master what he could of historical discipline, by the historian's desire to extend his domain from politics to general culture. But you cannot 'use' a work of art unless you have comprehended its meaning.³⁶²

Matthiessen's critical agenda is a democratic one: 'The true function of scholarship as of society is not to stake out claims on which others must not trespass, but to provide a community of knowledge in which other may share'.³⁶³ Graff assesses *American Renaissance* as follows:

Matthiessen's book comprehensively fused cultural criticism and academic literary history with the New Criticism's method of explication and its themes of complexity, paradox, and tragic vision. It combined a feeling for national identity with scrupulously thorough... explications of individual texts.

Unfortunately, the very comprehensiveness of Matthiessen's book set a limit to the fusion he was attempting and in the process dramatized the obstacles to making the academic setting the basis of a revived cultural criticism. After Matthiessen, no critical generalization would seem worth taking seriously unless supported by pages of voluminous textual explication, and after him the old public-spirited criticism to which Matthiessen was trying to restore respectability looked all the more like an unprofessional anachronism that academics could safely ignore.³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ Randall Stewart, 'Hawthorne by Newton Arvin', *American Literature*, 2 (January 1932), 446-448 (p. 448).

³⁶² Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, pp. ix-x.

³⁶³ Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. x.

³⁶⁴ Graff, *Professing*, pp. 219-220.

CHAPTER 3: THE 'NORMAL' HAWTHORNE, SCHOLARSHIP, AND THE 'END OF IDEOLOGY': HAWTHORNE BIOGRAPHY IN THE POST-WAR ERA, 1945-1965

Hawthorne was an analyst of human relations, of the nice relationship of person to person, of the adjustment of the individual to society. The most tragic persons in the world are those divorced from the social scheme. ...In story after story Hawthorne shows the varieties of maladjustment, of estrangement. That which unites in 'holy sympathy' is good; that which divorces and estranges is evil.³⁶⁵

The marked interest in Hawthorne is one of the more striking phenomena of our time. It is an interest which is evident among undergraduate students, among teachers as well as professing critics. The interest of which I speak is hardly at all biographical: readers of Hawthorne today are not interested primarily in the facts of Hawthorne's life, nor do they read the works to discover 'autobiographical' passages, or glimpses of the personality of the author, or characters who may be taken as 'spokesmen' for the author, or traces of the author's use of this or that 'source.' Readers today, rather, read a work by Hawthorne to get at the total impression of the work itself. They are interested in the tale *qua* tale, the novel *qua* novel. They find the meaning, the value, in the totality of the work, in the work's composite structure.³⁶⁶

3.1 Introduction

In this second passage, from an article titled 'The Golden Age of Hawthorne Criticism' and originally published in *The University Review* in October 1955, Randall Stewart contrasts two positions. The first, which could be described as 'scholarly' or 'philological' or 'historicist', is primarily 'biographical': it is interested in the 'facts of Hawthorne's life', attempts to get hold of Hawthorne himself through his texts, or seeks to identify the sources of his writings. The second position, which can be identified with

³⁶⁵ Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 252.

the 'New Criticism', aims to 'get at the total impression of the work itself'; it is concerned with 'value', which it locates firmly within the artwork itself, and, more precisely, in its 'composite structure', i.e. in the way its parts relate to one another. The first approach, Stewart tells us, has been eclipsed by the second, and he describes this event as precipitating a revival of interest in Hawthorne, whose work he sees as particularly amenable to this new critical or, rather, New Critical, method. In the process, he blithely announces an apparent waning of interest in biographical material, which he himself, as we will see, came to share: 'readers of Hawthorne today are not interested primarily in the facts of Hawthorne's life'. It would seem that in the mid-1950s Hawthorne biography was at a low tide.

In an essay which investigates the usefulness of the 'new historicism', Gregory Jay looks back at this period in critical history and identifies both 'the old historicism', exemplified by Stewart's first approach, and 'aesthetic formalism', of which New Critical practice is an example, as two sides of 'a singular theoretical coin'.³⁶⁷ The split between scholars and critics within American academic institutions corresponded to the conviction, held by both groups, that a dualism existed between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' approaches to literature.³⁶⁸ Jay's statement can best be elucidated through the example of Randall Stewart himself, whose *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (1948) was firmly embedded in the institutional structures of historical scholarship, but who evidently welcomed the shift towards the new, formalist approach to his biographical subject.

Like the biographies of the 1920s, those of the 1940s must be read in their political contexts, and one of the central issues in American political culture was the perceived failure of left-wing ideas in the wake of the Hitler-Stalin pact, the Second World War and the rise of Stalinism in the USSR. Liberalism was under siege from the outside and under pressure from its own adherents to redefine itself, whereas conservatism, by contrast, was able to consolidate itself as a doctrine. In 1951, the year

³⁶⁶ Randall Stewart, 'The Golden Age of Hawthorne Criticism' in *Regionalism and Beyond: Essays of Randall Stewart*, ed. by George Core (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), pp. 136-140 (p. 136).

³⁶⁷ Gregory S. Jay, *America the Scrivener: Deconstruction and the Subject of Literary History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 236.

Newton Arvin received the National Book Award for his biography of Herman Melville, George Santayana announced the death of liberalism.³⁶⁹ And yet Lionel Trilling had written only two years before:

In the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition. For it is the plain fact that nowadays there are no conservative or reactionary ideas in general circulation. This does not mean, of course, that there is no impulse to conservatism or to reaction. Such impulses are certainly very strong, perhaps even stronger than most of us know. But the conservative impulse and the reactionary impulse do not... express themselves in ideas but only in action or in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas.³⁷⁰

Richard Hofstadter retrospectively sums up the mood of the era:

The collapse of Europe, the horrors of the war and the death camps, brought about a revulsion from European society and politics, a disposition to look once again for the promise of the future on native grounds, a revival of the old feeling that the United States is better and different. ...The cold war brought about a certain closing of the ranks, a disposition to stress common objectives, a revulsion from Marxism and its tendency to think of social conflict as carried *à outrance*. The apocalyptic end of capitalism so widely expected during the 1930's had not been brought by the war – nor had the precipitate end of American democracy the isolationists had so confidently predicted. Instead of the expected catastrophic depression, an unprecedented economic boom followed the war, and the star of Keynes rose as that of Marx waned. Even the bomb, the most disquieting reality of the era, set in motion a current of conservatism, insofar as it made men think of political change with a new wariness and cling to what they had. The outburst of McCarthyism, instead of provoking a radical response, aroused in some intellectuals more distaste than they had ever thought they would feel for popular passions and anti-establishment demagogy. The populism of the right inspired a new skepticism about the older populism of the left. While Daniel Bell was writing about the end of ideology in the West, historians were returning to the idea that in the United States it had hardly ever begun.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ See Graff, *Professing*, p. 183.

³⁶⁹ George Santayana, extract from *Dominations and Powers* (1951) in *Conservatism: From Adams to Churchill*, ed. by Peter Viereck (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1956), pp. 183-4 (p. 184).

³⁷⁰ Lionel Trilling, 'Preface' in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Mercury Books, 1964), pp. ix-xvi (p. ix).

³⁷¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 438-9.

In 1953 Daniel Boorstin declared that the American lack of a political philosophy 'is a hallmark of a decent, free, and God-fearing society'.³⁷² Like many intellectuals of this era, whether conservative or liberal, Boorstin suggests that, in contrast to a Europe ravaged by war, Fascism and Communism, the comparative prosperity of the United States was based on commonsense values and freedom from ideology. The present chapter, therefore, contrasts three Hawthorne biographies which appeared within a period of seven months in 1948-9: one of these lives of Hawthorne was produced by a political conservative, Randall Stewart, the other two were by biographers with liberal credentials, Mark Van Doren and Robert Cantwell.

3.2 The New Criticism and the 'Lion of Biography'

If, in their 1930 manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, the Southern Agrarians had considered themselves underdogs, by the late 1940s the tables had turned. During the post-war years, as Vanderbilt observes, Van Wyck Brooks

continued his counter-attack on the ascendant New Critics for their undue attention to literary craft to the neglect of content and feeling. But for years before his death in 1963, Brooks's highly personalized works had ceased to be cited even for their content by postwar scholars (while professors Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren had now become respected students of American literature).³⁷³

The Agrarians had managed to establish their critical method, the New Criticism, as the perhaps dominant approach to literature in the literature departments of American universities, a breakthrough which Randall Stewart himself dated from the general adoption of Cleanth Brooks's and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938) as a textbook.³⁷⁴

René Wellek and Austin Warren's collaborative *Theory of Literature* (1949) outlines this critical school's attitude to biography. The two authors identify a need to define literature as an object of academic study and react to the frequent claims, on the

³⁷² Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 4.

³⁷³ Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy*, pp. 537-538.

part of philologists, that the literary text as such can only be appreciated, not studied, and that the only actual object of study can be the ‘environmental “facts”’ surrounding its production. Instead of this ‘dichotomy into “scholarship” and “appreciation,”’ Wellek and Warren seek to establish a method ‘for the true study of literature, at once “literary” and “systematic”’.³⁷⁵ Identifying as the object of literary study the ‘problem of individuality and value’ (p. 6), and thereby ruling out approaches modeled on the natural sciences, they affirm that ‘Literary theory, an *organon* of methods [specifically devoted to the study of value and individuality], is the great need of literary scholarship today’ (p. 7).

Typically, Wellek and Warren distinguish between ‘extrinsic’ and ‘intrinsic’ approaches to literature; the former seek to ‘explain’ the artwork by means of the author’s biography and psychological profile, or the interrelatedness of literature and society or the *zeitgeist*, the latter pay exclusive attention to the text itself. The authors admit:

Nobody can deny that much light has been thrown on literature by a proper knowledge of the conditions under which it has been produced; the exegetical value of such a study seems indubitable. Yet it is clear that causal study can never dispose of problems of description, analysis, and evaluation of an object such as a work of literary art. Cause and effect are incommensurate: the concrete result of these extrinsic causes – the work of art – is always unpredictable (p. 61).

However, the New Critics did not formulate this position *in vacuo*; they were reacting against a firmly established methodological foundation on which literary studies in American universities rested, as Gerald Graff reminds us:

That the New Criticism was ‘ahistorical’ in its theory and practice has become a commonplace, but it would be more accurate to say that the New Critics accepted and worked within the view of history held by most of the literary historians of their time. This was a view that reduced history to atomized ‘background’ information and saw only an ‘extrinsic’ connection between history and literature.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Stewart, ‘Golden Age’, p. 136. See also M. H. Abrams, ‘The Transformation of English Studies’ in *American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines*, ed. by Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 123-149 (p. 126).

³⁷⁵ René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (2nd ed., New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), pp. 3-4.

³⁷⁶ Graff, *Professing*, p. 183.

This had not been true, of course, for the interpretative biographies by Arvin, Mumford or Brooks, or for Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, considered in the previous chapter, but it shows how completely the backlash against interpretative biographies, on the part of biographers and of formalist critics, had succeeded by the 1940s.

René Wellek was responsible for the chapter on 'Literature and Biography' in *Theory of Literature* (pp. 63-68), which owes much to the equivalently titled article by the Russian formalist critic Boris Tomaševskij, 'Literatura i biografija', originally published in 1923, although Tomaševskij's essay is omitted from the chapter bibliography.³⁷⁷ Wellek and Warren were very aware of the Russian Formalist movement; they mention Tomaševskij's *Teoriya literatury* (1925) as a more 'doctrinaire' precursor to their own work, and there are far-reaching similarities between their attitudes to biography.³⁷⁸ Wellek himself originated among the Prague Linguistic Circle, and he firmly embraced the New Critical literary formalism when he emigrated to the United States in 1939. However, while Tomaševskij and his group had sought to establish a scientific basis for the study of literature, Wellek, as we have seen, rejects such an approach out of hand.

In line with the predominant view of the relationship between biography and literature at this time, Wellek repeatedly characterizes the relationship between the author and the literary text as one of 'cause' and 'explanation'. He declares, 'The most obvious cause of a work of art is its creator, the author; and hence an explanation in terms of the personality and the life of the writer has been one of the oldest and best-established methods of literary study' (p. 63). And he adds, even more significantly: 'For our conception of "literary scholarship" only the... thesis, that biography explains and illuminates the actual product of poetry, is directly relevant' (ibid.). Wellek, much like the historical scholars against whom he was reacting, thereby adopts an extremely narrow definition of biography: he defines it as a sub-genre of historiography (pp. 63-4), just as Tomaševskij had done, in order to dismiss it as irrelevant for literary study.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Boris Tomaševskij, 'Literature and Biography', transl. by Herbert Eagle, in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, ed. by Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 81-89.

³⁷⁸ Wellek and Warren, *Theory*, p. 5.

³⁷⁹ Tomaševskij, 'Literature and Biography', p. 89.

Instead, he asserts:

In our context two questions of literary biography are crucial. How far is the biographer justified in using evidence of the works themselves for his purposes? How far are the results of literary biography relevant and important for an understanding of the works themselves?³⁸⁰

Wellek proceeds to answer these questions by making a distinction between the time before documentary evidence for biography was easily available and after; this periodization is less detailed than Tomaševskij's had been, but largely corresponds to it, especially in highlighting the importance of Shakespeare and Byron.³⁸¹ Wellek notes that when documents are not easily available biographers would turn to the imaginative productions for evidence instead, a method which he considers invalid:

[A]uthors cannot be assigned the ideas, feelings, views, virtues and vices of their heroes. And this is true not only of dramatic characters or characters in a novel but also the *I* of the lyrical poem. The relation between the private life and the work is not a simple relation of cause and effect (p. 65).

The next phase is one where biographical material not only becomes abundantly available, '[i]ndeed, the [biographical] approach is even invited and demanded by the poet, especially the Romantic poet, who writes about himself and his innermost feelings or even, like Byron, carries the "pageant of his bleeding heart" around Europe' (ibid.). He notes a contemporaneous development:

³⁸⁰ Wellek and Warren, *Theory*, p. 64.

³⁸¹ For Tomaševskij, it is important 'how the poet's biography operates in the reader's consciousness' ('Literature and Biography', p. 82). He offers a periodisation of the status of biography for readers of literature, beginning with the pre-eighteenth century era, for which documentary materials for the compilation of a writer's biography are scarce, due not merely to the absence of records (he specifically mentions Shakespeare and Molière) but also to rules governing the production of artworks, such as the patronage system. He then takes us through the eighteenth century, 'an epoch which cultivated subjectivism in the artistic process', when the 'reader's interest reached beyond the work to its creator' and on through the Romantic period, where he mentions especially Byron as the writer who 'created the canonical biography for a lyrical poet' (pp. 82-83). The importance of this lies for Tomaševskij in the creation of (auto-)biographical legends' – demanded by the readers – on the part of the writers themselves; these legends were aimed at supplementing their writings; they are 'a premise which the author himself took into account during the creative process' (p. 86). For the mid-nineteenth century Tomaševskij postulates the rise of writing as business, when the writer 'did not allow any glimpses of his personal life', with which a Victorian 'timid interest in good people' came later to coexist (pp. 86-87), followed by further developments in the twentieth century. He concludes that 'the question of the role of biography in literary history cannot be solved uniformly for all literatures. There are writers with biographies and writers without biographies. ...the biography that is useful for the literary historian is not the author's curriculum vitae or the investigator's account of his life. What the literary historian

We should certainly distinguish two types of poets, the objective and the subjective: those who, like Keats and T. S. Eliot, stress the poet's 'negative capability,' his openness to the world, the obliteration of his concrete personality, and the opposite type of the poet, who aims at displaying his personality, wants to draw a self-portrait, to confess, to express himself (pp. 65-66).

The conclusion he draws is very similar to Tomaševskij's: there are writers with and writers without biographies, and the 'self-portrait' is significant, while the historical facts are not. For a consideration of Nathaniel Hawthorne this would mean that, according to Wellek and Tomaševskij, we are correct in paying attention to Hawthorne's autobiographical prefaces, but we would be wrong to attempt to relate those to actual events in his life. Wellek accepts the 'exegetical' value of biography, but concludes that '[n]o biographical evidence can change or influence critical evaluation' (p. 68), in other words, that for the reading of the literary text, biography is completely irrelevant. Wellek's conclusions are supplemented by his collaborator Austin Warren's comments on Emily Dickinson and biography, occasioned by readers' and critics' speculations about the poet's love life:

It is when the best of philosophers make blunders not inherent in their systems but extraneous to it... that we legitimately seek a biographical explanation. And when a good poet writes inferior poems we are concerned with the reason for the badness, in order to leave, inviolate, the goodness of the other poems. But the 'goodness' is not so to be explained.³⁸²

Warren thus suggests that, as if by a process of contamination, a poet's 'good poems' might become infected by his or her lapses if they are not kept carefully separated. He goes on to state that the biography of the 'empirical person' must be distinguished from 'literary biography'; the latter he considers a kind of spiritual biography of the literary persona, which is identical to Wellek's position. The 'goodness' of the poems in this view corresponds to the 'genius' of the poet, i.e. the New Critical analogue of the biographical subject; the genius and the poetaster are thus separated into different entities and the latter expelled from the consideration of the literary critic.

'Good poems' are 'those intelligible to and valued by competent readers, which

really needs is the biographical legend created by the author himself. Only such a legend is a *literary fact*' (p. 89).

are elucidatory of our own experiences'; important here is the presupposition of 'competent readers' and a relation between poetry and universal human experience, i.e. poetry's transcendence of its historical moment. Warren acknowledges that literary criticism needs to have recourse to 'a psychology of types', 'a knowledge of the culture in which a poet was reared' and 'the state of the language from which the poet makes artfully expressive deviations'. 'Biographical studies and culture-history', he claims, are 'for those who practise them, ends in themselves'; they 'restrict... a great poet to her own time, place, and empirical self'. It is the task of criticism, finally, to 'delicately "clear" the poems for present use and evaluation – show what is for our time, or, more grandiosely, what is for all times' (all quotations p. 118).

However, Warren then feels compelled to contradict himself, and does so consciously:

There is a 'lion in the way' of contemporary readers of Emily – the lion of biography. It has proved impossible not to pursue, to an extent, the facts gathered and the speculations offered by those who have sought to attach Emily's power as a poet of love and death to some single love and renunciation (ibid.).

Thus, he denies the usefulness of biography for an understanding of the literary text but then avows that a preoccupation with it is inescapable. It is noteworthy that Warren, in an article that starts out as a review of Thomas H. Johnson's edition of Dickinson's poems, does end up discussing conjectures not just about her love life but also her life in general. Having dismissed the value of biographical explanation, he then steers perilously close to such an explanation himself:

Emily's 'white election', we know, began around the year 1862. This 'white election': could it not have been Emily's acceptance of Death? What 'facts' are supposed to explain the 'problem of Emily' point to some one, a Person unacknowledgeable to her consciousness. Her poems suggest compelled flights from impending, threatening consciousness of that person or persons (pp. 124-125).

Warren leaves himself teetering on the edge, unable to commit to full blown biographical argument; the points where he approaches biography are confined in scare

³⁸² Austin Warren, 'Emily Dickinson' in *American Critical Essays: Twentieth Century*, ed. by Harold Beaver (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 105-129 (p. 117), originally published in the *Sewanee Review*, Autumn 1957.

quotes, denying that they are his responsibility but allowing him to retain his ‘unacknowledgeable... person or persons’. If he had grasped the biographical nettle he could probably have come up with something more concrete.

To sum up, Wellek and Warren perform two simple moves in their critiques of biography: on the one hand they reject the notion that in compiling a biography of a writer the imaginative texts could be used to gain actual insight into the subject’s life and personality; this is because they identify biographical strategy as one that would necessarily equate, on a one-to-one basis, characters, events, or emotions in the imaginative work with the same in the life. On the other hand, they insist that the only possible use of biography in literary study could be to *explain* the text. Thus, the extrinsic approaches are set up as methods of explaining the artwork, but the same claim is not made for the accepted intrinsic approaches in the first place, for they are characterized as methods of description and evaluation, not explanation. In chapter one of *Theory of Literature*, Wellek and Warren outline the historical development of the notion that the methodologies of the natural sciences were applicable to the humanities/literary studies:

As early as 1883, Wilhelm Dilthey worked out the distinction between the methods of natural science and those of history in terms of a contrast between explanation and comprehension. The scientist, Dilthey argues, accounts for an event in terms of its causal antecedents, while the historian tries to understand its meaning.³⁸³

However, when they proceed to discuss the ‘extrinsic approaches’, biography, which they do recognize as a species of history, is considered merely as a tool for a causal explanation of the work of art – belonging to the natural sciences rather than the humanities – and as such rejected. In order to validate the preferred ‘ergocentric’ or ‘intrinsic’ approaches to literature, Wellek and Warren are prevented from looking for possible uses of the biographical genre in furthering an understanding of the artwork by having to adopt a strategy of rejection.

Warren’s essay starts out as a review of Thomas H. Johnson’s scholarly edition of Dickinson’s poems and it constitutes a rather muted reaction to what was a significant scholarly event. While he recognizes the desirability of such a work, he circumscribes its

actual use: 'For pleasure, as for edification,' he says, 'Emily should not be read in big tomes, or much of her at a time. Johnson prints 1775 poems. I felt the immediate need to reduce them to 300 or less'.³⁸⁴ He would also normalize her idiosyncratic punctuation and remove her cryptic dashes. He thus divorces the fruits of scholarly labor from the appreciation of the literary work.

As Russell Reising reminds us, it is important to note that the New Critics' desire to exclude political content from the activity of reading literature did not mean that they themselves, or their critical project, were apolitical; in fact their critical project was intrinsically informed by their conservative political convictions:

To argue that the New Critics either attempted or succeeded in depoliticizing literary thinking is to miss the profoundly political recoil from history and politics implicit in their work. While less obvious and explicit, the politics of the Agrarian/New Critics were no less central to their project, as their virulent rejection of the leftist tradition in American criticism suggests. In their declared program, however, and this is the importance of their influence, the New Critics did reverse the popular 1930s conceptions of both literature in general and American literature in particular.³⁸⁵

3.3 Historical Scholarship and Biography

Whilst he participates firmly in the scholarly tradition, William Charvat is also recognized as a precursor of the discipline of book history. In an article titled 'Literary Economics and Literary History', published in 1949, only a year after Stewart's Hawthorne biography, he argues for the value of context in understanding the production of literature:

I believe that it is ...important to recognize... that much literary history is arid because it is not historical enough. It is a safe estimate that 95 per cent of all past literature, by any definition of that word, has little or no intrinsic value for the intelligent, non-academic, non-scholarly reader of today. The real present value of books that once interested readers is historical, the same kind of value that we attach to a past election, revolution, railroad system, school law, or system of

³⁸³ Wellek and Warren, *Theory*, p. 5.

³⁸⁴ Warren, 'Emily Dickinson', p. 106.

³⁸⁵ Russell Reising, *The Unusable Past: Theory and the Study of American Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), p. 16. See also Mark Jancovitch, *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

ideas. ...Literary history has been much too busy trying to prove that past writers shouted loud enough to be heard by posterity. We should be more interested in knowing how far their voices carried in their own generation, and – equally important – whether their generation talked back.³⁸⁶

In contrast, as we saw in the previous chapter, Bernard DeVoto, declared himself emphatically uninterested in how much money Twain made from his books. ‘For the chapters that follow’, he says at the start of his book *Mark Twain’s America*,

I have no interest beyond his books. My effort has been to perceive where and how they issue from American life. How much money he made from them – a young faith in the worthlessness of all books that make money is the basis of much written about him before now – has for my present purpose no more interest than the color of their bindings.³⁸⁷

The authors of these contrasting views both considered themselves conscientious and objective literary historians, but one opens up, and one closes down, the potential usefulness of economic information in understanding the literary past. The wider issues at stake here are the meaning of texts in their own specific historical moments, their significance for their immediate readership, and their interaction with other contemporary texts. Charvat’s attention restores significance to texts that have dropped out of the canon or been otherwise neglected; it also calls into question the belief in transcendent values inherent in literary texts which was held by the practitioners of the New Criticism but was also shared by the conservative scholar Randall Stewart.

Unlike Newton Arvin, who applied biography as a critical method to a number of literary figures and whose four published books were all biographies, Stewart only produced one biography, an end product of much scholarly labor. The fact that Norman Holmes Pearson describes Stewart’s approach as ‘Germanic and doctoral’³⁸⁸ and that George Core believes he ‘started to write under the direct influence of scholars like Kittredge and Lowes’³⁸⁹ is significant, for it highlights the survival of the attitudes and methods of the nineteenth-century philologists in the scholarly program adopted during the emancipation of American Studies as a separate discipline during the early 1920s.

³⁸⁶ William Charvat, ‘Literary Economics and Literary History’ in *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 283-297 (pp. 283-4).

³⁸⁷ Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain’s America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1932), p. xi.

³⁸⁸ Pearson, ‘Foreword’ in Stewart, *Regionalism*, p. xiv

³⁸⁹ Core, ‘Introduction’ in Stewart, *Regionalism*, p. xxiii.

This concentration on scholarship rather than an appreciative approach was part of the validation strategy of early American Studies, but it was also constantly embattled against New Humanists, like Norman Foerster, or progressives like Parrington.³⁹⁰ Stewart, with his close association with the Modern Language Association, was very much a participant in this program.

Stewart's early critical output is characterized by articles like 'Hawthorne and *The Faerie Queene*' (*Philological Quarterly*, April 1933), a straightforward source study which cites external evidence (e.g. letters) that Hawthorne was reading Spenser at such and such times and tracks down parallel passages between Spenser and some of Hawthorne's short stories. Stewart's observations on Hawthorne's villains, who, he argues, are modeled on Spenser's Archimago,³⁹¹ reflect his interest in classifying Hawthorne's characters according to certain types, which he had already outlined in an introductory article to his edition of Hawthorne's *American Notebooks*.³⁹² Stewart's final conclusion in this piece is that Hawthorne and Spenser 'meet' on 'the common ground of moral allegory' (p. 93). It is important to note that two decades later, during the 'Golden Age', he completely cast off this former approach, as becomes evident in his article 'Faulkner and Hawthorne', first published in *College English*, February 1956:

Perhaps I should say that I am not concerned with 'influences.' I have made no attempt to ascertain whether Faulkner likes Hawthorne, or has read him much, or little, or not at all. ...For the purposes of this paper, the extent of his acquaintance with Hawthorne is of no great consequence, for we are concerned not so much with actual influence as with a common view of the human condition. It cannot be too much insisted upon, I think, that the common view of the human condition held by these two writers is the point to be emphasized most in a comparative study such as I am trying to suggest or adumbrate. And it is particularly noteworthy that Faulkner, in recapturing the older view of Hawthorne, overleaped not only a century, but also the whole naturalistic movement which appeared so triumphant at the time when he began to write.³⁹³

Famously, Stewart made his initial mark as a scholar by producing a new and complete edition of Hawthorne's *American Notebooks* from the original manuscripts in

³⁹⁰ Graff, *Professing*, pp. 213-4.

³⁹¹ Stewart, 'Hawthorne and *The Faerie Queene*' in *Regionalism*, pp. 80-93 (pp. 84-5).

³⁹² Stewart, 'The Development of Character Types in Hawthorne's Fiction' in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks: Based upon the Original Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, ed. by Randall Stewart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp. xlv-lxvii.

the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. These had originally been in Sophia Hawthorne's possession after Nathaniel's death and she edited and published them as *Passages from the American Note-Books* in 1868. After Sophia's death the manuscripts went to Julian Hawthorne, from whom Stephen H. Wakeman obtained them in 1903. James Pierpont Morgan, the banker, bought them from the Wakeman collection in 1909. Stewart submitted his edition of the Notebooks as his doctoral dissertation at Yale in 1930. Its publication in 1932 marks an important breakthrough in Hawthorne scholarship, for it initiated efforts to publish authoritative texts for all of Hawthorne's works, a project which Stewart began with Norman Holmes Pearson, Stanley Williams, and Hawthorne's grandson Manning Hawthorne, and which culminated in the *Centenary Edition*, published from 1962 onwards and of which William Charvat was one of the general editors. According to Core, the *American Notebooks* did not merely transform Hawthorne studies but also set an example for American literary scholarship in general:

When Randall Stewart 'discovered' Hawthorne, in the late 1920s, he was partly responsible for starting a revaluation which was not limited to Hawthorne. Stewart's edition of the American Notebooks is a landmark in the reassessment of American literature in this century because its appearance made it dramatically evident that sound texts were needed for the Study of American letters.³⁹⁴

Stewart was thus a pioneer of 'that silent scholarship' which James Mellow ardently praised in 1980 for 'bringing out new and definitive editions of the letters, memoirs, journals, the authoritative editions of the writings, of such figures as Hawthorne, Emerson, and Thoreau, as well as the important but less famous personalities associated with them'.³⁹⁵ This initiative to produce definitive editions was very much an MLA driven venture: 'The epochal production of standard Editions of American Authors, initiated in 1962 and centered in the MLA, ...had an origin in the ALG Committee on Definitive Editions in 1947 to 1948', as Vanderbilt informs us.³⁹⁶ He continues:

Textual scholarship came of age in these editions of nineteenth-century authors, aided with generous funding by the new National Endowment for the Humanities and resources from various university presses. In the 1960s, the editions included Mark Twain (University of California Press), Crane (Virginia), Howells (Indiana),

³⁹³ Stewart, 'Hawthorne and Faulkner' in *Regionalism*, pp. 126-135 (p. 127).

³⁹⁴ Core, 'Introduction' in Stewart, *Regionalism*, p. xxiii.

³⁹⁵ Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*, p. 593.

³⁹⁶ Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy*, pp. 536-537.

Irving (Wisconsin), Melville (Northwestern), Thoreau (Princeton), Hawthorne (Ohio State), and Whitman (NYU). Harvard published the Emerson volumes both before and after the center was established, and Spiller was present at the heart of the venture. In the 1970s, eleven more editions were under way... (ibid.).

While that first flurry of scholarly editions yet again paid no attention to women writers, it was in fact Emily Dickinson who had beaten the rush: Thomas H. Johnson had created an edition of all of her poems including variant readings and respecting the poet's choices of capitalization and punctuation. This was published in 1955, followed by an edition of her letters three years later. The immense pride which editor and publishers took in the venture is evident in the prefatory material to the poems.³⁹⁷ However, as we have seen in the case of Austin Warren's reception of this edition, there is an ambivalence on the part of practitioners of the New criticism towards textual scholarship, because complete editions were not really necessary for their own critical project.

Stewart opens his edition of the *American Notebooks* with an account of the state in which he found the manuscripts, full of inked out and cut out passages, and the differences between these originals and Sophia's Hawthorne's edition of *Passages*. The tone of his essay on Sophia's editorial practice is very harsh: he refers to Sophia's revisions as motivated by 'excessive modesty' and 'prudishness', and calls them 'irritating', 'stupid', and 'unscrupulous'.³⁹⁸ Just over 25 years later, in an article for the *Essex Institute Historical Collections* in 1958, he concedes that his remarks about Sophia's editorial interventions had been 'too sharp, too castigatory:'

The day of publication the *New York Times* ran a story on Mrs. Hawthorne's revisions.³⁹⁹ They afforded a good deal of amusement all around. I, of course, had played them up, and I think rightly so. They not only justified the new edition, but they were important in themselves. They showed the clever mind of a genteel Victorian female at work; in fact, on the strength of them, Mrs. Hawthorne has

³⁹⁷ Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (3 vols., Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), vol. 1.

³⁹⁸ Stewart, 'Mrs. Hawthorne's Revisions of the American Notebooks' in Hawthorne, *American Notebooks*, pp. xiii-xxi.

³⁹⁹ 'Says Wife Censored Hawthorne's Notes', *New York Times*, December 5 1932, p. 15; see also Herbert Gorman, 'Hawthorne's Notebooks Are Rescued from Distortion' in the *New York Times*, December 25 1932, p. BR 3.

become the classic example, at least in America, of the genteel Victorian female. But the tone of my chapter dealing with these matters was wrong.⁴⁰⁰

Three issues here are highly significant. Firstly, the element of struggle, of elbowing aside a previous, rival work is very clearly articulated by Stewart, who admits that he had in fact ‘played up’ the issue of Sophia’s revisions in order to ‘justify’ his own effort and, by implication, create a market for it. Secondly, Stewart’s admission of exaggeration raises the question of historical truthfulness in relation to biographical responsibility. A scholar’s professional responsibility extends beyond his immediate subject to include the other historical persons he inevitably discusses (in this case Sophia Peabody Hawthorne), and Stewart had not only distorted Sophia’s character and motivations in his representation, he had also permitted her to be a laughing-stock for a quarter of a century.⁴⁰¹ Thirdly, by affirming that one of the justifications for his stridency was to demonstrate the workings of the ‘clever mind of a genteel Victorian female’ he perpetuates the notion of cultured women feminizing nineteenth-century American culture. But, as Stewart now admits, his attitude had also caused him to miss the opportunity to learn more about Hawthorne’s own social scruples, and about the contemporary moral and cultural mores:

A good deal can be said for the view that Mrs. Hawthorne was trying not so much to misrepresent her husband, or remake his writing closer to her heart’s desire, as to do the kind of revising which Hawthorne himself would have done. Of course, with her sometimes mistaken notions of language and delicacy, she made many revisions which would have been abhorrent to the author. But much of her rewriting was similar – and this point I did not sufficiently stress in the

⁴⁰⁰ Stewart, ‘Editing the American Notebooks’, originally in *Essex Institute Historical Collections* (July 1958), in *Regionalism*, pp. 3-8 (p. 4).

⁴⁰¹ Julian Hawthorne, then 86 years old but still as garrulous as ever, was sufficiently riled by the press coverage in the *New York Times* to respond; see ‘Son Denies Hawthorne Was an Indolent Man’, *New York Times*, December 6 1932, p. 4. Characteristically (having wistfully considered giving young Stewart a spanking), Julian Hawthorne sought to defend his mother from the inference that she was an ignorant woman; he stressed that she came from a family of high social standing and ‘was highly educated in literature and art and conversant with Hebrew, Greek and Latin’. However, as Maurice Bassan observes, Julian Hawthorne’s representation of his father’s personality was in essence the same as Stewart’s; he had attacked Lloyd Morris’s account of Hawthorne in 1927 by affirming ‘that his father was essentially a “man of action,” a healthy, outgoing person whose concerns in his fiction were not mirror images of a twisted psyche. These statements of course foreshadowed and perhaps influenced such later interpretations of the father as Randall Stewart’s’ (Bassan, *Hawthorne’s Son: The Life and Literary Career of Julian Hawthorne* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1970), p. 227).

Introduction – to the kind of writing Hawthorne himself had done when he adapted notebook materials in his tales and novels.⁴⁰²

In contrast, the corresponding volume of the Centenary Edition was not under pressure to justify itself and consequently gives a far more balanced account. Claude Simpson, the editor of the Centenary Edition volume of the *American Notebooks* (1972), stresses that Sophia consulted with James T. Fields over editorial choices and that Fields himself was responsible for many of these. Simpson also notes that at least some of the passages she had physically removed from the manuscripts were cut out in order to give them to people as souvenirs, and that many of the passages she removed or defaced related to herself (CE 8, pp. 682-690). Oddly, however, even he considers ‘suspect’ her motives in destroying passages relating to her miscarriage (p. 687).

Stewart’s scholarly output links him firmly with the philological approach, although, as George Core notes, he ‘was probably influenced in part by critics like Matthew Arnold and the new humanists – Babbitt, More, and, more particularly Foerster’.⁴⁰³ These possible influences, and the fact of his identity as a Southerner, are indicated by the other dimensions of Stewart’s work.

3.4 ‘A Lover of Normal Passions’: Randall Stewart and the Adjusted Hawthorne

The adjective that attended Randall Stewart’s *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (1948) on its publication and for a long time afterward was ‘definitive’;⁴⁰⁴ Stewart himself was frequently referred to as the ultimate expert on the facts of Hawthorne’s life. In his own 1949 Hawthorne biography, Mark Van Doren calls Stewart’s book ‘definitive as to the facts’.⁴⁰⁵ He thanks Stewart for letting him use the page proofs of *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* for his own research, and remarks:

Mr. Stewart’s book, scheduled to appear before mine, is one to which I have been indebted at many points. Its author knows more about Hawthorne’s life than any

⁴⁰² Stewart, ‘Editing’, in *Regionalism*, p. 5.

⁴⁰³ Core, ‘Introduction’ in *Regionalism*, p. xxiii.

⁴⁰⁴ A reading list for an undergraduate module on Hawthorne which I attended at the Philipps Universität Marburg, Germany, in 1992/3 recommended Stewart’s biography alongside those by James, Mellow, Miller, Turner, Van Doren and Wagenknecht, but not, for example, Arvin, Cantwell or Erlich.

⁴⁰⁵ Mark Van Doren, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (American Men of Letters Series, London: Methuen, 1949), p. 271.

other living man. I kept his work always at hand, as any writer on the subject henceforth will (x).

The blurb for the 1961 reprint of Stewart's book calls it 'lively and definitive' and 'an impeccable work of scholarship'. It 'reveals for the first time the full dimension of Hawthorne's thought and personality'. On the same back cover, Howard Mumford Jones praises the book for bringing Hawthorne 'alive, full-blooded, athletic and true'; he calls the biography 'solid and substantial', a book 'that devotes itself chiefly and bravely to the facts'. Likewise quoted is a review by Robert Spiller, which refers to Stewart as 'the number one authority on the subject'. The quotation continues: 'Stripped to essentials, lean and swift in thought and style, it says all that can surely be said... If only one biography can be allowed on the Hawthorne shelf... it will, of course, be *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* by Randall Stewart'.⁴⁰⁶ And in 1968, finally, George Core noted that Stewart's biography was 'still the standard one after two decades'.⁴⁰⁷ These endorsements appear to see eye to eye on a number of points: Stewart has done his homework; his representation of Hawthorne is different from, and somehow better than previous ones; an economy in his keeping to the facts is noted and praised, which implies the absence of speculation but also of interpretation; his book supersedes previous Hawthorne biographies and even, according to Spiller, renders future ones unnecessary – 'it says all that can surely be said'.

The fact that Mark Van Doren read Stewart's page proofs and still continued his own biographical project on Hawthorne, tells, however, a different story. And Ralph Thompson, the *New York Times* reviewer, while pointing out its unreliability, seems to prefer Cantwell's simultaneously published book, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years*, for being simply more fun; in his estimate, 'Professor Stewart's biography is the more concise and less stimulating but excellent so far as it goes. Mr. Cantwell's is the wordier and wilder, and excellent when it doesn't go too far'.⁴⁰⁸

As Bernard DeVoto did with *Mark Twain's America*, Stewart could easily have subtitled his Hawthorne biography an 'essay in the correction of ideas'. In 1931 he

⁴⁰⁶ Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, back cover; the omissions are the publishers'.

⁴⁰⁷ Edward Wagenknecht, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 222; George Core, 'Introduction; in Stewart, *Regionalism*, pp. xxi-xxx (p. xxvi).

reviewed Arvin's *Hawthorne for American Literature* and squarely criticized the lack of thoroughness in Arvin's research: he states that Arvin could not possibly have consulted any manuscripts, even though in his preface Arvin thanks the Pierpont Morgan Library for access to Hawthorne's journals. But, equally importantly, Stewart also seeks to establish the validity of his own opinions, much as Arvin had done when he reviewed Morris's Hawthorne biography. Stewart writes:

Although no one perhaps is disposed to question the view that the central fact of Hawthorne's life as well as the dominant theme of his fiction is isolation from the world, nevertheless Mr. Arvin, it seems to the present reviewer, has stressed Hawthorne's aloofness to the point of exaggeration.⁴⁰⁹

Similarly, Stewart's review of Mather's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Modest Man* (1940) reveals his own predilections and convictions: he praises the 'absence of the customary abolitionist reprehension' in Mather's assessment of Hawthorne's politics, but disagrees otherwise with Mather's assessment of Hawthorne's politics. He maintains that although 'Hawthorne was certainly a bad political prophet (political prophecy is always difficult!)' his 'political positions in 1852 and 1861 are historically more respectable... than... [Mather] allows'. This is a necessary defense: as Stewart seeks to claim Hawthorne as a fellow political conservative he cannot allow him to be perceived as a political incompetent. On the other hand, he praises Mather's biography as being 'refreshingly free from the methods and biases which have too often distorted recent biographical writing. There is no attempt at psychoanalysis and none of the psychoanalytic jargon; there is no political or sociological axe to grind'.⁴¹⁰

In his own Hawthorne biography, which he described in a letter as 'severely objective',⁴¹¹ Stewart frequently, almost compulsively, employs vocabulary that normalizes Hawthorne's psychology. In his account of Hawthorne's boyhood he notes that, 'His diary records friendly associations with the boys of the village [Raymond, Maine]. The entry "Swapped pocket-knives with Robinson Cook yesterday" is evidence

⁴⁰⁸ Ralph Thompson, 'Hawthorne – Two Studies, a Selection', *New York Times* (17 October 1948), p. BR41.

⁴⁰⁹ Randall Stewart, 'Hawthorne by Newton Arvin', *American Literature*, 2 (January 1931), 446-448 (p. 447)

⁴¹⁰ Randall Stewart, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne, A Modest Man by Edward Mather', *American Literature*, 13 (March 1941), 73-74.

⁴¹¹ Cited from Core, 'Introduction' in Stewart, *Regionalism*, p. xxvi.

of *normal* behavior'.⁴¹² The way Stewart summarizes Hawthorne's childhood development at the end of the first chapter is characteristic:

All told, Hawthorne's boyhood was not as abnormal as has sometimes been supposed. Although it is true that, except while at Raymond, he may not have played with other boys as much as would have been good for him, and that his activities were too much centered in his immediate family, his life was by no means physically inactive or socially impoverished. After his recovery from the lameness which handicapped him between the ages of nine and twelve, he became healthy and strong. Especially in Maine, where he spent a good deal of time between the ages of twelve and seventeen, he enjoyed a variety of outdoor sports – swimming, skating, fishing, hunting. A large family of uncles and aunts, sisters and cousins, stimulated his inclination to study the varieties of human nature. His relations with his mother and sisters were affectionate; his sister Louisa was especially congenial to him because of her fun-loving disposition. He did considerable reading – though not an excessive amount for a person who likes books – and began, in a juvenile way, to write. His was not a precocious development, but slow rather, and substantial (pp. 11-12).

Further on in the book Stewart explains Hawthorne's frustration at the repeated postponement of his wedding by saying that it 'is not surprising that a lover of *normal* passions should have become restive' (p. 60, my emphasis). It is noteworthy that Cantwell, at this very time, explicitly connects the term 'homosexual' with Hawthorne. He declares that Hawthorne's college friendships with some of the less intellectual students and Elizabeth Peabody's account of Hawthorne taking on the persona of 'Oberon' at Bowdoin made 'him seem a very sissified young man, if not a homosexual, an impression which his secluded way of life in Salem after leaving college intensified'.⁴¹³ Cantwell seeks to redeem Hawthorne from the perception of such an impression, which is likely to have been informed by Morris's account of the relationship between Bridge and Hawthorne at Bowdoin (cf. Chapter 2.5). It is probable that Stewart had also picked up on these hints and that his representation of Hawthorne as a 'lover of normal passions' is designed to exorcise any notion of this kind.

Like Arvin, Stewart devotes one chapter of his biography to the evaluation of Hawthorne's literary achievement. However, Arvin had throughout integrated his readings of Hawthorne's imaginative texts into his interpretation of Hawthorne's life.

⁴¹² Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 5, my emphasis.

⁴¹³ Robert Cantwell, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years* (New York: Rinehart, 1948), p. 66.

Stewart, in contrast, restricts his engagement with Hawthorne's opus to a final chapter, titled 'The Collected Works'. This final chapter reads like a checklist of conservative values. Stewart claims Hawthorne firmly as a fellow orthodox Christian and political conservative. Ronald Lora lists the main characteristics of conservative intellectuals at this time:

By 1945 American conservatism had developed a set of attitudes that clearly distinguished conservatives from liberals. First, conservatives tended to prefer institutional stability to change, to stress continuities in history, and to seek to conserve as much of the past as was consonant with a harmonious social system. Second, they identified frequently with the wealthier classes, with privilege and with vested interests. ...Third, twentieth-century conservatives identified with programs that supported law and order, states' rights, private enterprise, and a nationalistic foreign policy. ...Fourth, modern conservatives defended certain doctrinal positions, such as limited government, the inviolable nature of private property, the primacy of empiricism over reason, and the belief that historical change must not be engineered but permitted to unfold organically. They believed, moreover, that a moral consensus was necessary to maintain order, harmony, and social cohesion. Finally, they upheld the doctrine of original sin, believing that man's disagreeable habits were more realistically explained by innate depravity than by environmental theories.⁴¹⁴

Stewart writes of Hawthorne:

[D]espite the reservations, his leaning was to the Puritan view of life. This leaning was doubtless made more pronounced by the fashionable liberalism of Hawthorne's own time. What is the nature of man? Is he not innately good, entirely free, and infinitely perfectible, a god *in posse* who is soon to be, if he is not already quite, a god *in esse*? To questions like these, Hawthorne dissented. Both his grounding in the Puritan tradition and his sense of hard fact, his realism, compelled him to give answers contrary to those of Channing and Emerson. Hawthorne set himself against nineteenth-century progressivism, not because its utopian aims were not desirable but because (as he said of John Brown) it 'preposterously miscalculated the possibilities.' Too often it ignored, he thought, the fallible, sinful, nature of man, the life-and-death struggle between good and evil in human society and in the private breast, the inexorable influence of earlier modes and habits which form a predestinating chain of causality.⁴¹⁵

Comparison with his essays and with the other book with which he is most closely identified, *American Literature and Christian Doctrine* (1958), abundantly demonstrates

⁴¹⁴ Ronald Lora, 'A View from the Right: Conservative Intellectuals, the Cold War, and McCarthy' in *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism*, ed. by Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), pp. 40-70 (p. 43).

that the views he is here imputing to Hawthorne are identical with his own. In Stewart's biography, Hawthorne is being co-opted wholesale into the mid-twentieth-century conservative camp, a gesture that was repeated five years later by Russell Kirk in the classic textbook of American conservative thought, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*. Kirk calls Hawthorne the 'most influential conservative thinker' of his time and place, more so than his other examples of early to mid-nineteenth-century New England conservatism, John Quincy Adams and Orestes Brownson.⁴¹⁶ Like Stewart, Kirk cites Hawthorne's opposition to abolitionism as a confirmation of his own sense that social change cannot be engineered but must be awaited to develop organically.

Hawthorne's outlook was indeed largely conservative, but this co-optation is ahistorical. It does not account for the way Hawthorne's opinions evolved over time – Frederick Crews later judged that Hawthorne 'rarely held to the same opinion for very long', and James Mellow suggested that '[w]hat Hawthorne... felt on a particular day and in a particular set of circumstances may not have been what he thought on the following morning, much less a year later'.⁴¹⁷ It also does not account for any essential difference of Hawthorne from themselves: for Stewart and Kirk, as for Arvin before them, the past is not, as L. P. Hartley suggested, a 'foreign country' where they 'do things differently'.⁴¹⁸

In spite of their different social and political outlooks, Stewart's evaluation of Hawthorne's works owes much to Arvin's earlier one, and may well be a deliberate reformulation in Stewart's own terms: Arvin's identification of the moral of Hawthorne's tales as, 'All that isolates, damns; all that associates, saves', clearly resonates in Stewart's observation, cited more fully at the start of this chapter: 'In story after story Hawthorne shows the varieties of maladjustment, of estrangement. That which unites in "holy sympathy" is good; that which divorces and estranges is evil'.⁴¹⁹ Stewart equates 'adjustment' with being united 'in holy sympathy'; it is 'tragic' to be

⁴¹⁵ Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 244.

⁴¹⁶ Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (7th revised edition, Chicago: Regnery Books, 1986), p. 250.

⁴¹⁷ Frederick Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 7; James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 594.

⁴¹⁸ L. P. Hartley, *The Go-between* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 7.

‘divorced from the social scheme’. This is the critical point, the chief difference between Arvin’s outlook and Stewart’s. Arvin had written that ‘most Americans have suffered from’ the ‘illusion... that they could achieve social integrity by learning to “coöperate”, and attain harmony by striving for standardization’.⁴²⁰ For Arvin, this is an illusion precisely because adjustment to contemporary society is impossible unless the individual accepts a spiritual bankruptcy to which ‘failure to participate’ is preferable. Stewart, in contrast, shifts the responsibility for being part of ‘the social scheme’ from society to the individual; for him, Hawthorne’s life is a success story, corroborating in its form the maxim Stewart ascribes to Hawthorne, that ‘the surest basis of happiness is found not in traits which make one exceptional but in those which one possesses in common with others’.⁴²¹ During the war, Stewart himself had shown himself contemptuous of the notion of adjustment; of the ‘modern or scientific or mechanistic’ view of man during the 1920s and 30s he had written:

The individual is important today – indifferently with other individuals – only as a subject of a vast scientific experiment. Physiologically, if the thyroid doesn’t get you, then the pituitary must. Psychologically, you are a congeries of responses to stimuli. Sociologically, you must ‘adjust’ (the verb no longer requires, in common scientific usage, the reflexive pronoun). The greatest of American individualists was not interested primarily in adjustment: ‘Whoso would be a man,’ Emerson said, ‘must be a non-conformist.’⁴²²

By 1948 he had evidently changed his outlook. Indeed, one of the outcomes of the reevaluation of Hawthorne in the postwar period was that he came to be considered ‘better adjusted and more in tune with his fellow human beings and the life of his period’ than the critics and biographers of the 1920s and 30s had regarded him, as Stewart’s close colleague Walter Blair, wrote in 1956.⁴²³ ‘Adjustment’ was one of the watchwords of the American post-war era, and it is no accident that the term features frequently in Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), usually referring to

⁴¹⁹ Arvin, *Hawthorne*, p. 59; Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 252.

⁴²⁰ Arvin, *Hawthorne*, pp. 204-205 (cf. Chapter 3.5).

⁴²¹ Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 253.

⁴²² Stewart, ‘Three Views of the Individual as Reflected in American Identity’ in *Regionalism*, pp. 162-171 (p. 170).

⁴²³ Walter Blair, ‘Nathaniel Hawthorne’ in *Eight American Authors*, edited by Floyd Stovall (New York: W.W. Norton, 1956), pp. 100-152 (p. 108).

behavior on the part of women that was socially expected but stunted them emotionally and intellectually.⁴²⁴

This final chapter in his Hawthorne biography clearly shows Stewart's professional predilections at this point in his career. After finishing the biography he pulled out of the project of editing Hawthorne's letters in which he was prominently involved, writing to his collaborator Norman Holmes Pearson that 'I have reached the end of the Hawthorne rope. ...I am drained of any desire to do more with Hawthorne, to look up another reference, or write another footnote. I must take another tack in the years that remain'.⁴²⁵ However, it does not seem to be Hawthorne fatigue from which Stewart suffered as much as scholarship fatigue, for he continued to write about Hawthorne almost obsessively in numerous essays and in *Christian Doctrine*. After he had finished the biography, he left his scholarly mode completely behind, throwing himself wholeheartedly into what he was to call 'The Golden Age of Hawthorne Criticism', a new critical era which he describes in the quotation which introduces this chapter. He welcomes the new tendency on the part of formalist, Christian critics to combine a universalist literary criticism with Christian morals. In particular, he praises Hyatt Waggoner's *Hawthorne: A Critical Study* and notes:

Waggoner is a formal critic, but he goes beyond formalism (as many of the formalists are beginning to do), because he is interested in the moral meanings, too. Hawthorne's moral meanings are not only inseparable from the formal aspects of his art; they are to Waggoner intrinsically important, for he is quite sympathetic, I take it, with the new orthodoxy....⁴²⁶

However, Stewart does not claim that his own convictions are not ideological, he merely believes that his ideology is the better one than that of progressives.

I have heard one respected critic object to the ideological bias of Waggoner's book. I do not object to the bias, possibly because I find myself in hearty agreement with it. The re-emergence of some of the basic tenets of Christian theology I regard as one of the more hopeful signs of our time. This radical ideological shift is finding important support (in imaginative American literature) not only in the work of contemporaries like Faulkner and [Robert Penn] Warren, but in perspective rereadings of Melville and Hawthorne. If the critic actually

⁴²⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1970).

⁴²⁵ Cited from Norman Holmes Pearson, 'Foreword' in Stewart, *Regionalism*, pp. xiii-xix (pp. xv-xvi).

⁴²⁶ Stewart, 'Golden Age' in *Regionalism*, pp. 138-9.

thinks the ideological shift is a good thing, it is making a fetish of critical disinterestedness to insist that he refrain from saying so (pp. 139-140).

It is important to note that Stewart was an uncompromising critic of Parrington and Hicks. In 'The Social School of American Criticism' (1944) he had indicted them for 'the establishment of scientific materialism as an "over-all" philosophy', declaring that he was 'unwilling... to believe that the health and prosperity of democracy are contingent upon this body of doctrine, for such a belief excludes from a democratic society art and religion, traditions and manners, and a proper respect for the individual life'.⁴²⁷ This assessment is closely bound up not just with Stewart's conservatism but also with his identity as a Southerner, which, after he has joined the critical turn, leads him to examine Faulkner. In 'Hawthorne and Faulkner' he compares the two writers in relation to their regional identities:

Germane to our subject are the two regions, and the relation of each author to his respective region. The South in the second quarter of the present century (and after) resembled in many ways New England a century earlier. In both cases a rampant industrialism was transforming the traditional social structure. A marked progressivism was in the air. Making money had become very important.⁴²⁸

He continues:

We read these two writers allegorically. This approach to Hawthorne was recognized almost from the start, but it was not at first recognized as appropriate to Faulkner, because many readers insisted (and perhaps still insist) upon reading him as sociology, as a report on 'conditions' in the South. But his work now, like Hawthorne's, is seen by most readers to be not so much a sociological record of a particular region as a report on the whole human race. Recent criticism has done much to elaborate and enrich the symbolical interpretation of both Hawthorne and Faulkner. The last decade or so has indeed been a golden age in criticism for both of these authors. More than most authors, both Faulkner and Hawthorne compel a symbolic reading.

We see these two writers, finally, as working in the orthodox Christian tradition, a tradition which posits original sin. It doesn't much matter, perhaps, whether the tradition is called Protestant or Catholic, Calvinist or Augustinian, though it is probably true that both authors (whether consciously or not) hark back to a view of Man and God which is older than the Protestant movement. Adherence to such a tradition was natural enough in Hawthorne's case (despite the heresies of the romantic age which surrounded him) because of his strong hereditary sense. Faulkner's adherence is not surprising either (despite the naturalistic amorality

⁴²⁷ Stewart, 'The Social School of American Criticism' in *Regionalism*, pp. 172-177 (p. 177).

⁴²⁸ Stewart, 'Hawthorne and Faulkner', p. 127.

which dominated the early decades of this century) because certain fundamentalist beliefs had persisted longer in the South than elsewhere, and naturalism as a philosophy had failed to gain much of a foothold there. Religious liberals can with justice affix the label 'reactionary' to Hawthorne and Faulkner alike (pp. 134-135).

'Reactionary' is a label that Stewart himself – with Allan Tate, who had published a collection of his writings under the title *Reactionary Essays* (1936) – assumes with pride. Stewart ends his comparison between Hawthorne and Faulkner by asserting: 'The business of writers like Hawthorne and Faulkner (as indeed of Shakespeare himself) is not to change the world, but to describe the human condition, to anatomize the human heart, to contemplate our common imperfections' (p. 135). It is clear from the tone and scope of his Hawthorne biography that he judges the business of the biographer to be the same: not to change the world, but to describe it. The recent cataclysm of the war and the reality of the bomb made any change seem a risk America simply could not take.

3.5 Two Liberal Versions: Robert Cantwell's and Mark Van Doren's Hawthornes

The late 1940s saw the birth of a new 'American Men of Letters' series, published by William Sloane Associates of New York and in England by Methuen. This was very much a liberal undertaking: the board of editors was composed of Joseph Wood Krutch, Margaret Marshall, Lionel Trilling, and Mark Van Doren. From 1924 to 1928, Van Doren and Krutch had been among the literary editors of the *Nation*, a journal which, along with the *New Republic*, 'took... pride in its reputation as the historic voice of liberalism in America'.⁴²⁹ Marshall had worked on the editorial staff first, briefly, of the *New Masses* and then of the *Nation* during the 20s and was literary editor of the *Nation* from 1937 to January 1953, when she was 'fired for her anti-communist views'.⁴³⁰

Although there is some overlap with Warner's original American Men of Letters series, many subjects of previously unquestioned status, like Bryant, Curtis, Ripley, Taylor, Whittier and even Irving and Longfellow, have fallen away (see Chapter 2.2).

⁴²⁹ Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Middletown: CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 13.

⁴³⁰ Marshall's papers, including her correspondence as editor of the American Men of Letters series, which 'chronicle the series from its inception in 1944 to its end in June 1952', and the partial manuscript of her

The new series included Krutch's *Thoreau* (1948), Emery Neff's *Edward Arlington Robinson* (1948), Perry Miller's *Jonathan Edwards* (1949), Arvin's *Herman Melville* (1950), James Grossman's *James Fenimore Cooper* (1950), and John Berryman's *Stephen Crane* (1950). The only female subjects were Constance Rourke (by Margaret Marshall) and Emily Dickinson (Richard Chase), and Marshall and Marguerite Young were the only women biographers involved in the series. Marshall's *Rourke* was never published, as the series ended before she had finished the book, and neither was Trilling's projected *Mark Twain*. The jewel in the crown of this new series was Arvin's *Herman Melville* (1950), for which he received the National Book Award the following year. F. O. Matthiessen's *Theodore Dreiser* was published posthumously in 1951, for Matthiessen had committed suicide in the spring of the previous year by leaping from a hotel window. Matthiessen had been widely criticized for his continued adherence to socialism after the war, especially by Lionel Trilling in *The Liberal Imagination*.⁴³¹

Mark Van Doren's *Nathaniel Hawthorne* was described by the *New York Times* reviewer as 'a critical biography blessed with a genuinely critical point of view'.⁴³²

Charles W. Everett (who had the office next door to Van Doren's at Columbia) gives us an insight into Van Doren's biographical method when he declares that his card index notes for the Hawthorne biography were

...almost as interesting as the book itself. They consist of about a thousand 3 x 5 paper slips written in pencil and listed under about fifty heads: politics, boredom, the Peabodys, Melville, the lonely room, Italy, etc. The range of reading they cover is of course enormous, but in each case what is put down is so striking, so genuinely illustrative of a point in artistry or in character, that a less skillful writer would have in some way made a place for it in the book. The power of decision involved in discarding nine out of ten as not essential to the point Van Doren wished to make is central to understanding how a good book is written.⁴³³

Rourke biography are held at the Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; see: <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/beinecke.marshall.nav.html>

⁴³¹ In a remarkable pattern of repetition, Dreiser yet again becomes the touchstone of leftist alignment in 1994 when Donald Pease attacks Lionel Trilling's critique of Matthiessen's praise for Dreiser in 'Reality in America' (see Chapter 4.3) (cf. Donald Pease, 'New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon', in *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*, ed. by Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 1-37 (pp. 6-7)).

⁴³² Ralph Thompson, 'Hawthorne – Two Studies', *New York Times* (1 May 1949), p. BR5.

⁴³³ Charles W. Everett, 'Mark Van Doren at Work' in *Columbia Library Columns*, 9.2 (New York: Friends of the Columbia Libraries, 1960), p. 20, cited from William Claire's 'Introduction' to *The Essays of Mark Van Doren (1924-1972)* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. xviii.

Robert Cantwell was a journalist and novelist, author of two highly regarded social protest novels of the early 1930s, *Laugh and Lie Down* (1931) and *The Land of Plenty* (1934). Although he had little knowledge of Marx and was soon disillusioned with Communism, he was, like Arvin, one of the fifty-two writers who had signed an open letter supporting the Communist presidential candidate William Z. Foster in 1932.⁴³⁴

The projected second volume of his Hawthorne biography was never published, presumably because it was eclipsed by Stewart's book, which had been published almost simultaneously. The publisher, Rinehart, canceled the project because the first volume had only sold ca. 3,500 copies before being remaindered (*ibid.*).

As Cantwell himself states in the foreword to the book, his biography of Hawthorne 'differs from other studies in its fuller treatment of people whose lives were linked with his' (p. ix). As in Stewart's book, the issue of nineteenth-century politics is highlighted, again to comment on contemporary issues. Cantwell notes that Hawthorne 'was an active politician in the democratic party, a circumstance which has made me, in view of its treatment of him, and insofar as I have any political opinions on the issues of the time, a Federalist'.⁴³⁵

3.6 New Foci in Hawthorne Biography

While Stewart's neo-orthodox and conservative approach to Hawthorne was continued into the 1960s with such biographies as Wagenknecht's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer* (1961), and Hoeltje's *Inward Sky* (1962), there were also important new developments in Hawthorne biography in the late 40s and early 50s, characterized by far-reaching shifts in emphasis or focus. Cantwell, as we have seen, had opened out the scope of Hawthorne biography by casting his net very widely and pulling in many of Hawthorne's associates and contemporaries, situating the events of Hawthorne's life in a wider social fabric.

⁴³⁴ John M. Vermillion, 'Robert Cantwell' in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Novelists, 1910-1945*, ed. by James J. Martine (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1981), pp. 132-135.

⁴³⁵ Cantwell, *Hawthorne*, p. ix.

Louise Hall Tharp's *The Peabody Sisters of Salem* (1950) is an important book which has received comparatively little attention. Tharp's is a group biography which interweaves and constantly juxtaposes the lives of three sisters: Elizabeth Peabody, teacher; Mary, teacher, who married Horace Mann, educator; and Sophia, artist, who married Nathaniel Hawthorne, writer. As a result, the representation of Sophia Peabody Hawthorne changes considerably. Usually we encounter Sophia, the invalid, for the first time when she descends the stairs, with a white wrapper around her shoulders, to meet the visiting Hawthorne.⁴³⁶ While Tharp, too, stresses the disabling headaches from which Sophia periodically suffered and which Tharp largely ascribes to the effect of an oppressively overprotective mother, we see Sophia living away from home as an artist and a skillful copyist of paintings and struggling to negotiate the tricky waters of social propriety during her sojourn in Cuba, before Hawthorne ever lays eyes on her.⁴³⁷ Like Cantwell, Tharp uses several new sources which become difficult to ignore after her book, including Sophia's 'Cuban Journal', which Stewart had mentioned but not mined for insights into Sophia's personal history.⁴³⁸ Likewise, by situating the lives of the three Peabody sisters within nineteenth-century New England culture, Tharp renders the socio-historical context much more important, and highlights the roles of women in that culture without the derision then still frequently applied by male commentators. Stewart himself, for example, had dismissed Elizabeth as 'a famous bluestocking'⁴³⁹ and while his representation of Sophia is ambivalent – he is obliged to depict her as a suitable wife for Hawthorne and respect the way he had regarded her – it is his antagonism to the woman who had bowdlerized the 'naturalness and spontaneity', the 'uncompromising realism' and the 'ineradicable rusticity' – in other words the masculinity – in Hawthorne's notebooks, which is most pronounced.⁴⁴⁰ A similar hostility is evident when Edward Wagenknecht, for example, quotes Hawthorne's harsh final judgment of Margaret Fuller, who had lived with, and finally married an Italian Count before they

⁴³⁶ See Arvin, *Hawthorne*, p. 78; Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 51; Van Doren, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 51.

⁴³⁷ See Louise Hall Tharp, *The Peabody Sisters of Salem* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), pp. 53-55, 81-84.

⁴³⁸ The 'Cuban Journal' and other documents relating to Sophia Peabody's life before she met Hawthorne became important sources for Herbert's *Dearest Beloved*.

⁴³⁹ Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 49;

⁴⁴⁰ Stewart, 'Mrs. Hawthorne's Revisions', pp. xviii, xv, xvii.

and their little son were drowned in a shipwreck. Hawthorne had written in his journal that Fuller had a 'strange, heavy, unpliant, and, in many respects, defective and evil nature' which she had 'adorned... with a mosaic of admirable qualities, such as she chose to possess'; he concluded that he 'like[d] her the better' for having 'proved herself a very woman' in compromising her reputation and having fallen 'as the weakest as her sisters might'.⁴⁴¹ Wagenknecht shows no inclination to counterbalance this portrait; instead, he compounds it by suggesting that '[i]f Margaret Fuller had been a more attractive woman... [Hawthorne] might well have judged her more leniently' (ibid.). Stewart likewise quotes Hawthorne's remarks on Fuller at great length and concludes:

It would be difficult to find a better parable of Calvinism in the literature of New England, while Hawthorne's concluding emphasis upon our common humanity is a point sometimes missed by students of the old orthodoxy. ...the view of Margaret in the passage just quoted is broadly representative of Hawthorne's view of human nature generally, and the difficulty of transforming it by artificial culture. Sometimes thought merely malicious, the passage actually moves beyond the personal to the philosophical.⁴⁴²

Neither man attempts to draw a more balanced portrait of Fuller, who was one of the foremost intellectuals, and, importantly, feminists, of her time. These accounts of Fuller, tellingly referred to by Stewart as 'Margaret' in contradistinction to 'Hawthorne', also allow us to glimpse something of the prevalent expectations of womanly behavior in the post-war era: in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan wrote that during the years since the end of the war women learned 'that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for'.⁴⁴³ We may wonder whether Cleone Odell Stewart experienced a headache similar to Sophia Hawthorne's after becoming familiar with the content of her husband's masterpiece. In contrast, while we sense that she does not altogether approve of what she represents as Fuller's hauteur, Tharp frames her

⁴⁴¹ Cited from Edward Wagenknecht, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 147; the passage is in CE 14, pp. 155-156.

⁴⁴² Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, pp. 195-196.

⁴⁴³ Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, p. 11. Importantly, Friedan includes a historical account of the American women's movement, in which she refers to Margaret Fuller as one woman among a larger group, who 'loved, were loved, and married; many seem to have been as passionate in their relations with lover and husband, in an age when passion in woman was as forbidden as intelligence, as they were in their battle for woman's chance to grow to full human stature' (pp. 74-75).

estimation in Elizabeth Peabody's memories of Fuller and concludes: 'Whether she had been truly the Marchioness Ossoli or, as Hawthorne believed, the mistress of a fake nobleman, she had snatched at life with both hands before the sea claimed her' (p. 218). The combination of Tharp's female perspective with her focus on a group of women also serves to highlight ambivalences in the characters of those women sympathetically. Sophia's behavior towards her daughters is shown to resemble that of her own overprotective and manipulative mother; she did not want Una or Rose to live away from home or attempt to earn a living and was capable, as Tharp shows, of using emotional blackmail to keep them at home.⁴⁴⁴ Sophia's and her sisters' gendered attitudes and responses are foregrounded and discussed in the context of their education, associations and experiences. Tharp's book is thus a good example of Feminist biography (see Parke's definition in Chapter 1.7); it breaks with the implicitly expected account, of the male individual by the male individual, by talking about a group, and centering its narrative around the lives of women. This distinct starting position is evident, for example, when Tharp, redressing Stewart's emphasis in his account of the genesis of *Passages from the American Notebooks*, stresses Fields's involvement in the bowdlerization:

Mr. Fields had suggested changes in words and phrases in accordance with his own taste for simpering prettiness and prudery. Words with too Anglo-Saxon a flavor were out. Latin derivatives must be used.... Everything having to do with sex was either left out or changed. Some of these changes appealed to Sophia just as strongly as they did to Fields but every once in a while she stood out for Hawthorne's own expressions exactly as he wrote them down. Sophia, as editor, would be blamed or praised for the changes according to the temper of the times (p. 310).

Stewart's negatively gendered portrayal of Sophia as 'the classic example, at least in America, of the genteel Victorian female' is replaced with a depiction of Fields as an at least equally, if not even more, genteel Victorian male. Finally, Hawthorne himself becomes a figure embedded in a much larger context by being seen not as the principal focus of a biography but as a more peripheral figure, on a par with, for example, the figure of Horace Mann, the founder of Antioch College, whom Mary Peabody had married.

⁴⁴⁴ Tharp, *Peabody Sisters*, pp. 303-304.

As its title suggests, Vernon Loggins's *The Hawthornes: Seven Generations of an American Family* (1951) has a very different focus. The diachronic perspective is less novel than Tharp's approach, since the Hawthorne forebears had been accorded plenty of room in many previous Hawthorne biographies, but there is genuine originality in the fact that Loggins gives Rose Hawthorne Lathrop her own chapter, titled 'Mother Alphonsa'. Loggins makes it clear that he rates Rose among the three most significant members of the Ha(w)thorne family, the other two being her father and William Hathorne, the first America ancestor. Loggins writes: 'For the third time in three hundred years a Hawthorne was in the control of a mighty will. Rose was never to struggle against it, nor make compromises, as her father had done. The granite within her was the granite of the sire of the Salem Hawthornes'.⁴⁴⁵ Also noteworthy is Loggins's introduction of the incest theme into Hawthorne biography. At great length, Loggins relates how in 1680 three members of the Manning family, Hawthorne's forebears on his mother's side, had been accused of having an incestuous relationship. The accused were a brother and his two sisters; the brother, Nicholas Manning, escaped, but his sisters, Anstiss Manning and Margaret Palfray, were sentenced, among other punishments, to appear in front of the congregation with the word 'incest' pinned to their caps. This incident, Loggins claims, preyed on Hawthorne's imagination and found artistic expression in the story 'Alice Doane's Appeal' and in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun* (pp. 279, 293). He notes: 'That Hawthorne knew the identity of the two sisters and the brother can hardly be doubted. The effect which this dark Manning family secret produced on the romancer's emotions could only have been penetrating and most poignant' (p. 279). This highlights some of the problems with Loggins's book. It can be argued that Loggins projects his own notion of the importance of this episode onto the members of the Hawthorne family, and especially Nathaniel himself. As he admits, there is no evidence that Hawthorne knew their identity; the incident is mentioned in Felt's *Annals of Salem* but the names of the accused are omitted. That does not stop Loggins from suggesting that Hawthorne felt that, while writing in *The Scarlet Letter* of a similar punishment, '[h]is kinswomen tagged INCEST must not be mentioned' (ibid.). As the

⁴⁴⁵ Vernon Loggins, *The Hawthornes: Seven Generations of an American Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 321.

biographer who looks at the lives of the Ha(w)thornes through history Loggins claims the importance of this narrative as his discovery, as a new light in which to interpret Hawthorne's life and fictions. Nevertheless, for that aspect alone Loggins's book has been extremely influential. The incest theme was taken up almost greedily by Frederick Crews (*The Sins of the Fathers*) and Philip Young (*Hawthorne's Secret*).⁴⁴⁶ The fact that Loggins explicitly mentions Hawthorne's sister Elizabeth's approval of both 'Appeal' and *The Marble Faun* may have influenced Young's notion of an incestuous attachment between the two siblings.

Finally, Edward Davidson, with *Hawthorne's Last Phase*, opens up the discussion of Hawthorne's decline through his analyses of the four unfinished romances which Hawthorne had worked on from the time of family's return to the United States until his death but which he had been unable to shape into publishable texts. Although Davidson's book is not a biography it throws more light on Hawthorne's final years than previous studies had done, charting Hawthorne's mental decline through a minute examination of those literary fragments.

Like Stewart, Hubert Hoeltje and Edward Wagenknecht were both neo-orthodox and politically conservative and claimed Hawthorne as a precursor, both politically and theologically. In *Inward Sky*, Hoeltje describes a letter from Hawthorne to Sophia Peabody, which, he says, has informed his 'point of view':

Eager ...to reveal himself to his sweetheart, Hawthorne was troubled by the cloudy veil that stretched over the abyss of his nature. Still, it pleased him to think that God saw through his heart, and that any angel with the power to penetrate it was welcome to know everything that was there. So, too, was any mortal welcome to come into his depths – any mortal capable of full sympathy. Such a capability, and the willingness to supply it, Hawthorne of course quite rightly assumed that Sophia had when he invited her to look into his heart.⁴⁴⁷

By referring to this letter as the rationale for his biography Hoeltje construes himself as such a 'mortal ...capable of full sympathy' in order to authorize his own understanding of Hawthorne. His avowed method is to 'look through the whole range of Hawthorne's writings (his letters, his journals, his fiction) in order to discover the

⁴⁴⁶ Frederick Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 36-37; Young, *Hawthorne's Secret*, p.168-169.

pattern of the thought there, and to correlate this pattern with the facts of the outward life', and thereby to 'disclose, as far as possible the whole man'. He believes that such an approach could outline 'the admirable possibilities of human character, and... thus contribute... to the livableness of life'. He tells us that he has 'wherever possible, I may say parenthetically, employed a close paraphrase of the language of Hawthorne in an effort to convey that sense of repose which is the very essence of Hawthorne's style and of the man himself' (all quotations 'Preface').

In the final chapter of his book, titled 'To Gladden the World', Hoeltje evaluates Hawthorne's life and writings and concludes that:

nothing is more prominent than a quiet, deeply joyful affirmation. To recognize the hand of Providence in the affairs of man, to see the unity in the diversity of the world, to perceive in the forms of Nature a majestic and beautiful Idea, to feel that all these wonderful things are for the instruction and enjoyment of man, and to be assured that beyond is still a higher fruition in man's immortality – these were the basic tenets of Hawthorne's belief as a man, a belief, too, permeating all his writings and giving them abiding substance and worth.⁴⁴⁸

When Hoeltje describes Hawthorne as someone who sees 'the unity in the diversity' he claims Hawthorne as an exponent of 'E pluribus unum', one of the two mottoes of the United States.⁴⁴⁹ Hoeltje's strategy is a totalizing one; he collapses different elements into one another: Hawthorne's 'mind and heart', the man and the writer ('man and writer were one'⁴⁵⁰), and finally his own voice and the voices of his subjects. A characteristic instance is his treatment of an exchange of letters between Hawthorne and the absent Sophia in the summer of 1847. Although we can easily guess it in this case, we are not explicitly told that Hoeltje's sources are letters, nor which phrases are taken directly from them. Nathaniel Hawthorne had written that Sophia's and the children's absence had made him aware how much he was missing them:

⁴⁴⁷ Hubert H. Hoeltje, *Inward Sky: The Mind and Heart of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1962), 'Preface'.

⁴⁴⁸ Hoeltje, *Inward Sky*, p. 561.

⁴⁴⁹ The other being 'In God We Trust'. It is at this time, in the 1950s, that we see the conjunction between Christianity, capitalism and nationhood clearly spelt out in the adoption of 'In God We Trust' as the national motto of the United States in 1956. The words had appeared on coins since 1864 and began to be printed on paper money in 1957. See the website of the United States Department of the Treasury, 'Fact Sheet: Currency & Coins: History of In God We Trust' (<http://www.ustreas.gov/education/factsheets/currency/in-god-we-trust.html>).

⁴⁵⁰ Hoeltje, *Inward Sky*, p. 555.

It was when Sophia was absent, and when he could step aside from his daily life, that he could best behold how fair was his lot. Then he could most clearly see how infinitely he loved her.... He wanted, too, to hear the children's voices. ...Even their little quarrels and naughtinesses would be a blessing (pp. 252-253).

Sophia Hawthorne, in Hoeltje's version of her reply, said,

...she found it unnecessary to stand apart from daily life to see how fair and blest was their lot. Not every mother was like her, because not every mother had such a father for her children. Even in the very center of simultaneous screams from both darling little throats, she was as sensible of her happiness as when the most dulcet of sounds were issuing thence. She was so happy that she required nothing more. With such a husband and such children, no art or beauty could excel her daily life. Nor had she any desire to go out of her house to find anything better (pp. 253-254).

Hoeltje's paraphrases are utterly literal and yet they filter the sources to such an extent that, without looking at the original documents ourselves, we are unable to say where the Hawthornes stop and Hoeltje begins. In striking contrast, Walter Herbert, in 1993, reproduces Sophia's letter itself, with some omissions, and then reads it as 'a monument to repressed motherly and matrimonial fury', contending that 'Sophia at times wanted to slit the darling little throats, and Nathaniel's throat as well'.⁴⁵¹ The point here is not that Herbert's reading is necessarily correct, although I agree that the letter is capable of being read in such a way. What Herbert enables us to do and what Hoeltje prevents us from doing is to make up our own minds.

It is remarkable but also characteristic that, in the penultimate paragraph of the book, it is the appearance of Hawthorne's dead body that, for Hoeltje, 'epitomizes'

⁴⁵¹ T. Walter Herbert, *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-class Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 175. The letter, written in July 1947, is in the Berg Collection in New York Public Library. This is the letter as Herbert cites it: 'I do not need to stand apart from our daily life to see how fair & blest is our lot, because it is the mother's vocation to be in the midst of little cares & great blisses & the little cares make no account by the side of the great blisses.... This I tell thee all the time, but thou canst not believe it.... In the very center of simultaneous screams from both darling little throats, I am quite as sensible of my happiness as when the most dulcet sounds are issuing thence. The screams are transient & superficial. The beauty & loveliness & nobleness & grace which possess me in the shape of these fairest children which enchant all peoples – these lay hold on the basis of being – these are permanent & immortal.... Above all, beyond them is thyself – who art my everlasting satisfaction – my ever present felicity – my pride & glory & support – my sufficiency.... I am the happiest of women. Thou, beloved, oughtst not to be obliged to undergo the wear & tear of the nursery. It is contrary to thy nature and to thy mood. Thou wast born to muse & to be silent & through undisturbed dreams, to enlighten the world. I have suffered only for thee in my babydom. When I can once shut thee away in thy study & shew thee our jewels only when they are shining – then it will be unalloyed delight day by day' (*Dearest Beloved*, pp. 174-5, the omissions are Herbert's).

Hawthorne's life:

The life of Nathaniel Hawthorne can perhaps be most fittingly epitomized in the impressions of two of his best friends. To Franklin Pierce, at the hotel in Plymouth, ...as he leaned over the lifeless form of his friend, it had seemed that Hawthorne's face had never appeared more grand and serene. To Ralph Waldo Emerson, ...looking for the last time at the friend who lay in his ...coffin, it had seemed that Hawthorne's was a powerful head – noble and serene in its aspect. Statesman and poet, man of affairs and man of letters, had each seen, in those memorable moments, the essence of Hawthorne's character and accomplishment as a man.⁴⁵²

Judging the state of the soul by the appearance of the body was very much a nineteenth-century preoccupation, but one that even Emerson himself was skeptical of, for he continues to discuss other aspects of Hawthorne's death and even surmises that Hawthorne had died of unendurable loneliness (see Chapter 2.5).⁴⁵³ It is remarkable that the look of the corpse should be the only detail Hoeltje takes from Emerson's journal entry; he suppresses Emerson's references to Hawthorne's 'painful solitude', his disappointment in Hawthorne's literary output and politics, and the fact that Emerson, whom Hoeltje calls one of Hawthorne's 'best friends', believed he had not managed to 'conquer a friendship'. Hoeltje's strategy of ventriloquism, paired with his selectivity, turns the historical agents into puppets and their dissent – Hawthorne's own, Sophia's, Emerson's – is silenced. *E pluribus unum*: out of many voices, only one is finally heard, not a symphony of the many but only Hoeltje's own. By declaring himself one of those 'mortal[s] capable of full sympathy' who had been able to 'come into... [Hawthorne's] depths' Hoeltje assumes a position of authority from which to fabricate and impose a consensus.

Edward Wagenknecht's book on Hawthorne, which is not strictly a biography but a 'psychograph' – a 'study of Hawthorne's character and personality' – reveals a far more complex, contradictory, and a much darker Hawthorne than either Stewart or Hoeltje had done. This was the first biographical study of Hawthorne to thoroughly break with chronological arrangement and opt for a thematic approach, a strategy that Erlich and Herbert likewise found useful in the 1980s and 90s. Wagenknecht's final

⁴⁵² Hoeltje, *Inward Sky*, p. 561.

paragraph sums Hawthorne up as follows:

He could be stubborn and wilful [sic], for he was a human being. He was sensitive and highly cultivated, with a streak of human coarseness occasionally showing through all his spirituality. He was kind and loving, but he was sometimes cold and kind at the same time. There was a dark side to him, but he faced the light. If there was a potential Ethan Brand in him or a young Goodman Brown, he watched him and guarded against him and strangled him. In the end, darkness encompassed the weakness of his body and dragged him down, but his soul passed into the light which derives from God and illuminates the whole exhilarating, infinitely varied realm of world art.⁴⁵⁴

In a curious and revealing lapse of vocabulary Wagenknecht analyses Hawthorne's sublimation of his inner contradictions as an act first of policing and then, when policing fails, of 'strangulation'. His startling choice of expression exposes the violence inherent in enforcing a harmonious conclusion.

Tharp, Loggins and Davidson had opened up the field, but Hubert Hoeltje, with his circular, self-referential method, hermetically seals it, for his strategy of paraphrase categorically forecloses discussion: Hoeltje's judgment becomes the event horizon beyond which none of his subjects' meanings can escape. That strategy of foreclosure appears to go hand in hand with the 'normal Hawthorne' approach: in a review of Loggins's *Seven Generations* Stewart concludes, somewhat sardonically, 'The book doubtless offers opportunities for sage comment by anthropologist and moralist. Suffice it to say in this place that Nathaniel Hawthorne was more important than the rest because he was a genius, and because art has a permanence denied to other human achievements'.⁴⁵⁵ Thus, Stewart's assessment implicitly disqualifies any biographical subject he would not class as a genius and thus inherently invalidates Tharp's focus as well as Loggins's. Moreover, by stressing the 'permanence' of art he in fact divorces Hawthorne's literary output itself from historicizing approaches such as biography and renders the life and the works irrelevant to one another. This mode of compartmentalization is congruent with the structure of his own Hawthorne biography,

⁴⁵³ *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, selected and edited by Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 526-527.

⁴⁵⁴ Edward Wagenknecht, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 196), p. 201.

⁴⁵⁵ Randall Stewart, 'The Hawthornes by Vernon Loggins', *Modern Language Notes*, 62 (April 1952), 287-288 (p. 288).

which historically situates the composition and publication of Hawthorne's imaginative works but does not *read* any of them until the tacked-on final chapter. Stewart thus implicitly restricts the potential scope of Hawthorne biography to works that describe Hawthorne as a genius and stress the permanent values of his writings. Much more drastically, Julian Hawthorne had told the *New York Times* interviewer in 1932: 'Nathaniel Hawthorne has been abundantly described and analyzed and nothing important remains to be discussed'.⁴⁵⁶ While Stewart was of course a responsible biographer who intended a balanced account, his attempts at circumscription and containment reveal an anxiety on the part of the proponents of the 'normal' Hawthorne to prevent dark aspects of his life or psyche from surfacing or, if they do break the surface to consign them quickly back to the depths. They must either be revealed and then 'strangled' as by Wagenknecht and Stewart, or be kept muffled, if not mute, as in Hoeltje's book.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ 'Son Denies Hawthorne Was an Indolent Man'.

⁴⁵⁷ A similar tendency can be observed in Margaret Moore, a more recent exponent of the 'normalized' Hawthorne, whose *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4:

'MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY': 'CULTURAL' HAWTHORNE BIOGRAPHY AND THE CULTURE WARS IN THE 1980S AND 90S

Hawthorne biography was a battleground even as the principals lived out their lives, and the warfare was intensified when it was carried over into print. There is no reason to suppose this will cease to be so, given the family's role in the fashioning of middle-class selfhood at large. We have all become, for better or worse, members of the family.⁴⁵⁸

I would like to write the history of this prison, with all the political investments of the body that it gathers together in its closed architecture. Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present.⁴⁵⁹

4.1 Introduction

'Does Hawthorne's magnitude diminish? Will he perish?' asks Richard Brodhead in the concluding paragraph of *The School of Hawthorne* (1986), echoing Melville's questions about the whale. He notes that Hawthorne, whom he describes as 'American literature's great survivor', has endured two major paradigm shifts but '[w]hether he will survive the next reorganization of American literary culture is not so certain'. 'I sometimes suspect', Brodhead reflects,

that his place will be considerably reduced, in the new version of the collective past we are clearly moving toward. ...What Hawthorne will need is what every potential past needs in order to survive – for the living present to continue to make it the image of its living concerns and needs.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ T. Walter Herbert, *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-class Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 281.

⁴⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 30-31.

⁴⁶⁰ Richard Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 215.

Many biographers of Van Wyck Brooks's generation had done this programmatically, and during the heyday of the New Criticism many had taken for granted that the best literature of the past is that which transcends its own historical moment and illuminates the present with its universal truths. Since the 1980s and 90s the problem of the present relevance of the past has again become a disputed issue in biographical practice, and Hawthorne biography has once again formed an arena for this debate. Brodhead's proposition that for the past to survive we must 'make it the image' of our present 'concerns and needs' addresses an issue that has been, and still is, fiercely debated by biographers. His wording suggests that Hawthorne's survival depends on a continuation of the Brooksonian 'usable past' venture, in which it was considered legitimate to 'discover' or 'even invent' a past that would reflect our present lives back to us (see Chapter 2.1). Indeed, Ronald Bosco suggests in his survey of Emerson biography (2000) that it is legitimate for biographers to find in the subject's life the issues which they hoped to locate there in the first place:

Emerson's own facility in appropriating ideas from the long span of Western and eastern thought justifies the disposition of his many biographers and critics to appropriate his life and message to their particular ideological and psychological purposes. And because biography is a written form of personal relationship established among a writer, a subject, and a reader, we should have reason to believe that *our* biography of Emerson has not yet been written. If we choose to write that biography, it may well be that through our own appropriations of his life and thought Emerson will perform services for us today comparable to those for which biographers and critics have turned to him over the past century.⁴⁶¹

However, Bosco's unabashed espousal of biographical appropriation has been a rare position among academic biographers at the turn of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. By and large, we do not believe that such invention, or even just 'finding what we seek', is legitimate. The great problem for the biographers and critics since the early 1980s has been how to balance conflicting requirements: to 'adhere to the historical record' without 'imposing today's views on the past' (as David Reynolds describes his intent in the preface to his Whitman biography) and still produce an

⁴⁶¹ Ronald A. Bosco, 'We Find what We Seek: Emerson and His Biographers' in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 269-290 (pp. 286-287).

account that has a more than merely antiquarian interest, a history that is definitely relevant to our own lives.⁴⁶²

The half-decade before Brodhead expressed his concerns about Hawthorne's survival had seen a veritable Hawthorne boom. A spate of new biographies appeared in 1980: Arlin Turner's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*, James Mellow's *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*, Raymona Hull's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience, 1853-1864* and a biography for children, *A New England Love Story: Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody* by LouAnn Gaeddert. These were followed in 1983 by James O'Donald Mays's *Mr Hawthorne Goes to England: Adventures of a Reluctant Consul* and in 1984 by Gloria Erlich's *Family Themes in Hawthorne's Fiction: The Tenacious Web* and Philip Young's *Hawthorne's Secret: An Un-told Tale*.⁴⁶³ As if to confirm Brodhead's surmise, there have indeed been fewer Hawthorne biographies since Brodhead's *School* appeared: Edwin Haviland Miller's *Salem Is My Dwelling Place*, published in 1991, Walter Herbert's *Dearest Beloved* (1993), Nancy Whitelaw's biography for young readers, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: American Storyteller* (1996), Margaret Moore's *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1998), Brenda Wineapple's *Hawthorne: A Life* (2003) and in 2004 Philip McFarland's *Hawthorne in Concord*. This still constitutes a considerable crop – six book-length biographical treatments between 1991 and 2003. Two of these, Miller's and Wineapple's books, are extended accounts in the traditional cradle-to-grave format, while Herbert's, Moore's and McFarland's books concentrate on certain aspects of Hawthorne's biography, but are, nevertheless, substantial treatises.

In the many Hawthorne biographies published since 1980, various different approaches compete for the attention of readers and are often advertised by the books' elaborate titles and sub-titles. Several biographies focus on Hawthorne as a man in the world (Turner, Mellow), including two partial biographies concentrating on the

⁴⁶² David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. xii.

⁴⁶³ Rita Gollin's *Portraits of Nathaniel Hawthorne: an Iconography* (1983) should also be mentioned at this point, because it brings together the images of Hawthorne which have silently informed the biographical efforts. It is thus an indispensable reference work, for those images, by being selected for the biographies, convey highly important, but often not verbally expressed, information about the biographer's view of his or her subject.

European/consular experience (Hull, Mays). There is also an increased interest in the search for secrets in Hawthorne's life, especially on the part of Mellow and Young (see Introduction), but also in some degree Erlich, Miller and Herbert, whose books are informed, to a greater or lesser extent, by a range of psychoanalytic approaches.

Many of these biographies concentrate on the details of Hawthorne's family life and closest relationships, a trend instituted by an important revisionist article by Nina Baym (1982) on the relationship between Hawthorne and his mother.⁴⁶⁴ Gaeddert's book for young readers, in centring on the romance between Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody, is part of this trend, but merely goes over some already well trodden ground. Young investigates what he considers an incestuous attachment between Nathaniel and his sister Elizabeth (see Introduction). Erlich looks closely at all of Hawthorne's family relationships, but pays particular attention to the Manning household, within which Hawthorne grew up. Miller's is a full-scale biography, but he asserts the centrality of family relationships in Hawthorne's life and writings and declares it his 'purpose' to take account of them.⁴⁶⁵ Herbert's book, finally, focuses on the family Hawthorne made for himself (as opposed to the one into which he was born): he investigates the relationships between Nathaniel and Sophia and their three children. Significantly, Erlich and Herbert, the two biographers who concentrate most closely on their subject's familial relationships, also set out to develop models for the connection between imaginative writings and life, suggesting a perceived link, on the part of these two critics, between family and literary creation. Indeed, an interest in familial experience and a concern with how precisely that type of experience is imaginatively transformed into literature appear to go hand in hand.

The sudden and extensive renewal of interest in Hawthorne biography during the 80s and 90s followed a lull of nearly two decades. There was comparatively little biographical interest in figures like Emerson, Hawthorne or Melville in the 60s and 70s, and Hawthorne biography in particular was at a low ebb. The only Hawthorne biographies to be produced during this time since Hoeltje's and Wagenknecht's books in

⁴⁶⁴ Nina Baym, 'Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Mother: A Biographical Speculation', *American Literature*, 54.1 (March 1982), 1-27.

⁴⁶⁵ Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (London: Duckworth, 1991), pp. xvi-xvii.

the early 1960s were two books for young readers, Sean Manley's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Captain of the Imagination* (1968) and James Playsted Wood's *The Unpardonable Sin* (1970) in the Pantheon Portraits series. The most important and groundbreaking book on Hawthorne during this interim period was Frederick Crews's *The Sins of the Fathers*, not a biography, but a psychoanalytical study of Hawthorne's fictional writings.

It would be simplistic, of course, to suggest that current social and political developments are always instantly reflected in the kind of biographical writing produced during a period, and in fact the slowdown of biographical production in relation to these male American Renaissance authors may have been largely due to the disregard into which academic literary biography had fallen during the heyday of the New Criticism. However, it is evident that 1960s radicalism did not readily discharge itself into biographies of American Renaissance writers, except where the central themes with which these figures could be identified overlapped directly with current sociopolitical concerns, such as civil rights, women's rights or gay rights issues. In the 1960s, during the peak of the civil rights movement, we see an explosion of interest in Frederick Douglass in particular, which took the form of educational short biographies for children with titles like *Frederick Douglass, Freedom Fighter*, or *Frederick Douglass, Boy Champion of Human Rights* (see Appendix B.3.3), mostly written by women. Such educational pamphlets could be produced easily and quickly and with very little original research; this flurry, however, was directly preceded by an important academic biography of Douglass by the Marxist labor historian Philip Sheldon Foner (1964). To a somewhat lesser extent, Harriet Beecher Stowe was also taken up as a subject for educational pamphlets and short biographies, which demonstrate a nexus between civil rights, women's rights, and religiosity similar to that which linked the nineteenth-century women's movement with the abolitionist cause (see B.3.2); Gloria Hooker's *I Shall Not Live in Vain: The Biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the New England Author whose Book Changed Attitudes about Slavery*, published in 1978 in the Greatness with Faith series, is a typical title.⁴⁶⁶ The real fruit of the energies released during the

⁴⁶⁶ An awareness of this nineteenth-century nexus among 1960s feminists is demonstrated in Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1970), see pp. 81, 84-85.

social movements of the 1960s and 70s was reaped in the 1980s: three academic Douglass biographies were published between 1980 and 1984, and six academic Dickinson biographies by female (and two by male) scholars were published between 1982 and 1989. The upsurge in the number of Hawthorne biographies in the early 1980s can be explained similarly as a result of developments during the 60s and 70s.

4.2 'Hawthorne's Psychological Themes'

First published in 1966, Frederick Crews's *The Sins of the Fathers* immediately announced itself as a break with previous critical and biographical conceptions of Hawthorne. Because Crews needed to establish the space for his own approach to the subject, a Freudian reading of Hawthorne's fictions, the first few pages of the book are given over to a vigorous debunking of preceding approaches. In a 'see-also'-footnote Gorman's, Morris's, and Arvin's accounts of Hawthorne are lumped together with Van Wyck Brooks's description of the author as insubstantial and 'phantom'-like in *The Flowering of New England*; Crews thus dismisses this group, but also somewhat vindicates its members as at least having dealt with 'the less easily witnessed,' the 'haunted' Hawthorne.⁴⁶⁷ For, Crews argues, Hawthorne has fared even worse at the hands of the more recent 'symbolic' critics and 'positivistic-theological' biographers who have 'been anxious to depart from the emotional texture of Hawthorne's imagination' (p. 5) and have 'turn[ed] him into an odd combination of plodding democrat and religious tutor to posterity' (p. 6), in short, into 'a very boring writer' (p. 7). Among the biographers guilty of this banalization, Crews singles out Stewart (1948), Wagenknecht (1961) and Hoeltje (1962), discussed in Chapter 3, for especial censure:

Their normalization of Hawthorne springs not from 'evidence which can be checked by other investigators' [a quotation from Wagenknecht] but from a failure of intuition. Their belief that the 'man and writer were one' [Hoeltje] – healthy, pedestrian, moral – is a sign of a simplistic psychology that looks only at surfaces – an especially drastic weakness in approaching Hawthorne (pp. 5-6).⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ Frederick Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁶⁸ Further on (p. 14), however, Crews comments on the usefulness of Stewart's scholarship in relation to Hawthorne's notebooks: Stewart's account of Sophia Hawthorne's revisions of her husband's notebooks

Crews marks, and causes, a shift away from the normalized, 'healthy', conservative and orthodox Hawthorne of the 1940s and 50s to one who was psychologically complex and tortured by guilt. The serene Hawthorne, whose 'very essence... is repose' (p. 4, quoting Hoeltje) had not been the only Hawthorne made available during the post-war period; Trilling, in the article 'Hawthorne in Our Time', published two years before Crews's book, alludes to the 'grave, complex, and difficult Hawthorne we have learned to possess'.⁴⁶⁹ However, Hawthorne's contradictions had always, in the end, been sublimated, as by Stewart and Wagenknecht (see Chapter 3.6), whereas for Crews those contradictions are the point of his investigation.

Crews's book testifies to the comparatively late arrival of Freudian psychoanalysis in relation to Hawthorne, but after it a preoccupation with Hawthorne's unconscious as manifested in his literary works became, if not inescapable, then increasingly common. At the time he was writing *The Sins of the Fathers*, Crews was a proponent of the use of Freudian psychoanalysis for the explication of literary texts, and thus what he uncovers in Hawthorne's fictions are Freudian tropes: the Oedipus complex, a fearful obsession with incest, the return of the repressed, and so forth. Crews's book is a critical study and not at all a biographical one; while he does make statements about Hawthorne's mental makeup, he derives his insights almost solely from the writings, and only the fictional writings at that.

One of the most pervasive themes Crews detects in Hawthorne's fictions is that of the Oedipus complex, composed of filial resentment, patricidal urges, incestuous feelings towards mother and/or sister, and unconscious guilt. Crews's reading of Hawthorne's story 'Roger Malvin's Burial' is typical in this regard. The story begins in the aftermath of a battle with Indians. Perceiving that they cannot both make it back to civilization, Roger Malvin persuades his younger companion Reuben Bourne, the fiancé of his daughter Dorcas, to leave him to die in the wilderness. He obtains from Reuben the promise that the younger man will return, when he has recovered from his own wounds, to bury his body. On returning home, Reuben finds himself unable to admit to

after his death reveals that not only Sophia herself, but 'the whole culture in which ...[the Hawthornes] moved' had 'a dirty mind'.

⁴⁶⁹ Lionel Trilling, 'Hawthorne in Our Time' in *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1967), pp. 159-182 (p. 163).

Dorcas that he has left her father to die, and is therefore unable to fulfill his promise. Crews notes the strong paternal/filial dynamic in the two men's relationship and suggests that, in accepting the old man's sacrifice, Reuben satisfies an unconscious Oedipal urge. According to Crews, Reuben, as the 'son' in this constellation,

feels murderous impulses toward the 'father' simply because he *is* the father, i.e. the sexual rival. It is questionable whether Hawthorne's thinking has gone quite this far. Yet it remains true that Reuben, in leaving Roger to die, will get to have Dorcas's affections all to himself, and we cannot say that such a consideration is not among the 'many another motive' for his departure (pp. 86-87).

Crews work is perilously thin on biographical detail. Even when, at the beginning of his thirteenth chapter, he announces that it 'is time to spell out the biographical implications of Hawthorne's art' he merely goes on to mention the father's early death; Hawthorne's 'peculiar and probably psychosomatic lameness'; 'his intense dislike of his maternal uncle [Robert Manning], on whom he was financially dependent'; 'his early resort to secrecy, and notably secrecy about his writing'; and finally Hawthorne's 'evident terror of female sexuality' as evidenced by 'the circumstances of [his] marriage', 'a terror that psychoanalysis traces to thoughts of incest'.⁴⁷⁰ Crews accounts for the predominance of the Oedipal theme in Hawthorne's psychological makeup, as he perceives it, by reference to the father's early death, when Nathaniel was four. '[T]hough I have no desire to rewrite Hawthorne's biography', he says,

I would remind future biographers of certain circumstances in his life that match the conclusions we have drawn from his art. Psychoanalysis invariably shows that an obsession with incest and its prevention, and indeed a general concern with sin and guilt such as Hawthorne displays, stem from an incomplete resolution of early Oedipal feelings. This failure of development, furthermore, is commonest in men who, like Hawthorne and Melville, lose their fathers at a young age and are raised by 'well-bred' women. Unresolved fantasies of filial hatred, and of punishment for that hatred, thrive in isolation from the real parent, and the very death of that parent becomes a matter of personal guilt. Can anyone doubt that Hawthorne's fiction provides an inadvertent record of precisely that guilt? (p. 241)

Crews's allusions to facts of Hawthorne's life – in this instance the death of his sea-captain father whom he had barely known – never go beyond what might have been picked up from an entry in a biographical dictionary, always already translated

⁴⁷⁰ Crews, *Sins*, pp. 240-241.

simplistically into Freudian terms and made to fit dogmatic conclusions. Crews is fully aware of his non-attention to biographical detail; he states that biography is simply not what his project is about. Quite apart from the poverty of such a dogmatically Freudian reading, what clearly emerges from an examination of Crews's study is the lack of a grounding of his statements in biographical fact as a deficit. One comes away with the sense that, while Hawthorne poses more of an actual problem than Stewart and Hoeltje – the biographers whom Crews chides for rendering Hawthorne inane – had perceived, Crews's approach is highly unsatisfactory precisely because of the absence of biographical corroboration for his statements about Hawthorne's obsessions and fears. In that sense Crews also perpetuates the disjunction of 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' approaches to literary texts, which had been practiced by the biographers and critics he criticizes, and maintains the separation of Hawthorne's fictional from his non-fictional writings.

Crews's genuine importance lies not so much in the value of his discoveries, although he does break open the by then entrenched convention of the 'normal' and serene Hawthorne, but in the obvious gaps he leaves. Nina Baym notes, explaining the genesis of her book *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (1976): 'Although I did not, and do not, accept most of... [Crews's] analysis, I was encouraged by his first chapter – a declaration of independence from then-standard readings of Hawthorne – to embark on the task of making sense of Hawthorne for myself'.⁴⁷¹ She thus characterizes Crews as someone who had helped shatter an approach that had become fossilized, much as Robert Spiller had praised the 'de-bunking' biographies of the 1920s for demolishing 'stereotypes' and giving 'conscientious' literary history a new inroad (see Chapter 2.1).⁴⁷² His omissions open up spaces that future biographers have been able to colonize.

In 1989 Crews wrote an afterword for a new edition of *Sins*, in which he completely retracts his former Freudian approach. Ruefully, he admits:

To acknowledge, as I did, that Freud and Hawthorne were both Romantic thinkers offered me a chance to shift the issue of their kinship away from the realm of scientific truth and into that of cultural history. And when I remarked that Hawthorne's ancestral legacy and childhood situation gave him ample grounds for brooding about incest, here again I faced – but passed up – an opportunity to

⁴⁷¹ Nina Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 9-10.

⁴⁷² Robert E. Spiller, *The Oblique Light: Studies in Literary History and Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. viii.

pursue determinate biographical considerations as opposed to dogmatizing about the universal Oedipus complex (p. 277).

He strongly endorses Erlich and Herbert, who had by this time published some of his research in the form of journal articles, for pursuing precisely those 'determinate biographical considerations' he realizes he has neglected. However, Crews's contriteness is also a reassertion of power: his retraction was part of an ongoing controversy between himself and a group of critics he called 'New Americanists' (see Chapter 4.3 below). His afterword constitutes a deliberate intervention; Crews seeks to influence which practices will be considered legitimate in American literary studies, condemning some approaches (for example Jane Tompkins's investigation into the historical determination of Hawthorne's reputation), while embracing those which appear most like continuations of his own project of identifying 'Hawthorne's psychological themes'.⁴⁷³ In the process, he suggests how an investigation of these themes should be properly done, in fact, how Hawthorne biography ought to be properly practiced:

A full accounting of 'Hawthorne's psychological themes,' then, would not confine itself to the intrapsychic realm from which psychoanalysis so rarely ventures forth. An author's psychology takes coloration from every element in his background, genetic endowment, upbringing, and milieu, and it leaves its signature not just on plots and images but on everything he does. If I could rewrite my book today I would follow the lead of certain critics who, mindful of my own early probings but going well beyond them, have been revealing the subtle interconnectedness between Hawthorne's precarious social status, his politics of anti-fanaticism, his conduct as a husband and father, and the anxieties about manhood that do indeed shine through his prose (pp. 282-283).

The critics he explicitly mentions in this context are David Leverenz and Walter Herbert, having previously described the results of Gloria Erlich's research as 'fruitful' (p. 277) and also recommended David Reynolds's *Beneath the American Renaissance* (p. 281). Crews credits himself as the begetter of their approaches: 'It is as an episode in the education of such critics, I would say, that *The Sins of the Fathers* now chiefly survives' (p. 283).

⁴⁷³ Jane Tompkins, 'Masterpiece Theatre: The Politics of Hawthorne's Literary reputation' in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 3-39 (see my Introduction).

4.3 'Culture Wars', 'Cultural Biography'

A perceived threat to the humanities, over the last three decades, has been the conflict between traditionalists and multiculturalists about how the theory and practice of American literary studies and teaching should be defined. One skirmish of these so-called 'culture wars' was the exchange between Frederick Crews, who we have encountered shattering previously entrenched approaches to Hawthorne in 1966, and Donald Pease, one of the most vigorous proponents of the New Historicism in an American literary context. Crews had coined the phrase 'New Americanists' in 1988 in a review of a number of books which discussed American literature from overtly political positions, including Russell Reising's *The Unusable Past* and Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Design*, or which had set out to open up the canon, like David S. Reynolds's *Beneath the American Renaissance*.⁴⁷⁴ According to Pease, Crews had criticized the New Americanists for 'return[ing] ideology to a field previously organized by an end to ideology consensus', by use of which phrase Pease is purposely recalling the political and intellectual climate of the post-war era. Further, Pease declares, Crews had drawn on Lionel Trilling's critique of Parrington's ideological position in the first part of the essay 'Reality in America' to give historical weight to his own claim that literature should be the domain of culture and not of politics.⁴⁷⁵ Pease rejects the F. O. Matthiessen who had written *American Renaissance*, the 'established mastertext in American Studies', but claims as a proto-New Americanist the Matthiessen who was '[p]re-eminent among those [critics] who recovered after the war their engagement with political questions' by writing a biography of Theodore Dreiser (pp. 2, 6). Lionel Trilling's foil in the second part of 'Reality in America' had been Dreiser, and implicitly Matthiessen, whose support of Dreiser he criticized (see Chapter 3.5). Pease suggests that Crews 'fails to acknowledge New Americanists as members of his field because they insist on literature as an agency within the political world and thereby violate the fundamental presupposition of the liberal imagination' (p. 16) – Pease of course uses the term

⁴⁷⁴ Frederick Crews, 'Whose American Renaissance?', *New York Review of Books* 35.16 (27 October 1988), 68-69.

⁴⁷⁵ Donald Pease, 'New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon' in *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*, ed. by Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 1-37 (p. 2).

‘liberal’ as an indictment, to mean not sufficiently radical (see Chapter 1.1). According to Pease, these ‘New Americanists’ are responsible for ‘returning a historical context to American Studies’ and developing ‘a subfield within American Studies called New Historicism’:

The New Historicism constructs for New Americanists an ideological agency which returns questions of class, race, and gender from the political unconscious of American Studies. That agency depends for its effectiveness upon the skill in close reading developed by the previous generation of Americanists: their new critical ability to convert even the most incoherent texts into an apparent unity. Such New Historicists can turn the raw materials of history (chronicles, unofficial memoirs, fashions, economic statistics, anecdotes) into objects of New Americanists’ attention by reconstructing these texts’ relations with canonical works (ibid.).

For Pease, the main point of New Historicist practice is that it is political, and Gregory Jay equally stresses the political nature of the New Historicist program. ‘If the point of new historical criticism is not simply to describe the past, but to change it (and so the present and the future, too), then we are likely to focus on authors and texts that undertook similar missions,’ he suggests, explaining Frederick Douglass’s ‘new status as a canonical figure’ as a result of the new historicist intervention.⁴⁷⁶ Importantly, both Pease and Jay, echoing Brooks’s call for a ‘usable past’, agree that the central aim of a historicized engagement with past literature should be to change the present and the future, and that this should be done by looking at this material in new and different ways. This is in stark contrast to Randall Stewart, who had written (as cited in Chapter 3.4 above) that the ‘business of writers... is not to change the world, but to describe the human condition, to anatomize the human heart, to contemplate our common imperfections’.⁴⁷⁷ This cognizance of ‘our *common* imperfections’ had been meant to serve the creation of a consensus based on the recognition of our shared humanity. Proponents of the politicization of literary studies argue that such an imaginary consensus ignores or condones the marginalization of blacks, women or other groups. They believe that addressing difference through teaching and research informed by race,

⁴⁷⁶ Gregory S. Jay, *America the Scrivener: Deconstruction and the Subject of Literary History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 238.

⁴⁷⁷ Stewart, ‘Hawthorne and Faulkner’ in *Regionalism and Beyond: Essays of Randall Stewart*, edited by George Core (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), pp. 126-135 (p. 135).

class and gender perspectives and associated literary theories can render university education more democratic. Academic traditionalists of the 80s and 90s, by contrast, worried about the fragmentation of the academy into 'special interest groups' (see chapter 1.7).

In an article on 'New Historicisms', published the year before the appearance of Herbert's *Dearest Beloved*, Louis Montrose comments on the 'now-conventional representation' of New Historicism 'within critical discourse as a fixed and homogeneous body of doctrines and techniques'; such homogeneity he considers to be the 'invention of its critics and commentators', cultivated by both groups for their specific purposes.⁴⁷⁸ Montrose stresses that New Historicism is by no means monolithic, having shifting borders with cultural materialism, Feminism, and revisionist Marxist approaches. Nor, as Brook Thomas points out, was New Historicism the only historicizing movement in American literary studies during the nineteen-eighties. He draws attention to the continuities between these different historicisms in terms echoing those of Van Wyck Brooks:

As the debate over the canon, the numerous efforts to reconstruct American literature, and the completed and proposed Columbia and Cambridge literary histories demonstrate, there is a concerted effort to make American representations of its literary past more usable to... [the United States'] present population.⁴⁷⁹

One of the central figures in 1980s new, historicist, American literary scholarship has been David Reynolds. He was, as we have seen, claimed by Donald Pease as a 'New Historicist' and accused by Crews of being a 'New Americanist', but he himself expressed concern about academic relativism in American literary studies and has been critical, as we will see, of New Historicist theory and practice. In his seminal study *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988), Reynolds formulates a critical method which he calls 'reconstructive criticism' as an antidote to perceived relativism; he defines this approach as one which:

⁴⁷⁸ Louis Montrose, 'New Historicisms' in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), pp. 392-418 (p. 392).

⁴⁷⁹ Brook Thomas, 'The New Historicism and Other Old-fashioned Topics' in *The New Historicism*, ed. by H. Aram Veeseer (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 182-203 (p. 183).

calls upon the historical critic to reconstruct as completely as possible the socioliterary milieu of literary works through the exploration of a broad array of forgotten social and imaginative texts, paving the way for responsible reinterpretations of canonized works and making possible the rediscovery of lost literature. Ideally, the reconstructive critic would read *all* extant published writings of a given period with the aim of gaining a comprehensive, scientific overview.⁴⁸⁰

Reynolds's use of terms like 'responsible', and even 'scientific', demonstrate an anxiety on his part to restore respectability to academic criticism. Unlike Tompkins, who had argued that Hawthorne's literary fame was historically determined and that his works were not necessarily superior to those of his contemporaries, Reynolds seeks to affirm the status of the artwork as opposed to other, popular, forms of writing.⁴⁸¹ Accordingly, an important feature of 'reconstructive criticism' is its application to the artwork itself; it 'views the literary work as simultaneously self-sufficient *and* historically shaped by environmental factors in society and personal life'; this self-sufficiency is characterized by 'a full assimilation and willed transformation' of 'socioliterary forces' (p. 561).

Reynolds applies this method in his *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (1995). His motivation for writing a Whitman biography, despite the existing profusion, is that 'the interaction between [Whitman's] life and writings and their historical background has been reported only fragmentarily', an omission which he sets out to rectify: 'The current book tries to overcome piecemeal approaches to literary history by reconstructing the life and times of America's most representative poet'.⁴⁸² The task of the reconstructive critic is to observe, but not to judge:

In reconstructing Whitman's life and times I have found much to admire as well as certain attitudes that are repellent. Such attitudes are not defensible, but they are historically explainable. In all matters, I have tried to adhere to the historical record instead of imposing today's views on the past (p. xii).

Having produced a biography, Reynolds makes one of the most explicit claims for the cultural potential of the genre. In an article titled 'The Humanities Crisis: Biography to the Rescue' he declares that in writing his (programmatically titled) Whitman biography he arrived at the conclusion that 'the theory and practice of

⁴⁸⁰ David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 561.

⁴⁸¹ Tompkins, 'Masterpiece Theatre'.

⁴⁸² David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, p. xi.

biography could do much toward resolving some of the problems in the humanities today'. He observes a 'marked shift toward the historical' in many contemporary biographies, which are 'so far richer in contextual detail than former biographies' that they almost constitute a 'new genre', which, he suggests, might be called 'cultural biography'.⁴⁸³ This new genre, he proposes,

builds upon historical evidence instead of dismissing it altogether, as did the New Critics, or minimizing it, as do some current commentators. Moreover, cultural biography offers a means of bridging humanities fields that were once distant from each other, such as biography, criticism, and history.

Reynolds has not, of course, invented this term. The year before his own Whitman book appeared, Carolyn Karcher's *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* was published and Peter Conn's *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* came out in 1996, a year after Reynolds's own Whitman book; the phrase 'cultural biography' has also been appearing increasingly in book reviews. Originally, however, the term 'cultural biography' relates to geographical and material culture studies, often applied to things or places rather than people. Thus, the appropriation of the term might be a maneuver intended to claim for biographical writings the intellectual vitality of such fields as archaeology or anthropology.

Reynolds contends that the humanities are not just 'under siege' from outside threats. He argues that structures are in place by which they in fact sabotage themselves. Worst of all, the humanities 'have come to seem insular, cut off from the everyday concerns of most readers'. He assesses the task facing university departments thus:

Although we've made strides in the past decade towards crossing boundaries between academic disciplines, we now face the even greater challenge of saving the humanities by crossing the boundary between ourselves and the outside world, ...which provides the funding for the projects, jobs, and library collections we cherish.

One of the strengths of cultural biographies, according to Reynolds, is their 'accessible language', which, he argues, should replace the 'turgid jargon' frequently used by academics to impress their peers. He suggests that, '[w]ere the biographer's style to be generally adopted throughout the profession, humanities scholars might

⁴⁸³ David S. Reynolds, 'The Humanities Crisis: Biography to the Rescue',

regain something they are losing at an alarming rate: readers'. He points out that '[w]riters of cultural biography have had success in gaining readers', and cites the success of his own Whitman book, which has 'managed to appeal not only to readers in... [his] own field, American literature, but to historians and general readers as well', as an encouraging example. The possibilities of applying the scholarly rigor and the 'accessible language' of cultural biography to other humanities disciplines are almost endless, he suggests:

Humanities scholars who want to rebuild the crumbling bridge to the public would do well to follow the lead of cultural biographers. If they are interested in anecdotes that illuminate the past, let them tell these anecdotes with the biographer's narrative flair. If they want to give quantitative data to illuminate history, let them enliven this data with real-life examples. If they want to discuss theory, let them dispense with jargon and espouse the biographer's directness and specificity. If race, class, and gender are their chosen focus, let them aim toward historical objectivity in discussing these themes, instead of idiosyncratically imposing today's views on the past. In all areas of the humanities, let scholars substantiate their findings with solid evidence presented so clearly that the average reader can make sense of it (all quotations *ibid.*).

Thus, according to Reynolds, cultural biography is a redemptive genre, with the power to save the academy from both itself and its detractors.

4.4 Family, Hawthorne's 'Secrets' and the Proliferation of Hawthorne Biography in the Early 1980s

In *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (1989), Leverenz identifies psychoanalysis and historicism as the then dominant, and radically opposed, approaches to Hawthorne, 'with the now nearly silenced majority of Christian moralists holding to the hapless middle'.⁴⁸⁴ It seems to me that in fact Hawthorne biographies in the 1980s inhabit a continuum between these two poles. Their place in this continuum often seems to correlate with their chosen subject matter – family life, secrets, Hawthorne's masculinity, his status as a man in the world, and his relationship with his environment.

http://thehamptons.com/words/reynolds/humanities_crisis.html .

⁴⁸⁴ Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 232.

These issues have tended to encourage wider research, exploring questions of historical context and the possibilities offered by different classes of document.

In the 1980s, the structure of the family and the relations therein became an important theme in Hawthorne biography. Hawthorne's comparative domesticity had always been recognized; there was nothing new in Brodhead's characterization of Hawthorne as 'in fact the most perfectly domestic of all American writers, the one most devoted to the family as the scene of fulfilling relation'.⁴⁸⁵ However, in the biographies published after Julian's and Rose's accounts, which had emphasized their mother's equal importance, Hawthorne's domestic situation had tended to be taken for granted as the backdrop for his more important identity as a genius and man in the world. Meanwhile, social and political developments during the 60s and 70s (corresponding with a lull in Hawthorne biography) radically challenged and partially transformed the idea of the family. During the early 1970s, the women's movement had won what appeared to be decisive victories. In 1972 Congress sent the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the states for ratification; its proposed first section read: 'Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex'.⁴⁸⁶ In 1973, in the case of *Roe vs. Wade*, the Supreme Court 'struck down... state laws prohibiting abortion during the first three months of pregnancy and set up guidelines for abortion during the remaining six months', effectively legalizing abortion in all states (p. 466). However, 1980, the year of Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency, marked the end of a decade that had promised more changes for women than ultimately materialized. A major strand of the new conservatism under Reagan was the concern about the perceived deterioration of traditional family values. The proportion of two-parent households had declined since the late 1960s, as divorce, teenage pregnancy, and single-parenthood as a lifestyle choice became increasingly common. There was a backlash against feminism on the part of the new right, especially in areas where the aims of the women's movement appeared to threaten the notion of the traditional American family, in particular equal opportunities and legal rights, and

⁴⁸⁵ Brodhead, *School*, p. 48.

⁴⁸⁶ See Stanley and Eleanor Hochman, *The Penguin Dictionary of Contemporary American History, 1945 to the Present* (3rd edition, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p. 170.

legalized abortion. The ERA failed to be ratified in 1982, after a three-year extension, with many states still short of adoption; at the same time, 'publicly financed abortions were effectively curtailed by a series of congressional actions... and subsequent Supreme Court decisions' while a strong political 'pro-life' and 'pro-family' lobby has been attempting to have abortion outlawed ever since.⁴⁸⁷ Pamela Conover and Virginia Gray explain why this backlash against the women's movement took place:

The demands of feminists raise profound doubts, doubts which the demands of blacks and other minorities do not raise. Feminist demands are not just demands for civil rights, control over their bodies, and equal opportunity. They are simultaneously demands for a new conception of the family – namely that women be viewed as individuals – and a rethinking on the basis of law, philosophy and society (pp. 3-4).

American men had always been defined as individuals, whereas women tended to be defined in relation to their biological function and their role in the family. With their demands for equal legal status and control over their own bodies and the size of their families, women were in fact striving to be recognized as individuals, which ostensibly set them at odds with the family. However, as Walter Herbert suggests, the women's movement had personal outcomes for women that to some extent outstripped the legal ones:

In the feminist consciousness-raising of the sixties women sought freedom from ingrained habits of subservience that they had come to feel were natural and right. Women freed themselves from themselves: they set their personal stories in an historical context and learned to understand spontaneous impulses as the outcome of social arrangements.⁴⁸⁸

This work towards the recognition of women as individuals, and women's return to vocational work after the predominantly domestic interlude of the post-war era has had important implications for biography. Women as biographical subjects became 'usable' by women (note the many Dickinson biographies by female scholars in the 80s (see Appendix B.3.6)), as Herbert's formulation indicates; there has also been an increased interest in the roles women played within past domestic arrangements, as wives and

⁴⁸⁷ See Pamela Johnston Conover and Virginia Gray, *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict over the American Family* (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 1.

⁴⁸⁸ T. Walter Herbert, *Sexual Violence and American Manhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 3.

mothers. There was now a real interest in Sophia Hawthorne's emotional life, which displaced the tendency to treat her as a cipher or a scapegoat in her husband's story, as previous biographies had done.

The family was now recognized as central to Hawthorne's life and art, a shift which took place against the background of an 'explosion of family history' during the 1970s, a trend that developed further during the 1980s but petered out in the 90s.⁴⁸⁹ The emphasis in the majority of the biographical accounts of Hawthorne during the 1980s and early 90s is on family relationships: the role of the Mannings in Mellow's and Erlich's books, Baym's reinvestigation of the reputation of Hawthorne's mother, Young's somewhat preposterous speculation about Nathaniel's relationship with his sister Elizabeth. Hull, who does not specifically examine Hawthorne and his works in relation to his family life, had nevertheless suggested: 'When any family is as close as the Hawthornes were, it is impossible to speak of one without involving the rest, unless the biographer is attempting only the literary career of the artist. Even then he must consider the life of the man as well as that of the artist'.⁴⁹⁰ And Edwin Miller remarks in his preface: 'Donald Hall sums up my purpose perfectly: "Domesticity precedes ideology, for all men and women. The feelings between parents and children, siblings, men and women as lovers or as spouses – these relationships penetrate the life of genius as much as they penetrate the lives of the rest of humanity"'.⁴⁹¹

At the same time, there was an amplification of interest in uncovering secrets in Hawthorne's life, a tendency that is closely intertwined with the family theme, but also, more directly, with questions of his masculinity/manhood. Mellow's book opens with a passage from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*: 'Every dream has at least one point at which it is unfathomable; a central point, as it were, connecting it with the

⁴⁸⁹ Mary P. Ryan, 'The Explosion of Family History', *Reviews in American History*, 10 (1982), 181-195; Stephen Lasseonde, 'Family and Demography in Postwar America: A Hazard of New Fortunes?' in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, edited by Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 3-19 (pp. 16-17).

⁴⁹⁰ Raymona Hull, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience, 1853-1864* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), p. xii.

⁴⁹¹ Miller, *Salem*, pp. xvi-xvii; quoted from Donald Hall, *Remembering Poets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 102.

unknown'.⁴⁹² He closes his account of Hawthorne's life with an epilogue in which he relates how the aged Melville told Hawthorne's son Julian 'that he was convinced Hawthorne had all his life concealed some great secret, which would, were it known, explain all the mysteries of his career' (p. 589). Julian himself had discounted the possibility, but Mellow judges that, sharing with his mother 'that burden of absolute devotion to the memory of his father, [Julian] could hardly acknowledge that Melville might have been right' (p. 589). Mellow evidently believes that there was such a secret, but he relegates his conjecture as to its nature to a footnote. Here, he suggests that '[e]very student of Hawthorne... comes to feel that some fateful experience, either in his youth or perhaps earlier in childhood, opened up for him a deep sense of the sinfulness of human nature'; his own theory is, and he admits that it is a 'purely speculative bit of psychohistory', that 'Robert Manning figures in some way in Hawthorne's crucial experience'. Mellow argues that Hawthorne's animosity towards his uncle found 'probably unconscious' expression in his fictions, where he created villains who 'have distinct horticultural associations – as did his Uncle Robert', who was an eminent pomologist – he mentions Doctor Rappaccini, Roger Chillingworth, and Judge Pyncheon in *The House of the Seven Gables*, who 'has extensive orchards, imports rare varieties of fruit trees, and has bred "two much esteemed varieties of the pear"'. If '[p]ressed to explain the nature of Hawthorne's critical experience', Mellow says, he

would suggest that he may have been subjected to some homosexual assault or seduction, perhaps by his Uncle Robert, during the period when the two were sleeping together. But that, too, is speculation, based on the fact that Hawthorne's theology seemed always to be in search of and hinting at an 'unpardonable sin' that he could not precisely name; that he would speak of secret sins that would 'look monstrous in the general eye'; and that he was the creator of fictional scientists who, in one way or another, are intent on overthrowing the established laws of nature. My feeling is that Hawthorne's ambivalent attitude toward a possible homosexual complication in his youth also accounts for both the responsiveness and the aloofness of his later relationship with Herman Melville.⁴⁹³

Erlich responds directly to this suggestion, but shifts the focus to the question of Hawthorne's 'manhood'. She argues that it is unlikely that an overt act ever happened,

⁴⁹² James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. vii.

⁴⁹³ All quotations from Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, pp. 610-611.

but that the relationship between uncle and nephew, who shared a bed over a period of several years, 'was almost certainly tinged with enough eros to encourage a passively feminine identification in Nathaniel'.⁴⁹⁴ Uncle Robert had separated the young Hawthorne from his mother and sisters, who were living in Raymond, Maine, to 'make a man' of him, but 'his powerful, decisive personality fostered instead self-distrust, dependency, and passivity' (ibid.). As a result of this early dependency, Erlich argues, Hawthorne developed lifelong ambivalent relationships with avuncular figures, including male friends, such as William Ticknor and James T. Fields. Erlich pursues this theme into Hawthorne's fiction, where, she claims, Uncle Robert is transformed from an uncle into an 'avuncular figure' as a recurrent literary trope. She refers back to Crews's interpretation of 'Roger Malvin's Burial' (see above), demonstrating that, if one reinterprets Malvin (who shares Robert Manning's initials) as a father-surrogate, then explanation in terms of Hawthorne's psychology becomes much more straightforward.

Erlich acknowledges that, just as she herself had independently noticed, 'Mellow uses... evidence..., including Hawthorne's frequent linking of pear trees (Uncle Robert's favorite) to heavy villains reminiscent of this uncle', but she criticizes Mellow's perceived failure to 'build on these insights or integrate them into a theory of life and literature' (p. 191-2 n.10). Erlich's own 'theory of life and literature' draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory, which, as she notes, Mellow had 'eschewed' (ibid.), but her favored approach is not Freudianism, but Erik Erikson's theories on the human life-cycle. Erlich explains in the preface to her book that it

is not a literary biography or a psychobiography or a work of literary criticism, although it has elements of all three. Perhaps we should call it a thematic study of the continuities between Hawthorne's life and his art, the psychological and experiential sources of his fiction. The material flows freely between the biographical and the fictional poles, moved less by chronological sequence than by the movement from lived experience to imaginative expression.⁴⁹⁵

She highlights that her study is thematic and non-chronological, as only Wagenknecht's exploration of Hawthorne's life had been before, and calls Turner's and Mellow's books 'orderly', which is unlikely to be meant as a compliment (ibid.).

⁴⁹⁴ Gloria C. Erlich, *Family Themes and Hawthorne's Fiction: The Tenacious Web* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), p. 118.

I have already discussed Philip Young's take on 'Hawthorne's secret' (see Introduction). Another Hawthorne biographer who detects, in Hawthorne, a degree of elusiveness is Edwin Miller. He tells us that, in his life of Hawthorne, he 'seek[s] to lift the veils with which Hawthorne guarded self and art but only partly succeeded... and to delineate the external and inner life of a man who hid himself in his fiction and was known to leave by the back door when someone stood waiting at the front door'.⁴⁹⁶ Although not all of these biographers have chosen to use psychoanalysis, they were often broadly sympathetic to an approach which, setting out to probe the unconscious, seemed especially appropriate in uncovering Hawthorne's secrets. Erlich posits a similarity between literature and the human mind; she suggests that the '[i]nterpretation of marginal clues is common both to literary analysis and to psychoanalysis' and that 'Hawthornian truth, like psychoanalytic truth, arrives indirectly, by inference from traits, from hints, from tracks both deliberate and unintentional'.⁴⁹⁷

A further development in Hawthorne biography at this time is indicated by the fact that we find, in most of these books, much more explanation on the part of the biographers about their motives; many feature an expanded apparatus: acknowledgments which become more personal, allowing us a glimpse of the biographer's personal relationships; prefaces; afterwords; author's notes, etc. However, there is something more at stake than merely the egocentricity of the 'burned-out biographer', who really just wants to write about her- or himself.⁴⁹⁸ As Aram Veesser points out, New Historicist practice is often characterised by the free acknowledgement of the autobiographical impulse. In his introduction to the reader *The New Historicism*, he quotes the opening

⁴⁹⁵ Erlich, *Family Themes*, p. xiii.

⁴⁹⁶ Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (London: Duckworth, 1991), pp. xiv-xv.

⁴⁹⁷ Gloria C. Erlich, 'Interpreting Hawthorne: Subjectivity in Biography', *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 12.2 (Spring 1989), 127-141 (pp. 137, 136-137).

⁴⁹⁸ 'I am sorry to say that I want to write about myself. That is the mark of the burned-out biographer. The burned-out biographer is no longer willing to suppress herself in the service of another. She no longer wants to express indirectly in terms of the narrative of another's life the burning issues of her own. That interrogation by the self of another which animates a good biography no longer works. The self wants center stage, the whole enchilada'; Rose also affirms that her book *Parallel Lives* (1983), about the marriages of five Victorian writers, actually served her as a vehicle to tell 'the story of my own marriage and divorce' (Phyllis Rose, 'Confessions of a Burned-out Biographer' in *The Seductions of Biography* ed. by Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 131-136 (pp. 131, 133)). For an

sentence of Stephen Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* – 'I began with the desire to speak with the dead' – and declares:

Personal, even autobiographical, the sentence challenges the norm of disembodied objectivity to which humanists have increasingly aspired. Far from invisible, this writer's desires and interests openly preside: the investigative project proceeds from an unabashed passion.⁴⁹⁹

Catherine Parke praises a similarly impassioned engagement in feminist biography, which 'actively acknowledges, embraces, and often celebrates the subjectivity of biography, arguing that subjectivity is a liability only when it remains unacknowledged or unconscious' (cf. Chapter 1.7).⁵⁰⁰ This practice of the acknowledgement of motive is intended to clarify the relation of the critic/biographer to his or her subject, lay open the workings of the investigation by giving the reader a chance to estimate the 'meta'-text in relation to the sources, and evaluate the status of the information we are given. Erlich, for example, admits in *Family Themes*: 'There is speculation here, but informed speculation, which readers can easily separate from fact and weigh for themselves, testing it for coherence and explanatory value'.⁵⁰¹ Like Reynolds, she stresses the indispensability of 'historical responsibility' and the need to respect the specificity of the texts that are her sources: 'Each kind of text must be read according to its genre, being careful to remember that notebooks, family letters, love letters, and worldly correspondence must be read according to different conventions before one juxtaposes them with literary texts'.⁵⁰²

However, she also acknowledges that her own personality and interests have shaped her engagement with Hawthorne. 'Like most biographers', she notes, 'I used myself as a lens through which to read the life of another, and found that life interpretation has much to do with the shape of the lens – the contents of our own minds and hearts at a given time' (p. 135). She describes the process by which her own biographical engagement with Hawthorne took shape as 'a changing stream of input

exploration of the culture of 'confessional criticism' cf. the essays in H. Aram Veeger (ed.), *Confessions of the Critics* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁴⁹⁹ Veeger, 'Introduction' in Veeger (ed.), *The New Historicism*, pp. ix-xvi (p. ix).

⁵⁰⁰ Catherine N. Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 94.

⁵⁰¹ Erlich, *Family Themes*, p. xiii.

⁵⁰² Erlich, 'Interpreting Hawthorne', p. 139.

from the surrounding culture' which fed into her 'attentive field':

Certain insights about Hawthorne derived from cultural circumstances, such as the burgeoning feminist movement, some from personal circumstances such as scanning the daily mass of my husband's psychiatric mail. Literature on the life cycle emerging during this period sharpened my sense of the function of work and love in identity formation. In a circular way, this emphasis brought me back to the work of Erik Erikson at just the time when I was most susceptible to such a coherent theory of the life trajectory (p. 136).

Erlich's acknowledgment of the personal nature of her own engagement with Hawthorne has wider implications. The particular interrelations her research into Hawthorne's life had with her own are individual, but it is her intention to highlight that such resonances take place in the work of all biographers, whether acknowledged or not. She suggests that the

indirect knowledge obtained by allowing rich texts to germinate in the material of one's own consciousness modifies that consciousness and stimulates some exchange between observer and observed. Of course one does not change the historical Hawthorne, but observation alters the significance of the surviving records (pp. 138-139).

4.5 *Dearest Beloved*: We 'Other Hawthornes'

Walter Herbert's *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-class Family* can be regarded as part of a tradition that goes back to Julian Hawthorne's *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*; it does not relegate Sophia to an ancillary position in the biography but places her at the center of the narrative, side by side with her husband whom Herbert calls 'Nathaniel' throughout, in order to affirm their equality.⁵⁰³ It also follows the lead of the 1980s biographies in its emphasis on the primacy of family relationships. It is not Herbert's central aim to make yet another contribution to our knowledge about Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary genius by investigating his marital life as the background for his art, although that is an important byproduct of his investigation. Instead, Herbert treats the Hawthorne family as an exemplar of 'the domestic ideal of family relations that became dominant in the early nineteenth century'.

⁵⁰³ Herbert, *Dearest Beloved*, pp. xiv-xv.

The marriage exemplified the 'entanglement of misery and beatitude... native to the domestic ideal'; it was simultaneously the 'union of perfect beings' and a 'battlefield of souls', which was 'marked at times with scenes of cruelty and agony' and which 'produced [in Una, Julian, and Rose] a madwoman, a criminal, and a saint' (p. xvi).⁵⁰⁴ By investigating this representative nineteenth-century marriage and the ways Hawthorne imaginatively transformed its joys and strains into literature, Herbert believes it is possible to shed light on our own experiences of family life. He declares: 'The dilemmas of middle-class family life have not died away since Hawthorne's time but have taken new forms in becoming more explicit, and we are ourselves shaped and anguished by them' (p. xx). The implication is clear: the marital, parental and filial experiences of the members of the nuclear Hawthorne family are relevant to present day Americans. But perhaps his claim is even wider; we may well be invited to read our own British, or German, or Japanese, or Indian experiences of the nuclear family in the light of those of the Hawthornes more than a century ago. We are the 'other Hawthornes', in the sense of Foucault's 'other Victorians' and of his project of 'writing the history of the present' while decidedly resisting 'writing a history of the past in terms of the present'.⁵⁰⁵

Herbert's reading of Hawthorne's texts in relation to his life differs significantly from the methods employed by Arvin and Stewart, who had each set aside a chapter of their biographies for an evaluation of Hawthorne's literary achievement. In the chapter titled 'The House of Pride', Arvin had concluded that whilst Hawthorne was not a great writer he was nevertheless an important one in that his failure, conditioned by the social and intellectual forces in his environment, rendered him a 'usable' figure whose fate shed light on present predicaments.⁵⁰⁶ By contrast, Stewart, in his final chapter, 'The Collected Works', had concluded that Hawthorne was indeed a great writer, because the moral stance inherent in his works provided 'an admonition and a gift which are

⁵⁰⁴ 'Union of perfect beings': Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, *Memories of Hawthorne* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), p. 305.

⁵⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, 'We "Other Victorians"' in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (translated by Robert Hurley, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 1-13; 'writing the history of the present': Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 30-31 (see the second motto at the head of this chapter).

⁵⁰⁶ Newton Arvin, *Hawthorne*, pp. 181-221.

timeless'.⁵⁰⁷ Like Arvin, Herbert believes that it is the task of biographical writing to change the future, and, like Stewart, he takes the quality of Hawthorne's writings as given. But in contrast to both of those earlier biographers he fuses his reading of Hawthorne's imaginative writings, and in particular his four finished romances, with his reading of the Hawthornes' personal documents, and related materials produced in the culture at large.

Dearest Beloved resolutely participates in the historicizing trend; it was published in the series *The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, the figurehead of the critical approach.⁵⁰⁸ Unlike Arvin, or Mellow (biographer of Hemingway, the Fitzgeralds, and Gertrude Stein), or Hawthorne's recent biographer Brenda Wineapple (biographer of Janet Flanner, and of Gertrude and Leo Stein), Walter Herbert is not a professional biographer. Nor is he a dedicated Hawthorne scholar like Randall Stewart, Arlin Turner or Margaret Moore, nor a researcher specializing in a period, like David Reynolds. Nor can he be categorized simply as a new historicist, in spite of *Dearest Beloved's* inclusion in Greenblatt's series. His brand of New Historicism is characterized chiefly by a commitment to feminism, which is marked by an interest in gender roles and in the formation of gender identity, and particularly in the construction of American 'manhood'. Herbert's interest is topical and political; his research on the Hawthorne family fed directly into his next project, a book titled *Sexual Violence and American Manhood* (2002), in which he affirms that it is possible to create 'new forms of democratic masculinity' which will 'promise a greater measure of truthfulness, justice, and love in relationships between women and men'.⁵⁰⁹ The same impulse towards creating a more democratic relationship between men and women drives *Dearest Beloved*.

Herbert describes his method, which is closely allied with Erlich's approach, as a 'mutual reading of biography and art' and notes that such a reading 'is not only a matter of locating revelatory incidents – a fictional circumstance that resonates with events in

⁵⁰⁷ Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 265.

⁵⁰⁸ The series title reflects both of Greenblatt's acts of nomenclature, the accidental 'New Historicism', and the more deliberately chosen but less successful 'Poetics of Culture'; see Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture' in H. Aram Veveser (ed.), *The New Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-14.

[the Hawthornes'] lives – but of tracing a complex frontier along which the contours of Hawthorne's life and writing shape each other' (p. xix). Like Erlich's book, his is not a full cradle-to-grave account; it covers all the biographical bases, but not necessarily in the customary order. Each of the four parts of *Dearest Beloved* is anchored to one of Hawthorne's romances. Part One diagnoses a crisis in Hawthorne's self-image and in his marital relations with Sophia, which Herbert pursues through the Hawthornes' biographical circumstances into the gender constructions of the four central characters in *The Blithedale Romance*. Part Two explores the emergence of the middle-class family in post-Revolutionary America as experienced by Nathaniel and Sophia from their childhoods to their betrothal, and the way this new model of family life is endorsed in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Part Three explores the Hawthornes' courtship and early marital life in relation to *The Scarlet Letter*, showing how their experiences of domesticity, sex, and parenthood become encoded in the character constellations in Hawthorne's romance: Herbert suggests that 'The "hell-fire" in which the book was written had cast its glow on the hearthside of [Hawthorne's] Salem household'.⁵¹⁰ The final part examines the period the Hawthornes spent in Rome, during which Una became ill with malaria; in particular, it explores the family's management of the crisis of her illness in the context of Roman life and culture. According to Herbert, Hawthorne subsequently worked through these events in the composition of *The Marble Faun*.

Part of the interest of Herbert's book is that he makes available genuinely new material. Raymona Hull had dealt with the Roman episode and Una's illness in greater detail than any previous biographer; because the Hawthornes' letters and journals yield relatively little information during the worst period of Una's illness, Hull had turned to letters penned by the family governess Ada Shepard at the time. Hull mines these for concrete detail concerning the Hawthornes' responses to the crisis. Herbert returns to this collection, bringing to bear a set of letters written by Shepard to her fiancé Clay Badger, in which she describes for him her sexually motivated persecution by the family's physician, Doctor Franco. For Hull, these letters have insufficient bearing on the Hawthornes themselves to merit inclusion in her biography. Herbert, however, takes

⁵⁰⁹ Herbert, *Sexual Violence*, p. 27.

⁵¹⁰ Herbert, *Dearest Beloved*, p. 170.

the position that Shepard's distress unfolds within the Hawthorne household and is inextricably bound up in its dynamics. He argues that 'Sophia was drawn to Franco as an intimate ally and companion' at the crisis of Una's illness, and even that she 'was stirred by him sexually and transferred to him the ardent hero worship her husband had earlier inspired' (p. 253) – feelings which remained unconscious even to herself (p. 255). However, Herbert supports these suggestions with often extensive quotations from letters and personal notebooks; while he has a knack for picking out phrases and amplifying their potential suggestiveness he also reproduces the original document, so that we retain our freedom to resist his interpretation and are able to test it against the original material – we do not have to take his conclusions as authority, as with Hubert Hoeltje's exclusive paraphrasing (see Chapter 3.6.).

The imaginative transformation by which the author's explorations and responses to personal experiences and cultural formations turn into characters, character constellations and fictional events, impacts on the readers of Hawthorne's fiction and elicits a complex and ultimately fertile response, Herbert suggests:

Where Hawthorne's writing strikes us with full immediacy, we vibrate like a champagne glass when a singing voice calls forth its inherent harmonies. We too have resonance frequencies, a pattern of inward tensions against which great writing rings true. Touched by this foreign music, we are delivered into an otherwise unobtainable experience of ourselves.⁵¹¹

When reading literary works we get the opportunity to experience 'ourselves' in ways which we would not otherwise be able to. Herbert's image suggests that art is capable of increasing our self-knowledge and thereby, ultimately, of changing us. It is important that Herbert calls these literary resonances a '*foreign music*': we must not forget, as L. P. Hartley pointed out, that we engage with the past always as tourists, not as natives.⁵¹² 'If we are to appreciate the enduring force of Hawthorne's art', Herbert states clearly, 'we must grasp its nineteenth-century origins, recognizing that the Hawthornes are denizens of their era, not ours, a family of psychosocial antiques'.⁵¹³ Similarly, Erlich

⁵¹¹ Herbert, *Dearest Beloved*, p. xx.

⁵¹² 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there' (L. P. Hartley, *The Go-between* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 7).

⁵¹³ Herbert, *Dearest Beloved*, p. xvii.

had characterized Hawthorne as a 'quite alien being' between whom and herself she had nevertheless discovered an 'unexpected congruence':

This congruence is not one of personal similitude, idealization, or hero worship, none of which I feel with respect to Hawthorne. Rather, it is a congruence of identity themes or general patterns of personal organization which, oddly enough, does not imply recognizably similar personalities. Identity themes, as characteristic ways of defending against certain kinds of experience and representing others, are patterns for processing experience.⁵¹⁴

The 'congruence' Erlich detects between herself and Hawthorne is not based on an identification between biographer and subject; correspondingly, our response to Hawthorne's fiction, as Herbert describes it, does not derive from identifications between reader and author, or reader and fictional character. The 'patterns' to which both Herbert and Erlich find themselves responding are deeply bound up with our own identity; both biographers suggest that recognizing such patterns in literature makes us better observers of ourselves.

These responses by Herbert and Erlich could hardly be more different from Randall Stewart's approach, which, besides celebrating Hawthorne's works as 'timeless', also glossed over the difference between his own and Hawthorne's historical circumstances, making his politics and outlook seem directly applicable to the present. Ronald Bosco's claims in relation to the relevance of Emerson biography duplicate this stance, although he acknowledges that every generation needs to rediscover its own 'transcendent' Emerson:

Because the greatest virtue of Emerson as a thinker and as a biographical subject is his ability to transcend time and place and speak directly to Americans in terms they can understand and judge the value of for themselves, Emerson needs to be discovered, thought about, and written about by every American generation, including our own. The day that any generation is content to accept the published record as the complete record of the essential Emerson, Emerson and that part of America he created will cease to exist.⁵¹⁵

It is in response to such notions of the permanence of literary value that Alan Sinfield has observed, in an essay titled 'Against Appropriation,' published in 1981: 'Many difficulties have been created by the traditional claim that literature is of direct

⁵¹⁴ Erlich, 'Interpreting Hawthorne', p. 129.

⁵¹⁵ Bosco, 'We Find', p. 287.

relevance to contemporary life'; in contrast, he argues that 'literature will serve us better if we allow it to challenge rather than confirm ourselves'.⁵¹⁶ Against the widely held Arnoldian view that 'literature is a supremely valuable repository of sensitive and profound interpretations of human experience and, consequently, that criticism involves the discovery of at least a broad correspondence between the values of the author and the reader', Sinfield stresses the radical difference between the literary text and its readers. 'The real significance of literature', he argues, 'resides precisely in its *otherness*. It has constituted the most sophisticated means by which societies have sought to interpret themselves and has a special capacity to draw us into their problems and solutions' (p. 182). This view of the 'special capacity' of literature is very similar to that put forward by Herbert in *Sexual Violence and American Manhood*. Herbert suggests that:

literature gives access to the textures of intimate experience. Nothing survives from the human past that registers more fully the psychological conflicts that haunted our forebears and the imaginative transactions by which they sought to make sense of their lives. Literature gives us more than theories about human experience; it gives us an intimation of experience itself, on terms that free us from practical responsibility. As readers we share in feelings vicariously, respond to circumstances for which we are not answerable, follow lines of reasoning for fun, and are thus freed to commune directly with the ordering of emotion, circumstance, and thought. When they attain significant cultural power, literary works engage the structural principles by which we make sense of our lives, including the principles that guide us, or misguide us, in living as women and men.⁵¹⁷

Sinfield reminds us that we need to attend to what he calls 'the gap between the text and ourselves'.⁵¹⁸ Taking the seventeenth-century poet George Herbert as an example, he suggests that we 'probably have enough in common with [him] to understand him, but not enough to make the difference inconsequential. ... We show Herbert more respect and gain a more genuine relevance for ourselves by comprehending as best we can his strangeness, and by disagreeing with him' (p. 188). As a result of such distancing, Sinfield argues, 'the literary work bounces us back into our own society: its very closures make us aware of its otherness and provoke thoughtful analysis'. It is 'only through a full realization of the world' of the literary text that we

⁵¹⁶ Alan Sinfield, 'Against Appropriation', *Essays in Criticism*, 31.3 (July 1981), 181-195 (p. 181).

⁵¹⁷ Herbert, *Sexual Violence*, p. 24.

can 'gain the alternative perspective which will place our own world in an unaccustomed light'. We are tourists in an alien literary landscape; when we return home, 'we become conscious of normally unexamined assumptions, more able to assess the constraints of our own ideology' (all quotations, p. 193). This is why

a prime function of critical discourse should be to resist and reduce appropriative tendencies in our reading. The fact that the enterprise can have no clear conclusions doesn't actually matter, for the goal is not historical objectivity but the alien perspective which will illuminate our own circumstances. We must reconstruct the ideological specificity of the text in its original context, with all the historical work involved, because otherwise we will slide back into the self-indulgence of finding what we want to find (p. 193).

'Respect for the otherness of the text,' Sinfield concludes 'is of a piece with respect for ourselves. Blurring the two together accords respect to neither, so that we learn nothing' (p. 195).

The learning experience from which we benefit by respecting the otherness of the text means that we ourselves are being changed in the process. Herbert documents the change he himself has experienced through his engagement with the Hawthorne family in the 'Acknowledgments' to *Dearest Beloved*, which conclude with this final paragraph:

My wife has been throughout an incomparable loving companion. While I've been working on this project, she has established a thriving solo law practice, specializing in family law, and has served as the president of the Williamson County Bar Association. We have seen our son and daughter through high school and college. How our lives are intertwined and touch upon the issues of this book would make another book, but not for me to write (pp. 286-287).

This is of course at once highly self-conscious and somewhat tongue-in-cheek: Herbert is making the point that *any* life deserves and indeed requires to be written and practically invites the reader to become the biographer of his family. Thus, another statement can be located in the one just quoted – and throughout Herbert's book – and it might look somewhat like this: The Hawthornes were a middle-class family. So is mine. But my wife has not had to sublimate her own ambitions and transfer them to me, as Sophia did. She is a successful professional. We have shared interests. We have things

⁵¹⁸ Sinfield, 'Against Appropriation', p. 192.

we can talk about beyond the domestic sphere (for example family law, the evolution of the middle-class family, etc.) and I value her professional opinion. Moreover, we have children too, but from the way I refer to them you can tell that they are reasonably sane and happy, that they are going to make their way in the world, and that they will never be immured by their parents' identities. In fact, it is through the book I've written, and of course from what my wife sees every day in her practice, that we have learned not to make the same mistakes as Nathaniel and Sophia.

This was my reading of Herbert's 'Acknowledgements' when I first read *Dearest Beloved* in 1997.⁵¹⁹ *Sexual Violence and American Manhood*, Herbert's following book, deploys autobiographical strategically in his prologue and epilogue to exemplify the cultural formations of gender, and especially American 'manhood', through Herbert's own experiences. At the end of this book, we find the following acknowledgement – the 'bed-and-board frontier' is where cultural influences crystallise into intra-relationship politics:

For my wife, Marjorie Millard Herbert, my gratitude can only be intimated. Thirty-eight years of exploration and discovery at the bed-and-board frontier, where we've sought an equal and loving marriage, have yielded intellectual and spiritual wealth that there is no earthly way to sum up. The book is dedicated to my daughter, now a woman grown, who began to reshape my thinking about gender the moment she was born.⁵²⁰

Responding to Herbert's implicit encouragement to read these autobiographical statements in context with his other writings, this last remark tells us that Herbert's infant daughter shaped his understanding of Hawthorne's responses to Una, including his transformation of her into Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*, and that, vice versa, Hawthorne's relationship to his daughter made Herbert aware of his own responses. This is how, for Herbert, art and biography allow us to understand cultural formations, alerting us to the complex patterns of our own relationship with the world.

Dearest Beloved has had a very mixed reception, being in equal measure praised and reviled. In a review for the annual *American Literary Scholarship* Leland Person calls

⁵¹⁹ Angela Groth, "'Members of the Family:': Author-subject Relations in Four Biographies of Nathaniel Hawthorne' (unpublished M. A. dissertation, University of Kent at Canterbury), 1997, p. 26.

Herbert's book 'one of the most extreme views of Hawthorne and the Hawthorne marriage that we are ever likely to see'; he judges that 'Herbert's psychological analyses throughout *Dearest Beloved* are rich, well-reasoned, and almost always keyed to textual evidence – and complex enough to provide fertile and contested ground for many future scholars to work'.⁵²¹ In the *Women's Review of Books*, a feminist publication, Joan Hedrick, who was then working on her important biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe (1994), praised *Dearest Beloved* as a 'stimulating and important book that helps us better understand the social construction of gender in nineteenth-century America'.⁵²² Significantly, Herbert is the only male critic/biographer mentioned by Louise DeSalvo in her listing of eleven practitioners of recent 'Hawthorne feminist criticism' – the other ten are women, including Nina Baym and Gloria Erlich.⁵²³

In contrast, Margaret Moore, the author of the first full-length Hawthorne biography following Herbert's book, never mentions him without emphasizing her complete disagreement. In her 'Introduction' to *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* she gives a brief overview of previous biographical accounts in relation to her own project:

it has seemed to me that the Salem world of Nathaniel Hawthorne has needed more study than is now available, although much has been done, particularly by some of the early biographers such as George P. Lathrop or later by Robert Cantwell and Hubert Hoeltje. Arlin Turner has contributed much to our understanding. James R. Mellow has put Hawthorne in a wider geographical context than have I. Gloria Erlich has filled in much useful material on the Manning family. I disagree with the interpretation of T. Walter Herbert in *Dearest Beloved*. Edwin Haviland Miller's book, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place*, is more about Hawthorne's inner psyche than the dwelling place.⁵²⁴

Her sentence about Herbert is startling in its abruptness; she gives no indication at this point which aspects of his interpretation she disagrees with. Where she references him

⁵²⁰ Herbert, *Sexual Violence*, p. 241.

⁵²¹ Person, Leland S., Jr., 'Hawthorne' in *American Literary Scholarship: An Annual 1993*, edited by Gary Scharnhorst (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 23-37 (pp. 23, 24).

⁵²² Joan D. Hedrick, 'Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-Class Family by T. Walter Herbert', *Women's Review of Books*, 10.12 (September 1993).

⁵²³ Louise DeSalvo, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Feminist Readings series, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), p. 25; DeSalvo's book was published in 1987 – she is referring to Herbert's articles in which he formulated his views on the Hawthorne family prior to the publication of *Dearest Beloved*.

⁵²⁴ Margaret B. Moore, *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 6.

elsewhere it rarely has a direct bearing on the Salem context. It is telling that Moore's preferred biographer, to whom she repeatedly refers with approval, is Arlin Turner, probably the most staid and traditional of the 1980s biographers; demographically, Turner really belongs to the previous generation of Hawthorne biographers. Moore clearly seeks to reinstate the 'normalized' Hawthorne; her language, when she talks about Hawthorne as a boy echoes Stewart's affirmation in 1948 that '[a]ll told, Hawthorne's boyhood was not as abnormal as has sometimes been supposed':

Whatever the future would bring for young Nathaniel, I think his childhood was happier than do many critics. Erlich sees him as especially hating his domineering uncle even though he tried to be fair to his motives. Miller sees him like little Ilbrihim [sic – the character in 'The Gentle Boy' is actually called 'Ilbrahim'], always longing for the father he could barely remember. T. Walter Herbert thinks of him as submissive and unsure of his manliness. Yet he is remembered by those who actually knew him as a little golden-haired boy who ran around playing with other children.⁵²⁵

Similarly, one of her counter-arguments to Herbert's view that Nathaniel and Sophia's union 'did not endure as a happy marriage' is Brodhead's observation that Hawthorne was 'in fact the most perfectly domestic of all American writers' (p. 248).⁵²⁶ This is a claim which Herbert never contradicts – it is Hawthorne's very domesticity that makes the investigation of his marriage valuable for Herbert.

More surprising than Moore's is David Reynolds's response to Herbert's book. Like Reynolds, Herbert affirms the special status of literary texts as artworks; he espouses the reading of extra-literary texts alongside those artworks; he believes that we must recognize the Hawthornes as 'denizens of their era, not ours'; in line with Reynolds's requirement for cultural biography Herbert 'writes lucidly and avoids... jargon', as Reynolds himself concedes.⁵²⁷ Thus, we might have expected Reynolds to approve of Herbert's effort. In fact, Reynolds's review of Herbert's *Dearest Beloved*, in the *New York Times*, is scathing. Drawing on his own research on Whitman, Reynolds clashes with Herbert chiefly over their shared focus of nineteenth-century sexuality. For Reynolds, Herbert overstates Victorian prudishness and underestimates the flexibility of

⁵²⁵ Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 11 (see Chapter 3.4); Moore, *Salem World*, p. 75.

⁵²⁶ Brodhead, *School*, p. 48.

⁵²⁷ David S. Reynolds, 'Naughty Sophie Hawthorne', *New York Times*, 7 February 1993, p. BR25.

nineteenth-century sexual attitudes. He attributes Herbert's failure to arrive at his own conclusions to a methodological fault, asserting that *Dearest Beloved* 'may indeed qualify as the so-declared new historicism, but not as solid literary history. Like too many works of criticism today, it imposes current values on the past while playing fast and loose with the facts' (ibid.). Thus, he sets New Historicism up as a theoretical monolith – characterized by programmatic relativism, lack of objectivity, and – standing in the way of responsible historicist interpretation; I would argue, in contrast, that by the very fact that it was published in Greenblatt's series, Herbert's book testifies to the New Historicism as a fluid continuum of approaches. It is Herbert's choice to concentrate on particular aspects of Hawthorne's biography with the aim to advance an agenda of change – as opposed to disinterestedly creating an complete and context-rich biography – to which Reynolds actually objects here. But Reynolds also attacks *Dearest Beloved* where, to my mind, Herbert's book is indeed completely compelling: in its unmasking of the repressed tensions within the Hawthornes' relationship. Referring to Sophia's letter in which she affirms her happiness 'in the very center of simultaneous screams from both darling little throats' (cf. Chapter 3.6), Reynolds writes:

'Dearest Beloved' is best taken as an intriguing probe of a possibly darker side of the Hawthornes' marriage. Even on this score, however, some of its claims are suspect. A letter in which Sophia announces herself 'the happiest of women' because of her 'everlasting satisfaction' with her husband and children strikes Mr. Herbert as 'a monument to repressed motherly and matrimonial fury.' Would that all marriages were so miserable' (ibid.).

Either Reynolds is being flippant, or this dismissal of Herbert's reading of Sophia's letter represents a catastrophic failure of critical sensibility.

Clearly, Reynolds does not accept Herbert's book as an exemplar of the redemptive genre of cultural biography. However, the very fact that Herbert's conclusions have been so fiercely debated seems to me a good thing in terms of the continued survival of Hawthorne biography, whilst an approach such as Moore's, which essentially seeks to re-normalize Hawthorne, could in fact prove deleterious, in Brodhead's (and Melville's) terms, to Hawthorne's survival.

CONCLUSION

Does the Whale's Magnitude Diminish? – Will He Perish?⁵²⁸

We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future.⁵²⁹

In Chapter 105 of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael/Melville speculates about the continued survival of the whale; has he degenerated in size since the Tertiary, or the days of Pliny? Are his numbers declining? Both questions he answers in the negative: if anything, whales are larger than they have ever been, and if there appear to be fewer of them, then this is because they have adapted their patterns of migration and even their social habits to evade their human hunters. Ultimately, he suggests, the whales can retreat to the polar regions, and there 'bid defiance to all pursuit from man'.⁵³⁰ Today, those of us who care about the survival of the whale as a species do not share Ishmael's confidence that it will escape the fate of the American buffalo, which had been hunted nearly to extinction by the time *Moby-Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* were published. This is because the world has changed dramatically during the last 150 years. We do not live in Melville's and Hawthorne's time. And yet the lives and times of these authors, and their contemporaries, appear to matter to us. We produce biography after biography, elbowing aside predecessors and staking our own claim to the territory, but also seeking out the points of congruence where these past lives resonate with our own.

In the process, we do see a progressive enrichment of biography. I believe that we know more about Hawthorne today than Arvin did in the 1920s, or Stewart in the 1940s. The discovery of new materials, but also the connections that have been made

⁵²⁸ Title of Chapter 105 of Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*; see Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, edited by Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (2nd edition, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), pp. 351-354.

⁵²⁹ Frederick Douglass, 'What to the Slave is the Fourth of July' in Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, edited by William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), pp. 116-127 (p. 123).

within the material and the gradual stripping away of errors by their predecessors has benefited new biographies. In fact, even the disagreements between biographies allow us to learn more: most fruitful of new insights into Hawthorne's life have been the moments of intense debate. In order to create meaning, however, biographers have to impose structures and make choices, often having to discard things which it would have been equally interesting to know. I believe that we need to read more than one biography of a subject in order to get a sense of the complexity of the issues at stake in a particular life, not so much to choose between alternatives but to be aware of their existence.

Biographies do become superseded. Stewart's Hawthorne biography is 'truer to the facts' and more complete than Arvin's, and perhaps we don't need to read Arvin's, or even Stewart's book any longer to learn about Hawthorne's life. What we learn by reading these superseded books resides somewhere else; it provides us with our own critical genealogy.

Biography has been a player in the recurring conflict between theoretical and anti-theoretical positions. This anti-theoretical tendency has been a prominent feature of biographical writing, and biography has even been discussed in the wider debate over the value of theory. David Reynolds argues that we can 'rescue' the Humanities by 'talking straight', which he believes is the natural tendency of good biographers.⁵³¹ The question of theory has often been bound up with the question of politics, again a contentious issue in meta-biography. The biographical genre constitutes part of an ongoing questioning whether what academic intellectuals – and in particular those professing literature – do matters in the world. Stanley Fish simply observes that if you want to do politics you should become a politician, not a critic.⁵³² However, Walter Herbert demonstrates a will to democracy that may even escape into the world and change it.

⁵³⁰ Melville, *Moby-Dick*, p. 353.

⁵³¹ David S. Reynolds, 'The Humanities Crisis: Biography to the Rescue', http://thehamptons.com/words/reynolds/humanities_crisis.html.

⁵³² Stanley Fish, *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

The Hawthorne biographies of the 1980s and 90s were embattled with one another, engaged in active debate, trying out new formulae, most of them appearing to sense that they needed to justify their existence. Brenda Wineapple's book, the first Hawthorne biography of the new millennium, has assimilated the findings of these books of the previous generation, but does not engage in a debate with them. It comes before the world almost as if there had never been a full-length Hawthorne biography. A stylish black-and-white photograph of the author, looking at us across elegantly interdigitated hands, replaces introduction, preface, or author's note, nor do her acknowledgments afford us a glimpse of her involvement with Hawthorne. At the same time, Wineapple's language is in competition with that of her subject, even, on occasion, overpowering it.

When the next new full-length, cradle-to-grave Hawthorne biography comes along in three, or five, or ten years' time, I, for one, will not eagerly snatch it up to see what it has to say. I would rather see biographies of other figures: for example of George Lippard, the author of the 1845 pot boiler *The Quaker City*, or of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, whose novel *The Morgesons* (1862) Hawthorne praised as a 'remarkable and powerful book' (CE 18, p. 524).⁵³³ It has taken 55 years for Louise Hall Tharp's book on the Peabody sisters to be updated – a new biography of Elizabeth, Mary and Sophia by Megan Marshall is just being published. So far, there has been only one biography of Fanny Fern (Sarah Payson Willis), the journalist and author of a number of novels, including *Ruth Hall*, who, in Hawthorne's estimation, wrote 'as if the devil was in her' (CE 17, p. 308).⁵³⁴ Only a small handful of biographies of even such an author as James Fenimore Cooper have been published, and there are only two biographies of Charles Brockden Brown, both currently out of print.

However, although Ronald Bosco suggested that 'we certainly do not need more facts about Emerson's life', he still believes that we should continue rewriting his

⁵³³ See Margaret B. Moore, 'Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard's "Immortal Feather"' in *Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*, ed. by John L. Idol and Melinda M. Ponder (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), pp. 121-130 (p. 121).

⁵³⁴ For a discussion of Hawthorne's response to Fanny Fern and other contemporary women authors see Nina Baym, 'Again and Again, the Scribbling Women' in Idol and Ponder (eds.), *Hawthorne and Women*, pp. 20-35.

biography.⁵³⁵ Similarly, it appears that Richard Brodhead was overly pessimistic when he prophesied Hawthorne's impending displacement from the canon. Or perhaps his precondition for Hawthorne's survival has come true, and some biographers have indeed found ways to make him continually relevant to our own 'concerns and needs'.⁵³⁶ As Leland Person suggests:

Studies of Hawthorne and history show no signs of diminishing, and it seems likely that we shall see more scholarship that explores Hawthorne's connections to his nineteenth-century world in even more particularity. If Jane Tompkins's principle is correct – that 'a literary text exists only within a framework of assumptions which are historically produced' – then the changing needs and assumptions of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century culture will produce new historically oriented angles of vision on Hawthorne. ...Whether or not Hawthorne's genius can reasonably be considered a summary of all of *America's* history, scholarly studies that examine Hawthorne's relationship to American culture and its history should flourish like rose bushes in the footsteps of Ann Hutchinson well into the twenty-first century.⁵³⁷

If we must have more monographs, biographical or otherwise, on Hawthorne – as I'm sure we will –, then I would like to see books that concentrate on aspects of Hawthorne's life rather than yet more cradle-to-grave accounts assimilating previous findings into a polished gem of a story. But, more than that, I would like these new accounts to be deliberately and avowedly political and committed to changing the world. My own autobiographical confession is that I have found Herbert's *Dearest Beloved* to be the only Hawthorne biography to have made a really significant impact on my own, everyday, life ever since I first read it eight years ago. Every so often it makes me stop in my tracks, considering my relationships as a daughter and a wife and becoming aware to the patterns of the filial and marital discourses in which I am involved. This is not because I identify myself, or members of my family, with one or another member of the Hawthorne family. Rather, it is because the book does not try to get me to identify with anyone, leaving me free to observe patterns of speech and behavior. By comparison, Moore's *Salem World* and Wineapple's recent book leave me fairly cold – the one,

⁵³⁵ Ronald A. Bosco, 'We Find what We Seek: Emerson and His Biographers' in *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 269-290, (p. 287).

⁵³⁶ Cf. Richard Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 215.

because it retreats into antiquarianism; the other, because detail so outweighs argument. I find that neither gives me much to engage with.

The reason I have chosen to write about the Hawthorne biographies by Newton Arvin, Randall Stewart, and Walter Herbert is because they are all unabashedly political. Their authors share, in spite of their immense differences of period, political alignment, and view of literature, a common aim: to engage their readers by drawing them into a community, saving them through association, uniting them in 'holy sympathy', or welcoming them into the family. In their hands, biography has become a genre whose aspirations towards redemptiveness reach beyond the academy into our own lives.

⁵³⁷ Leland S. Person, 'Bibliographical Essay: Hawthorne and History' in *A Historical Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. by Larry J. Reynolds (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 183-209 (p. 200).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Biographies of Nathaniel Hawthorne

This chronological bibliography lists the first editions of all biographies of Nathaniel Hawthorne I could identify which matched the following criteria. They are all by Anglo-American authors, they are separate publications, and they are what I, perhaps somewhat subjectively, have defined as book-length: taking the length of the Hawthorne section in James T. Fields's *Yesterdays with Authors* (1871, later published separately as *Hawthorne*) – 86 pages – as a rough indicator, I have arrived at 76 pages as a cut-off point; any biographies of the authors considered here that are shorter than that are considerably shorter. In Hawthorne's case I have not found any biographical pamphlets (they are frequent particularly for Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass and Emily Dickinson), but because this bibliography is tied in with Appendix B, which provides a quantitative comparison of the biographies of seven American Renaissance writers, such pamphlets would be included here if they had the required length. Since the Hawthorne section in it is not a separate publication I have had to exclude Fields's *Yesterdays with Authors*; I have excluded George Parsons Lathrop's biographical sketch of Hawthorne in volume 12 of the Riverside edition (published by Houghton Mifflin/Kegan, Paul & Trench) of *The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by Lathrop, for the same reason. Because I have limited my investigation to biographies narrating a significant portion of the subject's life, certain biographical genres are excluded: these are reminiscences with titles such as 'A Half-Hour with Hawthorne,' or 'A Day with Emerson' (usually too short to be included in any case), and the 'Homes and Haunts' genre. Because the various partial biographies of Hawthorne covering his sojourn in Europe are so important, I have included such partial biographies of the other authors too, for example James Bradley Thayer's *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson* or Garner Stanton's *The Civil War World of Herman Melville*.

Of course, my restriction of the listed biographies to Anglo-American, book-length and separately published accounts produces a certain distortion. Biographies

produced in other countries can be important; L. Dhaleine's *Hawthorne, sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris, 1905), for example, is occasionally cited in the bibliographies of Anglo-American Hawthorne biographies, and in the case of Edgar Allan Poe, not listed here as a subject, Baudelaire's account of the life has been extremely important for the development of Poe biography. Brief accounts are likewise highly important: Rufus Wilmot Griswold's short obituary of Poe in the New York *Daily Tribune*, October 9, 1849, and the inclusion of similar material in his edition of Poe's collected works in 1850, marked Poe biography for a very long time – even George Woodberry still relied on it for his assessment of Poe's character in 1885. And Fields's account in *Yesterdays with Authors* would still have been extremely important even if it had not been separately published later. Also, scholarly articles on aspects of authors' lives have had a huge effect on subsequent biographies; important examples are Hayford and Davis's article 'Herman Melville as Office Seeker' (1949), and Nina Baym's 'Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Mother: A Biographical Speculation' (1982). The impact of short accounts of Hawthorne's life up to 1904 is outlined in Danny Robinson's 'An Image of an Image' (1985). However, these restrictions have been unavoidable for practical reasons; to have investigated the shorter biographies and biographical articles would have been beyond the scope of this appendix.

A.1 A Chronological Bibliography of Hawthorne Biographies

- 1876: Fields, James T. *Hawthorne*. Vest-Pocket Series of Standard and Popular Authors. Boston: James R. Osgood.
- 1876: Lathrop, George Parsons. *A Study of Hawthorne*. Boston: James R. Osgood.
- 1879: James, Henry. *Hawthorne*. English Men of Letters series. London: Macmillan.
- 1884: Hawthorne, Julian. *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife: A Biography*. 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: J. R. Osgood and Company.
- 1890: Conway, Moncure D. *Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Great Writers series. New York: Scribner and Welford.
- 1893: Bridge, Horatio. *Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- 1897: Lathrop, Rose Hawthorne. *Memories of Hawthorne*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- 1899: Fields, Annie. *Nathaniel Hawthorne*. The Beacon Biographies of Eminent Americans series. Boston: Small Maynard.
- 1902: Woodberry, George E. *Nathaniel Hawthorne*. American Men of Letters series. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.
- 1903: Hawthorne, Julian. *Hawthorne and His Circle*. New York and London: Harper & Brothers.
- 1906: Stearns, Frank P. *The Life and Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Philadelphia: Longmans, Green; Philadelphia & London: J. B. Lippincott.
- 1908: Sanborn, Frank B. *Hawthorne and His Friends*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Torch Press.
- 1913: Ticknor, Caroline. *Hawthorne and His Publisher*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- 1927: Gorman, Herbert. *Hawthorne: A Study in Solitude*. Murray Hill Biographies series. New York: G. H. Doran.
- 1927: Morris, Lloyd. *The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- 1929: Arvin, Newton. *Hawthorne*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- 1932: Hawthorne, Hildegard. *Romantic Rebel: The Story of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. New York: The Century Company.
- 1940: Mather, Edward. *Nathaniel Hawthorne, A Modest Man*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell.
- 1948: Cantwell, Robert. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The American Years*. New York: Rinehart.
- 1948: Stewart, Randall. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- 1949: Van Doren, Mark. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Critical Biography*. American Men of Letters series. London: Methuen.
- 1951: Loggins, Vernon. *The Hawthornes: The Story of Seven Generations of an American Family*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1961: Wagenknecht, Edward. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1962: Hoeltje, Hubert H. *Inward Sky: The Mind and Heart of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- 1968: Manley, Sean. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Captain of the Imagination*. New York: The Vanguard Press.
- 1970: Wood, James Playsted. *The Unpardonable Sin: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. New York: Pantheon.
- 1980: Gaeddert, Lou Ann. *A New England Love Story: Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody*. New York: Dial Press.
- 1980: Hull, Raymona E. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience, 1853-1864*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- 1980: Mellow, James R. *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- 1980: Turner, Arlin. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1983: Mays, James O'Donald. *Mr Hawthorne Goes to England: The Adventures of a Reluctant Consul*. Burley, Hants.: New Forest Leaves.
- 1984: Erlich, Gloria C. *Family Themes in Hawthorne's Fiction: The Tenacious Web*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- 1984: Young, Philip. *Hawthorne's Secret: An Un-told Tale*. Boston: David R. Godine.
- 1991: Miller, Edwin Haviland. *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. London: Duckworth.
- 1993: Herbert, T. Walter. *Dearest Beloved: The Hawthornes and the Making of the Middle-class Family*. The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics series. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1996: Whitelaw, Nancy. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: American Storyteller*. World Writers series. Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds.
- 1998: Moore, Margaret B. *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.
- 2003: Wineapple, Brenda. *Hawthorne: A Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- 2004: McFarland, Philip. *Hawthorne in Concord*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Appendix B: Quantitative Comparisons of Biographies of Seven American Renaissance Writers

The first item in this appendix is a table which provides a comparative, chronological overview of biographies of Emerson, Hawthorne, Stowe, Douglass, Melville, Whitman and Dickinson. The entries in the table are font style- and color-coded; these codes are explained in a legend underneath the table.

I distinguish between the following types of biography: memoirs, academic biographies, biographies for young readers ('juvenile biography'), biographies published in the form of a collection, and 'other'. It is sometimes difficult to draw a clear line between these types, and it has also at times been difficult to verify an author's identity beyond his or her name. For these reasons the survey should not be taken as complete or absolutely reliable, but as providing an indication of tendencies.

My criteria in distinguishing the types have been as follows: as memoirs I classify biographies produced by family members, friends or acquaintances, although they can be written in the third person; they are usually distinguished by an accumulative, life-and-letters approach which focuses on the subject's own words, mostly by reprinting letters and linking them with minimal narrative sections; thus, in Hawthorne's case, Julian Hawthorne's *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife* is a memoir, but George Parsons Lathrop's *A Study of Hawthorne*, even though Lathrop was married to Hawthorne's daughter Rose, is not, for Lathrop engages extensively in interpretation. As academic biographies I have classified books by authors verifiably affiliated with universities, or books taken up immediately by university presses: according to this criterion Margaret Moore's *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, even though Moore is an independent scholar, is an academic biography, but James Mellow's *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* is not, in spite of the fact that a new edition was eventually published by Johns Hopkins University Press. Biographies for young readers are books aimed specifically at children and teenagers; many of these are published within particular series (e.g. Famous Figures of the Civil War Era) or by subdivisions within publishing houses (e.g. Chelsea Juniors); the biographers usually specialize in

this genre, for example James Playsted Woods or Hildegard Hawthorne. Biographies in the form of a collection occur only in relation to Whitman: they are compilations of documents which are assembled by an editor or editors in order to give an overview over the subject's life; interesting here is the fact that a recent new biographical series practicing this approach, *Writers in Their Own Time*, has picked Whitman as its first subject. Any biography not covered by these criteria is listed as 'other'. The author of such a biography could be an independent researcher or professional biographer (like James R. Mellow, Gary Schmidgall, or the poet Laurie Robertson Lorant), or a hack writer or journalist, or a novelist excursing into the genre; the category as such says nothing about the comparative merit of the work. The relative frequencies of each type of biography for each of the seven authors are compared in graph B.2.1.

Graph B.2.2 compares the relative frequencies of male and female biographers in relation to subjects.

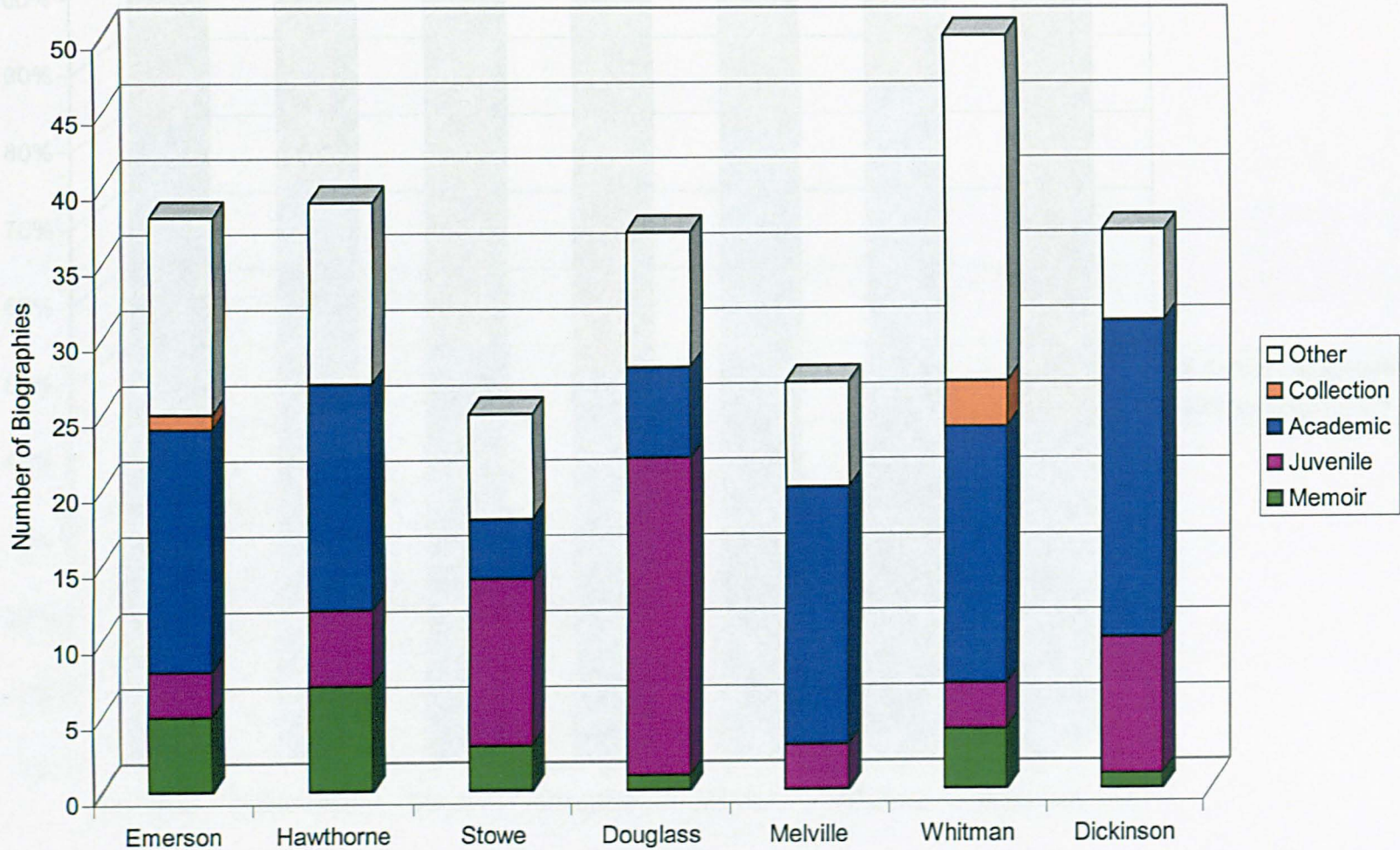
Full bibliographical information for the biographies included is given in B.3, which provides a separate chronological bibliography for each author (except Hawthorne, as Hawthorne biographies are listed in Appendix A.1). Whenever possible I have listed the first edition.

B.1 A Comparative Chronology

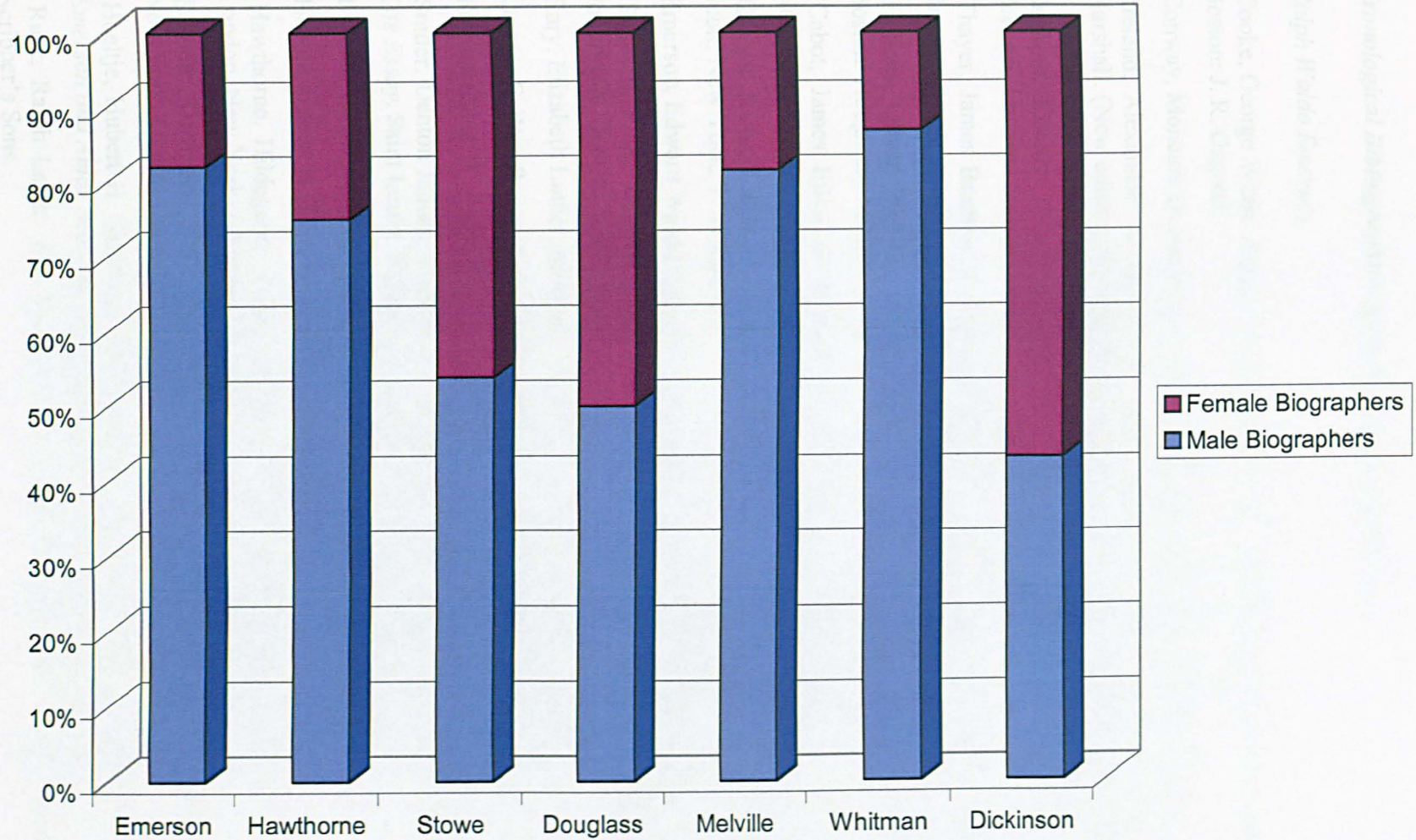
	Emerson (1803-82)	Hawthorne (1804-64)	Stowe (1811-1896)	Douglass (1817?-95)	Melville (1819-91)	Whitman (1819-92)	Dickinson (1830-86)
Total Number	37	37	22	28	25	49	35
1860s						1867: Burroughs	
1870s		1876: Fields, J. T. 1876: Lathrop, G. P. 1879: James, H.					
1880s	1881: Cooke 1882: Conway 1882: Ireland 1884: Thayer, J. B. 1885: Holmes 1887: Cabot 1888: Garnett 1889: Emerson	1884: Hawthorne, J.	1889: McCray 1889: Stowe, C. E.			1883: Bucke	
1890s		1890: Conway 1893: Bridge <i>1897: Lathrop, R. H.</i> 1899: Fields, A.	1897: Fields, A.	1893: Gregory 1899: Chestnutt		1893: Traubel, Bucke & Harned 1893: Symonds 1896: Donaldson 1896: Kennedy	
1900s	1901: Sanborn <i>1904: Cary</i> 1907: Woodberry	1902: Woodberry 1903: Hawthorne, J. 1906: Stearns 1908: Sanborn		1903: Thompson 1906: Washington		1904: Platt 1905: Binns 1906: Perry 1906: Traubel 1906: Carpenter, E. 1909: Carpenter, G.R.	
1910s	1915: Firkins	<i>1913: Ticknor</i>	1911: Stowe, C.E. & L.B. <i>1913: Crow</i>			1910: Thomson 1915: Elliot 1918: Johnston, J.	
1920s	1921: Snider	1927: Gorman 1927: Morris, L. 1929: Arvin			1921: Weaver 1926: Freeman 1929: Mumford	<i>1921: Keller</i> 1926: Bailey 1926: Holloway 1929: Morris, H. S.	<i>1924: Bianchi</i>
1930s	1932: Brooks 1932: Hoeltje <i>1935: Hawthorne, H</i> 1936: Scudder	1932: Hawthorne, H.			1938: Mansfield	<i>1931: Barrus</i> 1937: Masters 1938: Arvin 1938: Long	<i>1930: Taggard</i> <i>1930: Pollitt</i> 1938: Whicher
1940s	1943: Hoeltje 1949: Rusk	1940: Mather 1948: Cantwell 1948: Stewart 1949: Van Doren	1941: Wilson	1948: Quarles	1949: Stone	1942: Fausset 1943: Canby	
1950s	1953: Whicher	1951: Loggins		<i>1959: Bontemps</i>	1950: Arvin 1951: Leyda 1951: Gilman 1951: Howard <i>1953: Metcalfe</i> 1957: Sealts	1955: Allen	1951: Chase <i>1951: Patterson</i> <i>1954: Bingham</i> 1955: Johnson
1960s	<i>1962: Keyes</i> 1964: Wood 1967: Pommer	1961: Wagenknecht 1962: Hoeltje 1968: Manley	1965: Wagenknecht <i>1968: Rouverol</i>	1964: Foner <i>1965: Patterson</i> <i>1968: Davidson</i> <i>1969: Herschler</i> <i>1969: Humphreville</i>	1962: Humphreys 1963: Hillway <i>1966: Keyes</i>	1960: Asselineau 1961: Allen 1961: Allen <i>1968: Stoutenburg & Baker</i>	1960: Leyda <i>1961: Ward</i> 1967: Higgins
1970s	1974: Wagenknecht 1974: Hutch 1979: Porte <i>1979: Rather</i>	1970: Wood	1976: Gerson <i>1977: Johnston, J.</i> <i>1978: Hooker</i> 1978: Scott	<i>1970: Hoexter</i> <i>1970: Myers</i> 1970: Armour <i>1971: Douglass</i>	1970: Bixby 1971: Allen 1975: Miller, E. H.	1970: Brasher <i>1970: Marinacci</i> <i>1971: Funnell</i> 1973: Rubin	1971: Cody 1971: Walsh <i>1971: Barth</i> 1972: Wood 1974: Sewall <i>1974: Benét</i>
1980s	1981: Allen 1982: Robinson 1984: McAleer <i>1989: Barish</i> <i>1989: Barish</i>	<i>1980: Gaeddert</i> <i>1980: Hull</i> 1980: Mellow 1980: Turner 1983: Mays <i>1984: Erlich</i> 1984: Young	1981: Rugoff 1986: Van Why & Branch 1989: Jakoubek	1980: Huggins 1980: Preston 1984: Martin <i>1987: McKissack</i> 1988: Miller, D. T. 1988: Russell		1980: Kaplan 1981: Eitner 1984: Zweig 1985: Cavitch	<i>1982: Mossberg</i> <i>1985: Dickenson</i> <i>1986: McNeil</i> <i>1986: Wolff</i> 1986: Benfey 1986: Loving 1988: Sullivan <i>1989: Garbowsky</i> <i>1989: Knapp</i> <i>1989: Thayer, B. E.</i>
1990s	1994: von Frank 1995: Richardson 1996: Baker <i>1997: Engstrom</i> 1999: Smith	1991: Miller, E. H. 1993: Herbert <i>1996: Whitelaw</i> <i>1998: Moore</i>	<i>1993: Bland</i> <i>1993: Coil</i> <i>1994: Fritz</i> <i>1994: Hedrick</i> <i>1994: Johnston, N.</i>	1991: McFeely <i>1991: Ruuth</i> 1992: Weiner <i>1993: Banta</i> 1995: Voss <i>1999: Diedrich</i>	1993: Garner 1993: Kirby <i>1994: Steffoff</i> 1996: Dillingham 1996-: Parker <i>1996: Robertson-Lorant</i> 1997: Kring	1991: Myerson 1992: Callow <i>1993: Knapp</i> <i>1995: Reef</i> 1995: Reynolds 1995: Leon 1997: Schmidgall 1999: Loving	<i>1990: Longworth</i> <i>1990: Olsen</i> <i>1992: Farr</i> 1998: Arnold 1998: Lundin <i>1998: Dommermuth-Costa</i> 1998: Steffens
2000-2004	2003: Bosco & Myerson	<i>2003: Wineapple</i> 2004: McFarland	<i>2000: Gellely</i> 2001: Thulesius 2003: Schreiner <i>2003: White</i> 2004: Randolph	<i>2000: Phillips</i> <i>2000: Lutz</i> <i>2001: Becker</i> <i>2002: Schraff</i> <i>2002: Yancey</i> 2001: Novas 2003: Burchard 2003: Collier <i>2004: Fleming</i> <i>2004: Russel & Wagner</i>	<i>2000: Hardwick</i> 2004: Heflin 2004: Meltzer	2000: Krieg 2000: Morris, R. 2002: Meltzer 2004: Epstein	2001: Habegger <i>2003: Herstek</i> 2004: Kirk

B.2 Biographer/Subject Demographics

B.2.1 Types of Biographies in Relation to Subject



B.2.2 Gender Distribution of Biographers in Relation to Subject



B.3 Chronological Bibliographies of the Biographies Listed in B.1

B.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson

- 1881: Cooke, George Willis. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy*. Boston: J. R. Osgood.
- 1882: Conway, Moncure D. *Emerson at Home and Abroad*. Boston: James R. Osgood.
- 1882: Ireland, Alexander. *In Memoriam: Ralph Waldo Emerson*. London: Simpkin, Marshall. (New edition as *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Life, Genius, and Writings; a Biographical Sketch to which Are Added Personal Recollections of His Visits to England, Extracts from Unpublished Letters and Miscellaneous Characteristic Records*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1882.)
- 1884: Thayer, James Bradley. *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- 1885: Holmes, Oliver Wendell. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. American Men of Letters. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.
- 1887: Cabot, James Elliot. *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 2 vols. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.
- 1888: Garnett, Richard. *Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Great Writers. London: Walter Scott; New York: T. Whittaker.
- 1889: Emerson, Edward Waldo. *Emerson in Concord*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.
- 1901: Sanborn, F. B. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. The Beacon Biographies of Eminent Americans. Boston: Small, Maynard.
- 1904: Cary, Elizabeth Luther. *Emerson: Poet and Thinker*. New York: Putnam.
- 1907: George E. Woodberry. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. New York: Macmillan.
- 1915: Firkins, Oscar W. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.
- 1921: Snider, Denton Jaques. *A Biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Set Forth as His Life Essay*. Saint Louis: William Harvey Miner.
- 1932: Brooks, Van Wyck. *The Life of Emerson*. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- 1932: Hoeltje, Hubert H. *Emerson in Virginia*. Baltimore.
- 1935: Hawthorne, Hildegard. *Youth's Captain, the Story of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. London, New York: Longmans, Green.
- 1936: Scudder, Townsend. *The Lonely Wayfaring Man: Emerson and Some Englishmen*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1943: Hoeltje, Hubert H. *Sheltering Tree: A Story of the Friendship of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Amos Bronson Alcott*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- 1949: Rusk, Ralph Leslie. *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

- 1953: Whicher, Stephen Emerson. *Freedom and Fate. An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- 1962: Keyes, Charlotte E. *The Experimenter: a Biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. New Haven: College and University Press.
- 1964: Wood, James Playsted. *Trust Thyself: A Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson for the Young Reader*. A Pantheon Portrait. New York: Pantheon Books.
- 1967: Pommer, Henry Francis. *Emerson's First Marriage*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- 1974: Hutch, Richard A. 'The Self and the Phenomenal World: A Structural Biographical Study of the Early Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1903-38'. 2 vols. Doctoral thesis, microfilm, University of Chicago.
- 1974: Wagenknecht, Edward. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Portrait of a Balanced Soul*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1979: Porte, Joel. *Representative Man: Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Time*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1979: Rather, Lois. *R. W. Emerson, Tourist: The Story of Ralph Waldo Emerson's Visit to California in 1871*. Oakland, CA: Rather Press.
- 1981: Allen, Gay Wilson. *Waldo Emerson: A Biography*. New York: Viking Press.
- 1982: Robinson, David. *Emerson as Preacher and Lecturer*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- 1984: McAleer, John J. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Days of Encounter*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- 1989: Barish, Evelyn. *Emerson: The Roots of Prophecy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 1989: Barish, Evelyn. *Emerson in Italy*. Photographs by Evelyn Hofer. New York: Holt.
- 1994: von Frank, Albert J. *An Emerson Chronology*. New York: G. K. Hall.
- 1995: Richardson, Robert D., Jr. *Emerson: the Mind on Fire: A Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1996: Baker, Carlos. *Emerson Among the Eccentrics: A Group Portrait*. Introduction and Epilogue by James R. Mellow. New York: Viking.
- 1997: Engstrom, Sallee Fox. *The Infinitude of the Private Man: Emerson's Presence in Western New York, 1851-61*. American University Studies. New York: P. Lang.
- 1999: Smith, Harmon L. *My Friend, My Friend: the Story of Thoreau's Relationship with Emerson*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- 2003: Bosco, Ronald and Joel Myerson (eds.). *Emerson in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of his Life, Drawn from Recollections, Memoirs, and Interviews by Friends and Associates*. Writers in Their Own Time. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

B.3.2 Harriet Beecher Stowe

- 1889: McCray, Florin Thayer. *The Life-work of the Author of Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls.
- 1889: Stowe, Charles Edward. *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Compiled from Her Letters and Journals by Her Son, Charles Edward Stowe*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.
- 1897: Fields, Annie. *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin.
- 1911: Stowe, Charles Edward and Lyman Beecher Stowe. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Story of Her Life*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- 1913: Crow, Martha Foote. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Biography for Girls*. New York: D. Appleton.
- 1941: Wilson, Robert Forrest. *Crusader in Crinoline: The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott.
- 1965: Wagenknecht, Edward. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Known and the Unknown*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1968: Rouverol, Jean. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: Woman Crusader*. An American Pioneer Biography. New York: Putnam.
- 1976: Gerson, Noel Bertram. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Biography*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- 1977: Johnston, Johanna. *Harriet and the Runaway Book: The Story of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Harper & Row.
- 1978: Hooker, Gloria. *I Shall Not Live in Vain: The Biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the New England Author whose Book Changed Attitudes about Slavery, Greatness with Faith*. St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House.
- 1978: Scott, John Anthony. *Woman against Slavery: The Story of Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Women of America. New York: Crowell.
- 1981: Rugoff, Milton. *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Harper and Row.
- 1986: Van Why, Joseph S. and Earl Branch (eds.). *Harriet Beecher Stowe in Europe: The Journal of Charles Beecher*. Hartford, CT: Stowe-Day Foundation.
- 1989: Jakoubek, Robert E. *Harriet Beecher Stowe*. New York: Chelsea House.
- 1993: Bland, Celia. *Harriet Beecher Stowe*. New York: Chelsea Juniors.
- 1993: Coil, Suzanne M. *Harriet Beecher Stowe*. An Impact Biography. New York: F. Watts.
- 1994: Fritz, Jean. *Harriet Beecher Stowe and the Beecher Preachers*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

- 1994: Hedrick, Joan D. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1994: Johnston, Norma. *Harriet: The Life and World of Harriet Beecher Stowe*. New York: Four Winds Press.
- 2000: Gelletly, LeeAnne. *Harriet Beecher Stowe. Famous Figures of the Civil War Era*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.
- 2001: Thulesius, Olav. *Harriet Beecher Stowe in Florida, 1867-1884*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- 2003: Schreiner, Samuel A., Jr. *The Passionate Beechers: A Family Saga of Sanctity and Scandal That Changed America*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- 2003: White, Barbara A. *The Beecher Sisters*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- 2004: Randolph, Ryan P. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: Author and Abolitionist*. The Library of American Lives and Times. New York: PowerKids Press.
- 2005: Haugen, Brenda. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: Author and Advocate*. Signature Lives. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books.

B.3.3 Frederick Douglass

- 1893: Gregory, James Monroe. *Frederick Douglass, the Orator; Containing an Account of His Life, His Eminent Public Services, His brilliant Career as Orator, Selections from His Speeches and Writings*. Chicago: Afro-Am Press, 1969.
- 1899: Chestnutt, Charles Waddell. *Frederick Douglass*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002.
- 1903: Thompson, John, W. *An Authentic History of the Douglass Monument; Biographical Facts and Incidents in the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Rochester, NY: Rochester Herald Press.
- 1906: Washington, Booker T. *Frederick Douglass*. Philadelphia: G. W. Jacobs.
- 1948: Quarles, Benjamin. *Frederick Douglass*. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers.
- 1959: Bontemps, Arna Wendell. *Frederick Douglass: Slave, Fighter, Freeman*. New York: Knopf.
- 1964: Foner, Philip Sheldon. *Frederick Douglass, a Biography*. New York: Citadel Press.
- 1965: Patterson, Lillie. *Frederick Douglass, Freedom Fighter*. Discovery Biography series. Champaign, IL: Garrard.
- 1968: Davidson, Margaret. *Frederick Douglass Fights for Freedom*. New York, Four Winds Press, 1970.
- 1969: Herschler, Mildred Barger. *Frederick Douglass*. Library of American Heroes. Chicago: Follett, 1969.
- 1969: Humphreville, Frances T. *For All People; the Story of Frederick Douglass*. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin.
- 1970: Hoexter, Corinne K. *Black Crusader: Frederick Douglass*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- 1970: Armour, Anoble. *Freedom from Bondage*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.
- 1970: Myers, Elisabeth P. *Frederick Douglass, Boy Champion of Human Rights. Childhood of famous Americans*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- 1971: Douglass, Helen Pitts. *In Memoriam: Frederick Douglass*. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press.
- 1980: Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Slave and Citizen: the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Library of American Biography. Boston: Little, Brown.
- 1980: Preston, Dickson J. *Young Frederick Douglass: The Maryland Years*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- 1984: Martin, Waldo E, Jr. *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

- 1987: McKissack, Patricia and Frederick. *Frederick Douglass, the Black Lion*. People of Distinction. Chicago: Childrens Press.
- 1988: Miller, Douglas T. *Frederick Douglass and the Fight for Freedom*. Makers of America. New York: Facts on File.
- 1988: Russell, Sharman Apt. *Frederick Douglass*. Black Americans of Achievement. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.
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