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Blackwood's Responses to Hawthorne in Light of Its
Mid-Nineteenth Century Transatlantic Reputation

Holly Young Boud

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Blackwood's Responses to Hawthorne in Light of Its Mid-Nineteenth Century Transatlantic Reputation

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Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine was arguably the most important and widely published literary magazine of the nineteenth century. Its readership extended from Britain to America, shaping literary tastes across the Anglophone literary marketplace. *BEM* wrote two reviews of Nathaniel Hawthorne's fiction during the author's most prolific years. The first was published in 1847 and contained a lengthy reflection of the state of American literature that prefaced its review of *Mosses from an Old Manse*. In 1855, *BEM* reviewed Hawthorne's novels. The language of these reviews encouraged *BEM's* transatlantic readership to interpret Hawthorne in a very particular light: a dark, intense, and deeply psychological Hawthorne. In other words, *BEM* promoted a version of Hawthorne that would ultimately stick and become the standard Hawthorne adopted by twentieth-century historians of the "American Renaissance." I argue that *BEM's* reviews reveal a relationship with American literature predisposed to appreciate a dark, symbolic, gothic literature, and that Hawthorne, like Irving before him, succeeded in becoming one of the greatest writers of mid-nineteenth-century American literature because he was able to appeal to and please a transatlantic, and particularly a British, audience. By transcending geographic boundaries, at least in *BEM's* reviews, Hawthorne was ironically identified as an iconic "American" writer.

Keywords: Blackwood's, Hawthorne, American Renaissance, book history, transatlantic

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my chair, Paul Westover, for his vision, patience, and diligent feedback as well as my committee members, Nick Mason and Mary Eyring for their helpful suggestions and knowledge expertise. I express my gratitude to my friend Kara Winder who listened to and helped finesse an early draft of this paper as well as to my parents for their unwavering support and encouragement.

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Blackwood's Responses to Hawthorne in Light of
Its Mid-Nineteenth Century Transatlantic Reputation

“It is almost superfluous to describe this able periodical, which has been spread abroad to an extent beyond a parallel, and which exerts an influence where it is read that is actually marvelous.”—Theodore Foster, 1836, on *Blackwood's*

On June 8, 1849, a disgruntled and bitter Nathaniel Hawthorne was fired from his position at the Custom House in Salem, Massachusetts, when the opposing political party took power. It has been well documented that this experience sparked Hawthorne to begin writing his seminal work *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). The details of how Hawthorne managed his dire financial circumstances during the interim between being sacked and writing *The Scarlet Letter*, however, are not as well-known. Addressing this question, Hawthorne scholar Benjamin Lease found two unpublished letters that give insight into this period of Hawthorne's career. Four days following Hawthorne's dismissal, his friend Horatio Bridge, knowing the writer's problematic situation and wishing to help Hawthorne find ways to support his family, wrote a letter to John Jay asking him to help arrange Hawthorne's employment as a contributor to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (*BEM*), the legendary Scottish magazine founded in 1817. It was well known that *BEM* paid its writers well, and Bridge thought this could be a plausible and reputable outlet for Hawthorne's literary talents (Lease 152–154).¹ Although nothing came of the correspondence as far as we know, these letters connect Hawthorne with *BEM* during a crucial

¹ Horatio Bridge, on Hawthorne's behalf, was not the only one attracted to *BEM* for its ability to pay well for good writing. Authors like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Brontë sisters' brother Branwell, and, as Lease revealed, several of Hawthorne's friends all petitioned to be published in *BEM*.

part of his career. They should set us thinking about possible relationships between Hawthorne and one of the most important transatlantic literary journals.

As the author of multiple novels and collections of short stories, Hawthorne reigns as one of the most profound writers of mid-nineteenth-century American literature and a pivotal figure of the so-called American Renaissance. His is broadly remembered as a dark, brooding, deeply symbolic writer. In her groundbreaking scholarship recovering nineteenth-century sentimental writers, Jane Tompkins complicates his legacy by pointing out that in (mostly American) periodicals circulating during his own lifetime, Hawthorne was loved as a sentimentalist and more commonly connected to writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe than, say, Edgar Allan Poe (627). Tompkins's scholarship points out an important reality in the world of mass culture: depending on which periodicals you read, you got a different picture of Hawthorne's talents as a writer and which of his works deserved the most praise.² Through literary periodicals, readers came into contact with multiple Hawthornes, a fact that complicates and fleshes out the history of his transatlantic literary reputation.

If we look to the other side of the Atlantic, periodicals in Britain give another dimension to Hawthorne's multifaceted reputation. Rather than thinking of Hawthorne in any fixed light, British periodical reviews reveal a vast array of interpretations of Hawthorne's writing and merit in his own time, perspectives made available to anyone with access to these publications. While not the only interpretation of its kind, *BEM's* reviews of Hawthorne anticipate the view of Hawthorne's merits that will stick (that is, the view that will come to predominate in the twentieth century). Furthermore, with the rise of education, literacy rates, and new technologies

² For example, the *Universalist Quarterly*, the *Gazette*, and the *North American Review* treat Hawthorne's fiction differently, praising different stories, and valuing or criticizing his stories for political, moral, or stylistic reasons (Tompkins).

mass printing, and thanks to *laissez-faire* attitudes toward reprinting before the days of international copyright laws, periodical reviews were widely consumed with little if any institutional restrictions. This publishing climate gave a lot of power to popular magazines like *BEM*, who published widely in Britain and America, and shaped attitudes around literature and its interpretations that readers absorbed in their reviews.

BEM reviews prove to be an important archive for what many scholars have said about Hawthorne's deep and complexly psychological fiction. One of the most important nuances of *BEM*'s reviews of Hawthorne is that the writers couched Hawthorne within a rich discussion of the state of an American literary identity. If we consider *BEM*'s transatlantic influence and its reviews, we get a more accurate picture of (1) the transatlantic literary landscape in the mid-nineteenth century and (2) how *BEM* readers were encouraged to read Hawthorne. *BEM* reviews gave the magazine's vast readership in Britain and America a dark, gothic "Hawthorne" who wrote historical narratives for the former American colonies. It is this interpretation of Hawthorne's work, much like that of Washington Irving, that appealed to *BEM* and to a larger British readership. These reviews give a more complete picture of Hawthorne's transatlantic reputation and the ways he was branded on both sides of the Atlantic via British literary journals. It seems that, at least according to *BEM*, Hawthorne's ability to appeal to a British audience (like Irving's in earlier decades) directly correlated with his rising reputation on both sides of the Atlantic—that in fact, counterintuitively, the esteem he enjoyed in the British reviews led to his being viewed as that much more "American," a fact that helped shape his legacy as one of the greatest American authors of the nineteenth century.

Although archival studies are by no means new to literary scholarship, resources like, for example, the Wellesley Index of Victorian Periodicals, the Waterloo Directory of English

Newspapers and Periodicals: 1800–1900, and the Hathi Trust have revolutionized the possibilities of considering periodical texts in line with book history as understood through cultural and material studies in the last twenty to thirty years. The archival turn has enabled my own primary research as well as several studies that inform the analysis I undertake below. For instance, Meredith McGill’s *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* accounts for the role that transatlantic publication culture had on shaping what became, in many people’s opinions, the highlight of American literature, namely that which came out of the mid-nineteenth century. She focuses specifically on Poe and Hawthorne’s contributions to literary nationalism, narrative authority, and authorial identity. David Finkelstein has written extensively on combining book history and material culture approaches to literary studies as, among other publications, the editor and compiler of *The Book History Reader*. Finkelstein specializes in *BEM* research, helping to bring *BEM* studies out of the archives at the National Library of Scotland and into the light of literary studies. His work has given those of us outside of Edinburgh access to the minute records that the publishing house of Blackwood’s kept. His *House of Blackwood’s: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era* extends scholarship of *BEM* into the Victorian era and begins to investigate the influence of *BEM* outside of the British Isles. Nicholas Mason has also delved into the *BEM* archive and related it to the American context. His work is significant to my argument because it acknowledges the transatlantic publishing context in which *BEM* flourished. His work brings attention to the anti-American tensions inherent in many publications during the early nineteenth century and where *BEM* extends or breaks from that tradition. I want to add to this critical conversation by highlighting

what *BEM*'s reviews say about American literature and specifically about Hawthorne in the mid-nineteenth century, when so many iconic pieces of American literature were written.³

Scholarship has also begun to shed light on questions of genre related to Hawthorne's reception. Donald Ringe's *American Gothic* has taken an archival approach to understanding how periodicals like *BEM* shaped American tales, including Hawthorne's. Jane Tompkins's scholarship has been foundational for material culture studies and is often cited in reception theory, material culture studies, and recovery work. Her work on how periodicals rendered Hawthorne's legacy as a sentimentalist, though perhaps a bit outdated in 2018, is still foundational to anyone wanting to research Hawthorne's reception via periodicals. I want to use Tompkins's research in periodical reception of Hawthorne in America as a backdrop for my argument as I investigate an overlooked archive that in some ways supports and in others challenges certain assumptions we have had about Hawthorne's reception in what was arguably "the most important and influential literary-political journal of its time" (Morrison and Baldick). In this essay, I engage *BEM*'s archive to investigate how periodical reviews in Britain colored the reception of a pivotal mid-nineteenth century American literary figure, but rather than focus on Poe as most scholars thinking about America and *BEM* do,⁴ I will look at what *BEM* had to say about Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Hawthorne and *Blackwood's* in America

Though the magazine's first decade catapulted *BEM* into public consciousness in Britain, scholars have not fully considered the ways those reverberations extended onto the American

³ A few famous examples include Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850); Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (1851); Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852); Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), and Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

⁴ See "How to Write a Blackwood Article" by Edgar Allan Poe (1838).

continent. To illustrate *BEM*'s transatlantic power, it is essential to understand the publication context under which *BEM*'s reviews were published and distributed in America and Hawthorne's own reading of the journal. From there we can begin to analyze how *BEM*'s publications on Hawthorne's fiction might have influenced the transatlantic audience he tried to appeal to and why he went about writing in the way that he did.

The early nineteenth century gave enormous power to periodicals. One consequence of that power was the potential of periodicals such as *BEM* to shape the ways people read and interpreted up-and-coming writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne in the moment which we now look back on as a peak of antebellum American literature. During this period, the literary canon was subject to the power of the reviewer and, to some extent, the lay reader rather than academic elites.

Although most scholars of nineteenth-century British literary history are well aware of *BEM*'s power in Britain, few have noted how influential *BEM* was to American readers. *BEM* kept its reputation as one of the most prestigious literary magazines in America as well as Britain. Hawthorne's reading records show that he was well acquainted with *BEM*. In Marion Kelletring's *Hawthorne's Reading 1828–1850*, she unfolds the charge-books of the Salem Athenaeum (the library in Salem, Massachusetts) to show what Hawthorne was reading during those years. The record indicates that, in addition to reading American texts, Hawthorne engrossed himself in British publications, including *BEM*.

By way of elaboration of the popularity of *BEM* in America, please indulge one piece of anecdotal evidence. *BEM* had at least two semi-official publishers in America, both located in New York. David Finkelstein notes that Leonard Scott & Co. had a semi-official agreement with the editors to publish the issue in full (*House of Blackwood* 97). Theodore Foster was the second

publisher. According to Foster's account in 1837, because *BEM* was in such high demand,⁵ he decided to make it a part of his business to supply full issues of *BEM* to his customers, something that competing periodicals were not providing. According to Foster, he bought a subscription at \$5.00 an issue (Foster 1), reset the type, and sold "verbatim cop[ies] of the original" at "a tenth of the importation rate" (11). He reported that the right to republish was incredibly expensive for him to purchase: "[*BEM*] comes here at a price so contrasted with that which is generally paid for the best prints of our own country, that there is a repugnance even to gratify one's own tastes at such a rate" (11). Because of the high price, publishers would chop up and reprint *BEM*'s issues in bits and pieces, so that the "public generally, therefore, have been contented to read such extracts as those have thought proper to give in the periodical press of America, according to the fancy of the editors" (11).

Although Foster does not explain why he did not simply pirate each issue, we can imagine that buying printing rights gave Foster's company a leg up on the competition, perhaps because he was able to advertise authorized texts and publish almost contemporaneously with the issues published in the UK. Whatever the case may have been, Foster saw that the demand was greater than the expense and decided to reprint the complete issue so that readers would not have to search through various periodicals to get the whole of each issue, never knowing for certain if they had obtained all the content a full issue of *BEM* afforded. Needing a quick turnaround rate for profit, Foster said that the "typographical labors" were the only means of delay in turnaround from when he received the issues (Foster 11). He also remarked that his printing house

⁵ The price in 1860 was 2s6d (one half crown or 2 shillings 6 pence). As of 1860, *BEM* was "[o]f some importance as an organ of opinion, its readers were upper middle to upper class, of good education, politically conservative" (Ellegard 18). Some of the cheaper monthly magazines were only 1s, the more expensive 3s6d (*New Monthly Magazine*). The printer's register "puts circulation in 1868 at 7,500." Circulation was probably higher in 1860 and earlier "before the keen competition from the cheaper magazines had started" (Ellegard 18).

took the “greatest care ... as to general correctness” and that “in execution, it is neater than any other re-print” (11). *BEM* clearly had a strong enough appeal to readers in America to warrant the kind of time, money, and attention that Foster and others took to reprint its pages. Such a highly popular and respectable venue would catch the attention of readers and writers-as-readers alike.

During Hawthorne’s most prolific writing years, which (not coincidentally) largely correspond with the years later assigned to the American Renaissance, *BEM* published two long-form reviews of Hawthorne: “The American Library” (1847) and “Modern Novelists—Great and Small” (1855). I will highlight particularly the conversation of the state of American literature *BEM* engaged in their review of Hawthorne in the 1847 article and, given the comparison in the review, I will briefly explore similarities between Hawthorne and Washington Irving. The 1855 article underscores language that colored Hawthorne as a dark, gothic, romantic writer that fit within *BEM*’s gothic brand. This interpretation of Hawthorne’s writings made him interesting to *BEM* and therefore gave him substantial clout as a major transatlantic writer.

To speak more specifically, *BEM* reviews reveal two important things about Hawthorne’s standing as an increasingly important author of the nineteenth century. I will discuss how the 1847 article posits an international literary tradition that undermines any effort toward a national (i.e., American) literature outside the boundaries or influence of a larger (Anglophone/European) tradition. Foregrounding their review of Hawthorne within this discussion was an important structural choice in that it placed him within a debate between national and international literary identities, and *BEM* acted as a staging ground to parse out the nuances of that debate. Secondly, I will discuss how the 1855 article situates Hawthorne’s literary genius (post-publication of *The Scarlet Letter*) within the parameters of his novel’s historical gothic aesthetic. This plays an

important, albeit largely unacknowledged, role in shaping Hawthorne's literary reputation as a darling of transatlantic gothicism. Due to *BEM*'s prevalence in American and British literary journal circles, *BEM* encouraged its readers to interpret Hawthorne's writings in its own way and gave language to his merits within the terms of its own aesthetic standards. *BEM* was an important authority on the gothic genre, and its power spread through American soil in major publishing cities in New England to those with access to copies of its publications. Though British and American gothic traditions have important differences,⁶ *BEM*'s transatlantic readership heavily informed the ways in which Hawthorne appealed to a wide readership within a loose gothic aesthetic.

"The American Library" (1847), National Literatures, and Transatlantic Renown

The first of *BEM*'s reviews gives more space than the other to thinking about national literary identity. *BEM* picked up the thirty-year-old debate provoked by its rival the *Edinburgh Review*'s infamous article by Sydney Smith, "Who reads an American book?" (1820), and pumped life into it when new actors like Hawthorne came on the stage.⁷ Responding to Wiley and Putnam's,⁸ "Library of American Books" (1845–1847), *BEM* again entered the ring of journals discussing what constituted American literature and what its merits were. Though consensus was not reached as to what exactly distinguished literature coming out of America as

⁶ See Teresa A. Goddu's, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (1997).

⁷ When Sydney Smith wrote this biting criticism in the *Edinburgh Review*, he sent serious reverberations throughout the transatlantic literary community. Much of early American literature fell under a large umbrella of disdain from review publications in the United Kingdom. It was popular to poke fun at the backwards Americans, who were perceived as rough and dirty and less sophisticated. If even to simply pinch a nerve and draw out more subscribers for their journals, making fun of American literature and Americans more generally was popular and ignited the tempers of American writers to respond in full.

⁸ Wiley & Putnam (1751–2013) was an American publishing house especially active during the mid-nineteenth century. They published editions of American and British authors including Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Simms, Hunt, and Carlyle (Greenspan).

“American,” the debate lends critical insight into the ways that *BEM* conceptualized a burgeoning and competing literary canon. Furthermore, it illuminates how many British readers, along with many of *BEM*’s readers in America, likely interpreted and consumed American literature. *BEM*’s reviews circulated a conversation about the merits of a transatlantic canon, breaking down the strict boundaries of nationalized literatures.

One of *BEM*’s most important contributions to the transatlantic literary tradition in these reviews was its lengthy consideration of the larger literary community in the English language. *BEM* showed a surprisingly progressive attitude towards American literature and intellectual life compared with many of its competitors (Mason, “Introduction” 1). *BEM* allowed for Americans to contribute seriously to a European literary canon and spent several pages negotiating the particulars of nationalism in literary identity and a transatlantic literary culture. *BEM* was an important voice that insisted on debunking the traditional notion of nationalist literary identity.

While the authors of the 1847 and 1855 reviews, William Henry Smith (1808–72) and Margaret Oliphant (1828–97) respectively, might have had their own interpretations of Hawthorne and feelings about American literature, I will defer to David Finkelstein’s *The House of Blackwood: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era* to support my conclusion that their work would have had to conform to some kind of “House of Blackwood” standard in order to be published. When John Blackwood came into the family business in 1840 and was made chief editor in 1845, he took a heavy-handed approach to his involvement in the firm (Finkelstein 10). It was John Blackwood’s tenure that “established Maga at the forefront of mid-Victorian literary production” as “the firm experienced unprecedented growth and success” (11). Finkelstein goes as far as to call John’s tenure a “successful dictatorship” (13).

Furthermore, as to the question of whether or not *BEM* had a house voice of its own, it would be difficult to contest that point in its early years of publication, but does the existence of style extend into the 1840's and '50's? Can we take Smith's and Oliphant's words as expressing such a style? While the overall tone or mood of the magazine may have shifted somewhat after forty years (under new management, with perhaps fewer ad hominem attacks and duels, bringing in foreign voices, expanding conceptions of the gothic, taking on publications dealing with the empire, travel, and exploration, etc.), I will affirm that, after reading articles across the decades of publication, the Victorian *Blackwood's* had a distinctive voice. Whether or not Smith or Oliphant had their own agendas reviewing Hawthorne, they were both regular contributors to the magazine and longtime readers, and it seems only reasonable that they shaped their voices, at least to some extent, to fit into the *BEM* style. Still, I wish to acknowledge the reviewers' individual weight. When writing about American literature, *BEM* did not simply employ novice writers looking to make a quick buck. Especially in the case of Oliphant's authorship, *BEM* employed a highly respected and premium contributor to review Hawthorne's novels, which would be a mark of some respect for the merits of American authors.

Before getting to Hawthorne (one of several writers under review) in *BEM*'s 1847 "The American Library," William Henry Smith (1808–1872)⁹ devoted quite a bit of space to marking the parameters of the debate concerning what constituted a national literary identity. He cited works by William Gilmore Simms (1806–1870) and Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) to make his central point: the most successful American writers were going to build on the European tradition rather than reinvent the literary wheel. In terms of Hawthorne's merits, *BEM* praised

⁹ Not to be confused with the William Henry Smith of W.H. Smith, this Smith was a philosophical critic, moral philosopher, novelist, dramatist, poet, and reviewer. He wrote this and several other reviews as a writer for *Blackwood's* for thirty years, and some of his original works were published in *Blackwood's* as well.

him as comparable to Washington Irving, which was high praise, since Irving epitomized transatlantic literary success. But why does *BEM* pick out Irving from other prominent and more contemporary writers? I can only posit a potential rationale: *BEM* was familiar with the work and transatlantic legacy of Irving, and Smith saw thematic and structural similarities that contributed to Hawthorne's ability to appeal to their transatlantic audience. *BEM* appreciated Hawthorne for following in the steps of Irving both in terms of content (dark romantic) and form (historical narrative) as well as his ability to reach a wider audience than the former colonists. This is significant to note because Hawthorne's reputation as an "American" author was being negotiated within these pages. Hawthorne's publications became occasions for *BEM* writers like Smith to discuss the "English" literary canon in ways that shaped Hawthorne's reputation and defined him, paradoxically, as a distinctly American voice.

BEM reproduced the words of William Gilmore Simms¹⁰ and Margaret Fuller¹¹, which had been included in Wiley and Putnam's "Library of American Books," and which called for a national literature. In hindsight, 1847 was coming on to an important era (the 1850s) for American literature, and many American writers were calling out for literature that could be labeled in nationalistic terms.

Cynicism toward such nationalism prefaces Smith's analysis and becomes a lens through which readers would be encouraged to interpret the writings of the authors under review. In laying the groundwork for a discussion of the state of American literature, Smith first articulates the terms of that debate within the magazine: "Nationality one is sure to have, whether desirable or not, but the great writers of every people are unquestionably those who, without foregoing

¹⁰ *BEM* quotes from an untitled essay, however, *BEM*'s larger project criticizes Simms's novel, *The Wigwam and the Cabin* (1845).

¹¹ Fuller's essay is entitled "Papers on Literature and Art."

their national character, rise to be countrymen of the world” (“The American Library” 577). In other words, the only writers who will rise to the standard of great American writers will be those who rise to the ranks of great writers in the wider (i.e., European)¹² world. Smith criticized Simms for calling for American writers to forego the literary tradition of their ancestral homes and to write something new. Smith remained unenthusiastic about strict literary nationalism, and in a characteristically biting tone, he argued that “Mr. Sims, instead of complaining that his fellow-countrymen are European (may more of them become so!), should be assured of this, that it is only those who rise to European reputation that can be the founders of an American literature” (577). The American tradition, therefore, could only be worthwhile if it remained cosmopolitan and inspired by the European tradition. Ironically, to work from a blank slate would isolate and deflate any attempt at creating a national literature. Those seeking to be the most notable American writers should seek to also be the most European. In similar, though not quite as biting terms, Smith also criticized Margaret Fuller’s call for a national literature.

In the Wiley and Putnam reprint of Fuller’s “Papers on Literature and Art,” as Smith reports, Fuller called for an “original idea” to “animate a whole nation” (577). Smith responded to her patriotic injunction with skepticism, saying, “it sounds fit and congruous that the new world ... should give us a new truth; and yet, as this new world was, in fact, peopled by inhabitants from the old, who have carried on life much in the same way as it has been conducted in the ancient quarters of the globe, we fear there is little more chance of the revelation of a great original idea in one hemisphere than the other” (576). It does not do an author any good to take on the overwhelming task of trying to come up with something no one has said before—and if

¹² I will use the word “European” because that is the word that *BEM* uses; however, *BEM* writers do little to differentiate British from continental literary traditions. (The same was true of many Americans, as when Whitman called for sending the “corpse of European literature out the door.”) For the sake of this argument, I will sometimes use “European” synonymously with “English” to encompass cultural traditions wherever English speakers may be.

they do, it would not be of interest to anyone outside of a small circle. Furthermore, it would be impossible to shed oneself, to “*uneducate*” (576) oneself of the tradition from which one’s language and heritage derive. Since the American people are historically European (never mind the complications of that assertion), Smith argued that to embrace rather than shirk that heritage would be better for creating a national literary identity. In essence, the argument *BEM* made in 1847 was for an aggregative canon: if someone wanted to shine as an American author, he or she would do better by drawing from and adding to a European tradition. By shaping work to appeal to a transatlantic audience, that writer might also become a key figure in a national American literary tradition.

Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, though American literary critics have deemed it one of the most iconic works of the “American Renaissance,” is framed within a transnational context that highlights the complications of nationalized literature that the *BEM* review articulates. Hawthorne’s novel orients itself within that shared history. Hawthorne, well aware of a transatlantic audience, wrote *The Scarlet Letter* harkening back to a time when, though rooted on American soil, the people were very much British: “The persons now in the market-place of Boston had not been born to an inheritance of Puritanic gloom. They were native Englishmen, whose fathers had lived in the sunny richness of the Elizabethan epoch; a time when the life of England, viewed as one great mass, would appear to have been as stately, magnificent, and joyous, as the world as ever witnessed” (Hawthorne 230). On the New England Holiday, “sports [were not] wanting, such as the colonists had witnessed, and shared in, long ago, at the country fairs and on the village-greens of England; and which it was though well to keep alive on this new soil, for the sake of the courage and manliness that were essential in them” (231). Hawthorne created a sense of unity and shared historical narrative with his English audience by

drawing on a time when both nations were connected by important aspects of cultural identity. It was the success of *The Scarlet Letter* that cemented Hawthorne's reputation as a foundational figure for nineteenth-century American literature, yet by situating his story within a shared history, Hawthorne broadened his audience and got the attention of powerful institutions like *BEM* that would circulate his merits widely between the Britain and America.

While Hawthorne is celebrated as an iconic "American" both inside and outside of *BEM*, his story supports the view that often the American writers able to get traction in a transatlantic marketplace were the least American, or the least nationalist in approach.¹³ *BEM*'s 1847 article implies that the writers in America best able to utilize the European tradition from which their language was born are the ones most palatable to an English audience. Smith insists that "the day that sees the American poet or philosopher taking his place in the high European diet of sages and of poets, is the day when the national literature has become confirmed and established" (577). The key to establishing a new literary order, then, was to appeal to and circulate among the European writers of the same tradition. The savviest of early American writers conscientiously appealed to a complexly transatlantic, and I would argue, mainly British audience. As Smith puts it,

But it is altogether a superfluous and futile anxiety which agitates these writers. A national literature the Americans will assuredly have, if they have a literature at all. It cannot fail to assume a certain national colour, although it would be impossible beforehand to fix and determine it. ... And how egregious a mistake to imagine that they would hasten the advent of an American literature by discarding

¹³ Irving's work was highly Euro-centric (despite how it's remembered now) and actually sometimes criticized for that. Some Americans didn't feel he was national enough.

European models, and breaking from the influence of European modes of thought! ... They cannot discard European models without an act of mental suicide; and who sees not that it is only by embracing all, appropriating all, competing with all, that the new and independent literature can be formed? And, after all, what is this great boast of *nationality* in literature? Whatever is most excellent in the literature of every country is precisely that which belongs to *humanity*, and not to the nation. (577)

Not only would ignoring the European models be unprofitable, but, dramatically, “an act of mental suicide” (577). Literary identity, therefore, was more than simply starting something new, in terms of the sustainability of that tradition, it was a matter of life and death.

One of the best examples of a successful writer who seemed to embrace the European tradition was Washington Irving, and Hawthorne followed Irving’s footsteps in his ability to appeal to a British audience. To open his review of American literature in 1847, Smith quickly made reference to Hawthorne and compared his work to the influential *Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* He remarked, “‘Mosses from an Old Manse’ is occasionally written with an elegance of style which may almost bear comparison with that of Washington Irving” (“American” 574). Hawthorne resembles Irving in his use of historical narrative, his application of folklore, and his reformulation of history as psychological romance.

The previous century witnessed an international pattern of looking backwards for stories to form a national identity in Britain and America. It is no coincidence that Irving and Hawthorne used imaginative narratives to create a history for America. Their heritage focus both marked them as American (because they often looked to the American past and American settings for legitimacy in their writings) and gave them credence in the European tradition. Marta

Gutiérrez Rodríguez insists on the importance of the historical narrative in American literary history. What she argues of the abilities of James Fennimore Cooper and John Neal¹⁴ to tap into “[t]his interest in the history of the country” (33) can be said of both Irving and Hawthorne as well. Popular interest in the historical narrative arguably began with the writings of Sir Walter Scott in Britain and Cooper in America. These two men were among the most respected and influential writers in their respective countries as the forefathers of the historical romance narrative. To their historical narratives, Hawthorne and Irving added an enchanted world, a dark place full of stories of witch hunts, walks with the devil, and headless horsemen. These elements enlivened and animated American history for readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

In addition to writing historical romances, Hawthorne followed Irving’s footsteps in appealing to the British audience via the gothic. As an authority on the gothic in both Britain and America, *BEM* is an important reviewer for any writer intentionally (or unintentionally) trying to be taken seriously within that genre. Ringe asserts that in early nineteenth century fiction, “In England sensational tales that played upon the predicament of a protagonist in some frightening situation began to appear in the journals, and the genre was brought to its fullest development in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, which soon became identified with it” (*American Gothic* 58).

¹⁴ One of the most important responses to Sydney Smith’s criticism came from American writer, John Neal, who between 1824–1825, wrote an encyclopedia-like catalog of American literature entitled “American Writers.” In these long articles, published sporadically over a series of months, *BEM* opened up a crucial transnational conversation. While many people have explored the literary merits and impact of *BEM*, the implications of its influence in America or have not been fully explored. *BEM* served as a staging ground for framing and teasing out the parameters of the debate surrounding Smith’s question and larger questions of what American literature was during some of the first years of its conception. In an odd way, Neal’s *BEM* article offered a backhanded defense of American literature by watering it down into a transatlantic English literature, which would make sense to make it more palatable to British readers. By the time *BEM* was writing reviews of American writers we recognize from the American Renaissance (notably Hawthorne) in the 1840s and 50s, it again took up the question of the transatlantic nature of “English” literature. Consistently, then, across decades, *BEM* became an important stage to negotiate the boundaries of American and British literature by downplaying geographic boundaries.

The relationship between *BEM* and the gothic is important because Irving had charmed the British populous with his ghostly tales and had become a well-admired figure of American literature for the British. In many ways, Irving set the tone for what was (and still is) seen as the “best of” American literature.

Irving also made important contributions to the psychological character of gothic narratives. Commenting on the gothic tradition in Irving’s writings, Ringe argues that Irving reveals “the purely mental basis of Gothic experience. ... In effect, it affirms the reality of the world perceived through reason—the world of common sense and prosaic daylight” (*American Gothic* 143). Paul Giles agrees with Ringe’s assertion of the psychological focus of Irving’s gothic narratives. He takes Ringe’s argument further to say that “Hawthorne, of course, was read in this kind of way for years, as a social realist whose paraphernalia of Gothicism lent a charming, if somewhat old-fashioned, aspect to his literary productions” (*Transatlantic Insurrections* 143). While other periodicals, as Tompkins writes, portray Hawthorne as a sentimentalist, *BEM* framed his literature within a gothic standard that favored the deep psychological complexity of his writings,¹⁵ and it was this trait in his writing that they admired and that reminded them of Irving.

Smith’s review of Hawthorne’s *Mosses from an Old Manse*, a collection of short stories including “The Birthmark,” “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” and the favorite of almost any latter-day classroom on nineteenth-century literature, “Young Goodman Brown,” is a mixed bag. Hawthorne, according to Smith, “perpetually gives his reader, who, being pleased by parts, would willingly think well of the whole, some little awkward specimen of dubious taste”

¹⁵ *BEM* was not the only periodical to interpret Hawthorne as such. Its reviews (though of course in a very distinctive style) are fairly representative of how other periodicals interpreted Hawthorne as a gothic writer. I pick *BEM* as a representative authority because of its close association with the gothic genre.

(“American Library” 590). Smith did not appreciate how the stories in *Mosses from an Old Manse* did not align with actual life, complaining that “the most serious defect in his stories is the frequent presence of some palpable improbability which mars the effect of the whole” (588). He specified that “[u]nfortunately, in Mr Hawthorne’s stories, it is the human being himself who is not probable, nor possible” (588). Toeing the line between fiction and fantasy, flirting with improbabilities, was one of the hallmarks of the gothic genre, but according to this authority on the gothic, Hawthorne missed the mark—at least in *Mosses from an Old Manse*.

After the publication and international success of *The Scarlet Letter*, however, *BEM* would reevaluate Hawthorne’s craft; either Hawthorne perfected the art of writing in mystery and dark romanticism or *BEM* (at least Oliphant) would simply come to different conclusions about his writing. The gothic would become the genre for which Hawthorne would be revered both inside and outside of *BEM*’s reviews. Still, although Smith did not totally buy his merits, *BEM* did devote a little more than five pages to review Hawthorne’s short stories. Whatever their overall impression was, it is significant that Hawthorne’s short stories in *Mosses from an Old Manse* warranted minute attention by one of the most respectable literary magazines on either side of the Atlantic.

“Modern Novelists—Great and Small” and the Gothic Standard

The *BEM* reviews provide an important window through which to understand Hawthorne from a British perspective. This literary journal would play a key role in Hawthorne’s reputation in particular because, as noted, *BEM* was instrumental in publishing and popularizing gothic fiction. Julia Straub makes important claims as to the formative role literary magazine culture played in culture that “sustained and nourished the Gothic throughout the nineteenth century and was instrumental in popularizing and disseminating works” (271). *BEM* made itself

indispensable to any English-speaking culture whose literary tradition relied heavily on the gothic. On the popularity of *BEM* on both sides of the Atlantic and its subsequent importance to writers like Hawthorne, Julia Straub, editor of the *Handbook of Transatlantic North American Studies*, affirms,

No magazine has had a more significant impact on the Gothic on both sides of the Atlantic than the Edinburgh *Blackwood's Magazine*, which [was] “read and discussed by everyone from Byron and Wordsworth to John Wilson Croker and the Duke of Wellington and influenced, among others, Poe, Hawthorne, Browning, Dickens and Charlotte and Emily Bronte. (271)

BEM constructed a standard for gothic literature that extended beyond the borders of the British Isles. The gothic genre connected writers across the Atlantic and brought their work into communication with one another, which prompted *BEM* to review the novels of, say, Charlotte Brontë and Hawthorne in the same article in 1855. Furthermore, the title, “Modern Novelists—Great and Small,” erased any national literary identity. According to *BEM*’s review, by 1855 the literary community extended beyond geographic and political borders and went into realms of literary merit.

By 1855, five years after the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* had established Hawthorne’s fame, the popularity of Hawthorne’s novels and stories had caught *BEM*’s attention once again, and this time they were more generous in praise. In “Modern Novelists—Great and Small,” a particular kind of Hawthorne emerges. Casting him in terms of its own gothic standard, *BEM* reviewed Hawthorne’s novels as dark romances, full of interiority, psychological complexity, drama, and the strange. Though of course not the only periodical to notice or comment on these elements of Hawthorne’s works, *BEM* is an important voice to consider given

its wide publication throughout Britain and America and its reputation for gothic texts. With so many voices contributing to the ways American literature developed and matured during the mid-nineteenth century, this consideration gives us a more complete picture of Hawthorne's reputation during his lifetime.

Though on the whole his short stories in *Mosses from an Old Manse* fell short of *BEM*'s standard, *The Scarlet Letter*'s success called for a reevaluation of Hawthorne's abilities. In her review, Margaret Oliphant admitted, almost with chagrin, that "Had the reputation of this gentleman [Hawthorne] been confined to his own country, it would have been out of our sphere of comment; but he has had great popularity on this side of the Atlantic, where we understand he is now resident, and his books have perhaps excited the public curiosity almost as much as the books of Miss Brontë" ("Modern Novelists" 563).¹⁶ It seems that Hawthorne had to one extent or another forced himself onto a transatlantic stage, and *BEM* had to reevaluate its interpretation of his art. In light of a gothic standard, Oliphant praised Hawthorne's novels because they are "dramas of extraordinary dumb show, before which, in darkness and breathless silence, you sit and look on, never sure for a moment that the dimly-lighted stage before you is not to be visited by the dioramic thunders of an earthquake, falling houses, moaning victims, dismay and horror and gloom" (563). Very much in the aesthetic of a nineteenth-century gothic melodrama, *BEM* glories in the merits of *The Scarlet Letter*.

The language Oliphant used to characterize *The Scarlet Letter* is indicative of *BEM*'s own gothic paradigm. Oliphant painted a dramatic picture of the novel: "*The Scarlet Letter*

¹⁶ Hawthorne, at the time, was stationed in Britain on a political appointment as consul in Liverpool for the U.S. from his friend the president Franklin Pierce between 1853–1857.

glows with the fire of a suppressed, secret, feverish excitement” (563). She characterized Hawthorne’s most famous novel as deep and otherworldly, for “it is not the glow of natural life, but the hectic of disease which burns upon the cheeks of its actors” (563). Here, Oliphant used language of the gothic tradition to praise Hawthorne’s style. She continued, “we have a perpetual strain of excitement—a fire that neither wanes nor lessens, but keeps at its original scorching heat for years” (563). Furthermore, “the volcano is muttering and growling in the depths of the earth; there is an ominous stillness, like the pause before a great peal of thunder. Nor is the air once clear, nor the fever dissipated, till, with a sigh of relief, we escape from the unwholesome fascination of this romance, and find ourselves in a world which is not always tending towards some catastrophe” (563). Moral judgment aside, using this language taught *BEM*’s readers to interpret Hawthorne’s novel in particularly intense, rich, and deeply complex ways. Oliphant used the same standard to review *Blithedale Romance*, but she focused on characters rather than themes.

Though not quite as taken with the characters and plot of this one, Oliphant used similarly gothic language to review *Blithedale Romance*. She opened with, “In the *Blythedale Romance*, we have still less of natural character, and more of a diseased and morbid conventional life” (564). That lack of “natural character” is not a value statement in and of itself. *BEM* could appreciate “morbid[ness],” more so than some other publications, but there was a limit. As for characters, Zenobia is “imperious and splendid,” and Pricilla is a “pale clairvoyant” and “victim” (564). Paul Pry and Miles Coverdale are “meddling, curious, impertinent rogue[s]” (564). The descriptions of the four main characters sound as though they could have been pulled straight out of an Ann Radcliffe novel. The women are victims, and the men are reprobates.

While character descriptions might have cleared the bar, it was the setting and plot that Oliphant wished had more finesse: “How thoroughly worn out and *blasé* must that young world be, which gets up excitements in its languid life, only by means of veiled ladies, mysterious clairvoyants, rapping spirits, or, in a milder fashion, by sherry-cobbler and something cocktails for men, and lectures on the rights of women for the ladies” (564). This plot description also sounds like it comes straight out of a conventional piece of gothic fiction: “veiled ladies, mysterious clairvoyants, rapping spirits,” and the like. Hawthorne’s world is “strange” and sets up “supernatural intercourse,” “warming up with occult and forbidden influences the cold and waveless tide of life” (564). *Blithedale Romance* did not seem to fit into Hawthorne’s larger body of work—it was not historical, and it was neither pure gothic nor recognizable realism—and *BEM* was not sure what to make of it. Oliphant ended by saying that for all of Hawthorne’s successes, he missed the audience for novels a little bit by trying to appeal to intellectuals, for “The novelist’s true audience is the common people—the people of ordinary comprehension and everyday sympathies, whatever their rank may be” (565). *BEM* did not know how to interpret *Blithedale Romance* given the Hawthorne they were familiar with, had constructed, and understood from *The Scarlet Letter* and Hawthorne’s earlier works. Even for *BEM*, Hawthorne’s works articulated a complex legacy; they could not fully be reduced to a particular formula. Still, Hawthorne’s dark romanticism prevailed in most evaluations of his work and therefore in cultural memory. Because of its integral role developing the gothic genre, *BEM* helped to shape the “best of” American literature, privileging the strange, mysterious, dangerous, and terrible.

In sum, consistent with the gothic aesthetic, *BEM*’s writers foregrounded the strangeness of Hawthorne’s writing, the regional flavor of his settings, and the odd morality of his stories and characters. These areas of focus seem to have played a significant role in defining *BEM*

principles as the magazine grappled with a competing literary tradition and sought to place it within the value structures of its own. *BEM* reviews aimed to teach both British and American readers how to read Hawthorne, what to value in his writings, and how to conceptualize him as compared to other literary figures of the time. They helped invent the “Hawthorne” that would later dominate literature courses in American schools.

Conclusion

BEM served as a staging ground for framing and teasing out the parameters of the debate of Sydney Smith’s famous question of the merit of American literature and of larger questions of what American literature was during some of the most important years of its nationalist and literary identity. Gothicism is one of the ways that *BEM* pointed to a transatlantic tradition for Anglophone letters. Gothic writing obviously had its roots in Europe, a genealogical connection that *BEM* was quick to point to in later praise of Hawthorne’s writing. In “The American Library,” William Smith quotes Simms’s frustrated complaint that “with very few exceptions, their [American authors’] writings might as well be European. They are European. The writers think after European models, draw their stimulus and provocation from European books, fashion themselves to European tastes, and look chiefly to awards of European criticism. This is to denationalise the American mind” (575). And continuing with characteristic hyperbole, *BEM* rebuffed with,

All the literati of Europe are manifestly in league to sap the constitution and destroy the independence of America; and, at this very time, its own men of letters—the traitors!—are seeking a European reputation. ...America can no more begin a literature, no more start fresh from its woods and its prairies, than we here in England could commence a literature; neither can it any more abstract itself

from the influence of its own institutions, the temper of its people, its history, its natural scenery than we here in England can manumit ourselves from the influence of the age in which we live. (575–576)

Whether we take this seriously is up for debate and perhaps not expected, but it does highlight the point that *BEM* sought to break down the barriers between nationalized literatures, consciously joining the “best of” American literature with their own European tradition.

While some other literary magazines like the *Edinburgh Review* dismissed the merit of American writing out of hand, *BEM* spent pages and pages discussing the highs and lows of American literature. On *BEM*’s willingness to publish about American literature during its first decade, Nicholas Mason wrote,

If any aspect of *Blackwood's* early years should motivate a reassessment of the traditional, reductive view of the magazine as insular and close-minded, it is its attitude towards American literature and culture. ... [T]he *Blackwood's* circle showed a remarkably cosmopolitan spirit in its willingness to devote a major portion of the magazine to the intellectual scene in the United States.

(“Introduction” 1)

I would argue that this argument is even more relevant to *BEM*’s consideration of American literature in the 1840s and ‘50s. As the power of *BEM* grew, and its reputation became more established, what went inside the magazine had to meet a high standard and had to be of importance to the magazine’s established brand. Reviewers’ attention to American literature would not have held as much importance had it come from a less prominent magazine. As one of the most widely disseminated journals of its age, *BEM* made reverberations of its influence felt across the Atlantic.

Readdressing *BEM*'s influence on transatlantic gothic reshapes how we interpret the "American Renaissance." Looking at the case of Nathaniel Hawthorne in particular should shape the trajectory of scholarship on the literature of his period. Most scholars when studying a transatlantic *BEM* point only to its connection with Poe.¹⁷ Although it is well documented that Poe had a sensitive relationship with *BEM*, scholars have not adequately analyzed Nathaniel Hawthorne's relationship with the immensely popular magazine nor its relationship with him. Lease's documentation of Hawthorne's friends' letters and *Hawthorne's Reading*, however, show us that Hawthorne was indeed connected to the literary magazine, and the two reviews in 1847 and 1855 illustrate how *BEM* was interested in Hawthorne, in what light they framed his work, and the rubric with which they judged his short stories and novels. These reviews also shed light on how *BEM* received American literature as a competing, meritorious tradition in its own right.

To ignore *BEM* in American literature during the American Renaissance is to ignore one of the most widely disseminated, demanded, and digested literary magazines of the age that helped define the parameters of the best of American literature as later defined by the American Renaissance critics. The implications of *BEM*'s influence extend into the twentieth century. Because of *BEM*'s integral role in shaping the gothic, the fact that New Critics praised Hawthorne for his gothic writings necessarily leads us to acknowledge *BEM*'s role in that long-term reception process. Understanding *BEM* in America and its reception of American literature helps us understand a transatlantic print and review culture that dominated the 1800s and shaped the literature that came out of that period. For much of that century, including the 1850s,

¹⁷ See Daniel E. Lees's "An Early Model for Poe's 'the Raven'" (1970); J. L. Dameron's "Poe, 'Simplicity,' and Blackwood's Magazine" (1998) and "Poe, Blackwood's, and Archibald Alison's Essays on Taste" (2012); Bonnie S. McMullen's "'A Desert of Ebony': Poe, Blackwood's, and Tales of the Sea" (2010); Ilse M. Bussing's "Complicit Bodies: Excessive Sensibilities and Haunted Space" (2016).

transnational models of canon had more purchase than nationalist ones—at least, so suggests the archive of *BEM*, which represents a major current of Anglophone culture. American writers like Hawthorne knew this, and they established themselves *as* American authors precisely by finding their way in a transatlantic marketplace.

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