The School of Hawthorne: New England Women Writers after the Civil War

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One of the commonplaces of Hawthorne criticism has been, for about fifty years now, a claim of feminist critics that the author of *The Scarlet Letter* detested women writers of his time, who were actually making much more money paid for their novels than he ever made. The best known piece of evidence in this respect is of course Hawthorne’s letter of January 15, 1855 addressed to his publisher and friend James Ticknor, who urged him to resign from his tedious consular position in Liverpool and return to the US to resume writing:

> Besides, America is now wholly given over to a d----d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of the Lamplighter and other books neither better nor worse?—worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 100,000. (The Centenary Edition 304)

In her essay included in a volume perhaps surprisingly titled *Hawthorne and Women. Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*, Nina Baym took the “Hawthorne-and-women” question into consideration one more time, and attempted to analyze both his two 1855 letters to Fields, in which he referred to women writers—the other one praising Fanny Fern for *Ruth Hall* (Hawthorne, *The Centenary Edition* 307-08)—and the context of his literary and diplomatic careers signalized by “besides.” Baym’s conclusion confirms the difference between Maria Cummins and her detractor: the author of *The Lamplighter* tackled important social issues, while Hawthorne preferred the ethereal realm of symbolic aesthetics and decided to remain aloof, distant from the down-to-earth problems of gender, sexuality, and class. Paradoxically, however, almost all of the twenty-three essays published in the collection point in different ways to significant links connecting Hawthorne’s female contemporaries and successors to their personal friend and/or sometimes not so obvious literary mentor.
In mid-September 1919, Fred Lewis Pattee, professor of American literature at Penn State, wrote a letter to Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, in which he included a number of questions concerning her biography and literary works. He was preparing a new edition of *A New England Nun and Other Stories* with his introduction and wanted as much information as possible to uphold his editorial authority. Among others, the list of questions included one typical of critics, bringing to mind Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s oft-quoted letter to Emily Dickinson:

I think you were caught in the realistic rush of the 80s and early 90s with its fierce demand for the concrete, the localized unusual, the Kipling rush and freshness, the short unit of measure, and were swept along in spite of yourself. Had you been born a generation earlier you would have been either a lyricist with intense notes or a Hawthorne working problems with the deeper materials of the human heart. You are in soul more akin to Hawthorne than to anyone else. Am I right in my conjecture? (Freeman, *Infant Sphinx* 385)

As if foreboding Pattee’s study of the sentimental women’s fiction of the 1850s, *The Feminine Fifties* (1940), written without much respect for its once popular authors, Wilkins Freeman responded in a rather surprising way. Most likely, she decided to play a game with the professor who might have seemed to her just a bit too sure of himself and his academic expertise:

You may be right. Given perfect freedom of choice, which I was not given, I might have been a lyricist, but the notes would certainly have been ‘intense.’ I do not know if I am ‘akin to Hawthorne.’ I do not care for him as I care for Tolstoi, Scheinkewitz, and Hardy. You understand. I have never bothered to analyze myself, and I fear I cannot. (*Infant Sphinx* 385)

Author of thirteen collections of short stories and several novels, including *Pembroke*—next to Jewett’s *Deephaven* the best literary record of the postbellum New England’s crisis—Wilkins Freeman refused to confirm Pattee’s opinion and pretended to be a naïve, natural talent, unable to account for her cultural background. On the other hand, the professor failed to do his homework and did not read or reread the reviews of her books, in which she was quite often placed near Hawthorne, even if not always in her favor.¹ About six decades later in *School of Hawthorne* (1986) Richard Brodhead expressed no doubts that “Hawthorne’s presence runs through American local color fiction, formally the most traditional of its genres. A romance line comes out of Hawthorne…. [b]ut no less impressive realist line comes out of him too” (Brodhead 16). Brodhead preferred not to go into detail in this respect, choosing as an object of analysis the work of Howells and James, but he believed that New England women writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries owed much to *Mosses from an Old Manse* and *The House of the Seven Gables*. Wilkins Freeman, Rose Terry Cooke, Alice Brown, Annie Trumbull Slosson, and Sarah Orne Jewett were definitely realists deeply rooted in the New England mores and landscape, familiar with local dialects (particularly Slosson), traditions, and the predicament of the present, yet they were also in a number of ways the heirs of Hawthorne. Most importantly, like the author of “Young Goodman Brown” and “The Minister’s Black Veil,” they proved unable to stop moving between the region’s past, sometimes quite remote, and their own time after the Civil War, won by the Union, but at a fearful cost.²

The cultural situation in the US Northeast after four years of continuous fighting and bloodshed has been summed up by Perry D. Westbrook in his *New England Town in Fact and Fiction*:
The years following the Civil War... were a time of widespread disillusionment. The millennial hopes... could not be so confidently entertained after the nation had temporarily disintegrated and become whole again only after enormous expenditures of life and property and a severe erosion of spiritual values.... [A] tangible cause of pessimism among New England writers was [also] the region's social and economic decline. (Westbrook 161-62)

Due to the heavy loss of men—fallen, injured or compelled to emigrate in search for opportunities—women had to, or perhaps were finally entitled to take over the responsibilities that formerly had been almost exclusively masculine according to the doctrine of separate spheres. They had to support themselves, the children, and the elderly, keep paying mortgage, cultivate land, sail on their own, and sometimes do the traditional fishing. On top of that, they got rare chances to find a husband and start a family, which meant far reaching consequences for the local population. A perfect illustration of that is Wilkins Freeman's story "A Taste of Honey" from A Humble Romance (1887). Inez Morse, who lives with her mother, loses her chance to get married because, focused on paying a bank debt, she neglects the appropriate social occasions where young women could meet young men. When she is ready for another priority, it is too late. Another relevant example is of course the best known story by Wilkins Freeman, "A New England Nun," opening her second volume of the same title (1891). Louisa Ellis has been waiting for her fiancé for fourteen years and when Joe Daggett at last shows up, it turns out that communication between them is impossible, so she is actually relieved, realizing that he has chosen another woman. (The collapse of communication, to which I will come back again later, is a major symptom of the New England variety of decadence.) Last but not least, it also became the women writers’ task to represent the postbellum condition of the Northeastern states. Among them, there was just one male local colorist: Rowland Robinson.

Most often, the setting of the narratives in question is a small town or even a single house in such a town, occupied by a family or what has been left of it. Sometimes the house may be abandoned, haunted by the generations of its dead residents. This is the case of Alice Brown’s story "A Last Assembling" from Tiverton Tales, published in 1899. Dilly Joyce, a descendant of a respectable but now almost extinct New England family, hesitates to accept Jethro Moore’s proposal and move with him to Chicago to start a new life of modern luxury. Coming for possibly the last visit to her ancestor’s home, she takes a rest among old furniture and experiences a rapport with the past:

As soon as Dilly had entered the sitting-room, where the old desk stood in its place, and the clock was ticking, she felt as if all her confusion and trouble were over. She smiled to herself in the darkness. She had come home and it was very good... She drew forward her father’s chair, and sat down in it, with luxurious abandonment, to rest. Her mother’s little cricket was by her side, and she put her feet on it and exhaled a long sigh of content. Her eyes rested on the dark cavern which was the fireplace; and there fell upon her a sweet sense of completed bliss, as if it were alight and she could watch the dancing flames. And suddenly Dilly was aware that the Joyces were all about her. (Brown 167-68)

At this moment, Brown’s story clearly reaches back both to “The Custom House” with its nocturnal “domestic scenery” virtually haunted by ghosts, “where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet” (Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter 28), and to The House of the Seven Gables, left by Hepzibah, Clifford, Phoebe, and Holgrave. Hawthorne’s characters are happy to be able to leave the accursed place, hoping to find peace and quiet in the countryside, while Dilly Joyce, on the contrary, decides to stay and renounce the
tempting prosperous future. Enjoying her father’s chair, she appears quite close to another nostalgic New Englander, Richard Henry Dana, Sr., who in 1817 published in the *North American Review* a sketch titled “Old Times”:

I went to my heart when they cleared the old parlour of the venerable family furniture, and stripped the oak panels of the prints of the months.... [T]he old furniture was huddled together topsy-turvy in the garret. The round oak table, which had many a day smoked with the substantial dinners of former times, lost one of its leaves by too rough handling; but an old oak desk, at which my grandfather in his days of courtship was wont to pen epistles and sonnets to my grandmother, escaped the violence of the revolution with only a few scratches. I have had the gust wiped off its black polish, brought it down by my study fire, and place before it the old gentleman’s armchair, which I found standing calm and stately upon its four legs, amidst the disordered rubbish of the garret.... I am seated in it this moment; and with my pen fresh dipped in its leaden inkstand, shall scribble on till my mind and heart are eased. (Dana 3-4)

Dana’s vantage point, like Brown’s, is also directed at the distant past even before the rise of the United States, against the American grain. His alter ego feels comfortable in grandfather’s colonial armchair which helps him adjust to the aftermath of the revolution—the domestic one as well as the political. One seems to be an allegory of the other. Dilly Joyce faces a revolution, too—industrial and commercial, pushing into oblivion New England’s past glory, announcing a new era when Chicago, not Boston, will become the ‘hub of the universe.’ Indeed, Brown’s local color fiction proves to be the most traditional genre not only formally. Using Hawthorne’s ‘progressive’ matrix—an ancient mansion that is a trap for generations of the Pyncheons, but eventually lets them go—Brown turned it upside down, changing the atmosphere from suffocating decay to life-giving hope. As we will see, however, few houses found in the stories written by New England women writers after the Civil War are good places to live.

One of the most impressive horror stories by Wilkins Freeman is “The Southwest Chamber.” In a big house in a nameless small town live two unmarried elderly sisters and a young daughter of the already dead third one, who helps her aunts with chores. There are no men around and since Sophia and Amanda Gill have no inherited funds, their only regular source of income are rooms for rent. Usually lodgers have no reasons to complain, but the spacious southwest room differs from all the other chambers available to strangers. Whoever makes an attempt to spend a night in it, realizes that she or he is not welcome there. Some power either plays tricks on the occupant, or even poses a serious danger to the occupant’s life, as when Mrs. Elvira Simmons wakes up at midnight and feels that her nightcap is trying to strangle her, while a minister, the only man in the story, cannot even enter the room because the air all of a sudden turns solid, so he is literally unable to cross the threshold. Finally, Sophia Gill dares to try her luck. Inside the chamber, both her body and mind are invaded by the presence of someone else:

She looked in the glass and saw, instead of her softly parted waves of hair, harsh lines of iron-gray under the black borders of an old-fashioned head dress. She saw instead of her smooth, broad forehead, a high one wrinkled with the intense concentration of selfish reflection of a long life; she saw instead of her steady blue eyes, black ones with depths of malignant reserve; behind a broad meaning of ill will; she saw instead of her firm benevolent mouth one with a hard, thin line, a network of melancholic wrinkles. She saw instead of her own face, middle-aged and good to see, the expression of a life of honesty and good will to others and patience under trials, the face of a very old woman scowling forever with unceasing hatred.
and misery at herself and all others, at life, and death, and that which had been and
that which was to come. (Freeman, *Collected Ghost Stories* 155)

12 Shocked by her metamorphosis, Sophia recognizes in the mirror the face of Aunt
Harriet, long dead, who could never accept her sister’s decision to marry a poor man
against their mother’s will. Since now the family house belongs to the progeny of the
disobedient woman, Harriet keeps haunting the chamber that she used to occupy,
persecuting the lodgers thanks to whose rent money the unwanted proprietors make
ends meet. It is hard to determine which decade of New England history the story
refers to, but it definitely portrays the world in which men are few and their position is
marginal. The senior family member in charge is the mother, no father is ever
mentioned, and Mr. Gill, the improper gentleman-caller and then husband, initiates a
string of misfortunes. Sophia Gill realizes that she has no choice but to sell the house.
Otherwise, its residents will not get rid of the past.

13 Homes and houses figure prominently in Wilkins Freeman’s fiction, both domestic
gothic and just domestic, sometimes in quite unusual ways. For example, in “The
Vacant Lot” the house happens not to be haunted, but haunting—it appears on a lot in
Boston that seems unoccupied, with no visible traces of its lingering traumatic history.
A special case of haunting is also “The Lost Ghost”: once again, the characters are
women only, who either indirectly or directly confront a specter of a little girl, gentle
and confused, continually repeating the same complaint: “I can’t find my mother!”
Even though humans can hear her speak, they cannot answer her because she cannot
hear them. As it transpires, she was abandoned by the mother and died of hunger in a
locked room, an obstacle to the parent’s new amorous relationship. Under the
circumstances, the house turns into a prison, with the girl as a convict and a victim.
The family of which she had originally been a member fell apart, depriving her of a
place to live—ultimately, one of the women volunteers to lead her to an alternative
shelter in heaven.

14 A similar revenant, in this case a boy, shows up in “A Speakin’ Ghost” by Slosson. House
sitting for several months in New York City, the narrator, a woman from New
Hampshire, misses her native region badly until one night she is apparently visited by a
ghost that speaks with a strong New England accent. Each time the boy materializes,
like the dead girl from Wilkins Freeman’s story, he asks the same question: “Don’t you
want to hear me speak my piece?,” and immediately after that he continues, reciting
some cryptic distich, never to be repeated twice. The first piece reads as follows: “My
name is Norvle; on the cramping hills / My father feeds his flock” (Slosson 244). It
seems to be a kind of self-presentation, but in fact it is a slightly modified quote from
the eighteenth-century Scottish poet John Home, and all the subsequent pieces, always
distichs as well, also come from literary texts. At first surprised and a little
apprehensive, the woman is also very pleased, somehow getting an idea that the boy
visits her to receive necessary religious education according to the Westminster
Shorter Catechism, which he did not have a chance to acquire when alive. No matter
what the ghost recites, all his pieces are interpreted in a religious key and when the
task has been completed he disappears never to return. Like in a number of
Hawthorne’s tales, perhaps most notably in “Young Goodman Brown,” the reader finds
it difficult to decide whether the encounter with “Norvle” was a figment of the
narrator’s imagination or a series of real, i.e. marvelous events. At any rate, the
educational effort brings a happy result: the boy may be gone to heaven while his teacher goes back home, hoping to stay there till the end of her life.

An unambiguous trace of Hawthorne cannot be missed in the final paragraph of “Luella Miller,” another domestic gothic story by Wilkins Freeman. The title heroine is an unusual, homespun version of a vampire: unlike most New England women, she is unable to do the chores and even take care of herself. Sympathizing with her, neighbors move in to lend a hand, and after some time they die one after another, as if Luella were sucking not their blood, but their vital power. To make the case unique in the context of literary vampirism, she seems to be unaware of her pernicious influence on the others; helpless, naïve, and childish, more a victim of her condition than a predator. When strong Lydia Anderson turns out immune to Luella’s potency and the vampire dies because she cannot rob the woman of her energy, the surviving housekeeper can see a train of ghosts, led by Miss Miller herself, cross the threshold of the house and disappear into thin air:

The next night there was a red gleam of fire athwart the moonlight and the old house of Luella Miller was burned to the ground. Nothing is now left of it except a few old cellar stones and the lilac bush, and in summer a helpless trail of morning glories among the weeds, which might be considered emblematic of Luella herself. (Freeman, Collected Ghost Stories, 53)

Here, as if attempting to prevent the audience from overlooking the allegorical meaning of the flowers, Wilkins Freeman goes perhaps a little too far with her explanation. Consequently, it becomes impossible not to notice a link connecting her story to “The Prison Door” chapter of The Scarlet Letter, with Hester Prynne standing right next to a rosebush, or, for that matter, “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” where flowers play a crucial role as well. In still another horror story, “The Wind in the Rose-Bush,” the title plant is identical with that remembered from Hawthorne’s romance, although Hawthorne made it an allegory of beauty, independence, and pride, while Wilkins Freeman preferred an allegory of death. Ms. Rebecca Flint visits Ms. Emmeline Dent to pick up her niece who had to spend some time with strangers. According to Ms. Dent, Agnes is fine, but she is not at home, and none of the explanations provided seem convincing. Soon the guest notices that a rose-bush on the house’s upper terrace keeps moving when there is no wind—in the end, she finds out that her niece has been dead for a year, neglected in sickness by her adult guardian.

A number of stories by Wilkins Freeman, Slosson, and Brown from the 1880s and 1890s are different variants of one and the same blueprint: as a result of the war cataclysm, the traditional New England socio-economic order and lifestyle collapsed, incomplete families no longer held together, men and women lost the ability to communicate, children suffered and died, and opportunities outside the region tempted young people to leave and try their luck elsewhere. As Allen Tate wrote in his classic essay on Emily Dickinson, locating his point of view a decade before the Civil War broke out:

[By the 1850] great fortunes had been made (in the rum, slave, and milling industries), and New England became a museum. The whatnots groaned under the load of knickknacks, the fine china dogs and cats, the pieces of Oriental jade, the chips off the leaning tower of Pisa. There were the rare books and cosmopolitan learning. It was all equally displayed as the evidence of a superior culture… But culture, in the true sense, was disappearing. Where the old order, formidable as it was, had held all this personal experience, this eclectic excitement, in a comprehensible whole, the new order tended to flatten it out in a common experience that was not quite in common; it exalted more and more the personal
and the unique in the interior sense. Where the old-fashioned puritans got together on a rigid doctrine, and could thus be individualists in manners, the nineteenth-century New Englander, lacking a genuine religious center, began to be a social conformist. (Tate 283-84)

18 After the Civil War, with many of the great fortunes gone and the religious heritage degraded to the level of fossilized habits or to silence, the crisis became much more acute. In fiction, the dominating realism absorbed—thanks to the high prestige of Hawthorne—the language of allegory, introducing also genuine, full-blooded ghosts, brought into play for the first time by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Sam Lawson's Oldtown Fireside Stories* (1872), a supplement to *Oldtown Folks* (1869). Arguably, despite obvious distance in space between the United States and Germany, and in time between the Civil War and the Thirty Years’ War, the historical and the literary situation in both countries after the devastating wars invites a risky comparison. We may still be close enough to Hawthorne and his followers, making at this point a reference to Walter Benjamin’s comments on the “formal definition of the relationship between symbol and allegory” made in relation to the German tragic drama that came into being in the late 17th century:

> Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death’s head. And although such a thing lacks all ‘symbolic’ freedom of expression, all classical proportion, all humanity, nevertheless, this is the form in which man’s subjection to nature is most obvious and it significantly gives rise not only to the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of the individual. (Benjamin 166)

19 Apparently, the surface of everyday life represented in most short stories and novels by writers such as Wilkins Freeman, Brown, Slosson or Jewett demonstrates almost perfect order well rooted in the past. Wounds are paradoxically present as absences—most notably those of men, money (as in Wilkins Freeman’s “Taste of Honey”), food (as in “New England Nun”) or shelter (as in her “Mistaken Charity”). In some cases, for example in Brown’s “Last Assembling,” where the abandoned ancestral house is a mess, one may even come across a local New England equivalent of a ruin; in others there are ghosts, the vestiges of women and children no longer alive. Finally, there are also flowers—signs of the ghosts, twice removed signs of humans, that point directly at death, the ultimate allegorical signified. The underpinning of decay is omnipresent, while melancholy, often combined with desperate self-control, is the most common mood. As Benjamin puts it,

> [i]f the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist and it is unconditionally in his [her] power. That is to say it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. He places it within it and stands behind it; not in a psychological but in an ontological sense. (183-84)

20 The melancholy voice of the allegorist, that of an omniscient narrator, can be heard as a sort of *basso continuo* in most works of New England fiction from the turn of the 20th century. It is sounded quite distinctly in *Pembroke* and takes a personalized form in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, with its elegiac final paragraphs.
I want to conclude with demonstrating a very special use of Hawthorne—one that leaves absolutely no doubt to be such, but also makes allegory a trope of life and changes the postbellum melancholy atmosphere into its opposite. “The Artist of the Beautiful,” included in Mosses from an Old Manse, is one of Hawthorne’s best known and most often interpreted tales. Instead of doing his job for the benefit of the community, young Owen Warland, a junior watchmaker in a small New England town, dreams of constructing a mechanical replica of a real butterfly. Against all odds, he succeeds, but pays a high price for the success: not only is his artwork almost immediately destroyed by a child, but he also loses his beloved Annie, the child’s mother, who has married the local blacksmith. Fortunately, the artist is satisfied with his achievement, realizing that he managed to touch the Platonic ‘Reality’ nonetheless, while the contrivance was only a symbol of the ideal. There is nothing in the story about profit or loss, nothing about the living conditions and subsistence. It is a perfect allegorical exercise with a moral meaning present throughout. Obviously enough, Hawthorne, author of Romantic parables sometimes only conventionally set in his native region as if outside its social history, wrote quite a few of them.

One of the uncollected stories by Wilkins Freeman, “The Blue Butterfly,” was published in Woman’s Home Companion in January 1913. The title may be read as an unambiguous signal, but it is just the beginning of a strangely familiar literary performance. The town where the events take place is also nameless, as in “The Artist of the Beautiful,” but in this case the artist is a woman, a dressmaker, Ms. Marcia Keyes. Even though she works hard and her skill is undoubted, the affluent patrons usually choose her competitor, one Madame Soule, who knows how to take advantage of the distant charm of Paris. One day, however, Marcia has her stroke of luck: unexpectedly, she is visited by Mrs. Streeter and her daughter Alice, who happen to be in dire straits. Mr. Streeter’s business has been somewhat less prosperous recently, which means that they cannot afford the services of Madame Soule, and Alice is going to have her first dance on New Year’s eve. The dressmaker takes up the challenge, goes to New York, spends her savings on some extra expensive laces, and makes a dress with impressive gauze wings that transforms Alice not just into a replica of another creature, but a human being more beautiful thanks to the suggested features of a butterfly. The costume turns out to be an eye-opener for Tom Liston, a handsome young man from a wealthy family, who immediately falls in love with the girl, as it was hoped for by the Streeters. Most likely the couple will get married and live happily ever after, multiplying in the atmosphere of comfort and joy.

Wilkins Freeman’s melodrama repeats the central motif of “The Artist of the Beautiful,” but with significant differences. Not only is the protagonist a woman, but her skill is not art for art’s sake. Unlike Owen Warland, she stands apart, not involved directly in the relationship of Alice and Tom—just an observer interested only in her success on the local market. She momentarily realizes that the unusual commission is a golden opportunity and is ready to invest all her resources to become a serious competitor of Madame Soule. It does not matter that because of the difference in social status she cannot be present at the dance—watching Alice from behind the curtain is enough to confirm her business triumph. The plot follows the logic of the market economy, with Marcia as a shrewd Yankee entrepreneur, a self-made woman able to adjust to the changing world. While Owen became an outcast of society, she rises to an important social position, satisfying the needs of women and families.
The trace of Hawthorne in “The Blue Butterfly” is clear. For Alice Streeter and Tom Liston the allegorical butterfly dress represents their future union and happiness, for Marcia Keyes her future good fortune. Still, whereas Hawthorne himself—most remarkably except for The House of the Seven Gables—made most of his allegories dark, favoring the “power of blackness,” the New England women writers took various routes. In many of their short stories and novels they portrayed the decadence of the postbellum decades, but in some they also showed that the decline of the region could be overcome thanks to its residents’ energy and entrepreneurial spirit. The protagonist of Alice Brown’s “Last Assembling” decided to stay at her ancestral home in ruin, choosing loyalty to the past instead of taking her chance in Chicago. On the contrary, the heroine of Mary Wilkins Freeman’s “Blue Butterfly”—who did not leave her hometown, either, but prospered right there—proved able, like Hawthorne’s daguerreotypist Holgrave, to move beyond history.

To conclude, it seems almost obvious now that Hawthorne’s poetics of allegory and even some specific motifs of his fiction were not ignored by the generation of New England women writers that dominated the literary landscape of the region in the decades following the Civil War. While Harriet Beecher Stowe made them continue the homespun realistic tradition originated in A New England Tale by Catharine Maria Sedgwick, the author of The Scarlet Letter offered them a (less prominent after 1865, but perhaps no less significant) gothic ambiance and the semiotic underpinning of flowers and butterflies. A more detailed reading of their short stories and novels, resulting in a map of a hardly recognized territory, is still to be performed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. See Marchalonis.
2. Connections between individual women writers and Hawthorne have been discussed by scholars whose work was published in a volume titled *Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*, edited by John L. Idol, Jr. and Melinda M. Ponder (U of Massachusetts P, 1999). This valuable collection also includes essays on Wilkins Freeman and Hawthorne as well as Jewett and Hawthorne, but no attempt to draw more general conclusions referring to New England regionalists as a group of writers.

ABSTRACTS

The main argument of the essay is that New England women writers of the late 19th century, such as Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Alice Brown, Rose Terry Cooke, Annie Trumbull Slosson, and Sarah Orne Jewett, known as post-bellum regional realists, were actually continuing certain elements of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s poetics of fiction. Describing in their short stories and novels New England’s demographic, economic, and cultural decadence, they often used allegory and introduced fantastic elements, which arguably allows to read their works in a way proposed by Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

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*Keywords:* New England, Civil War, decadence, allegory, ghosts

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