

Chautauqua 2001

“Writers of the American Renaissance”

A Companion Reader



Greenville June 17 - 20

Asheville June 18 - 21

Chautauqua

The American Renaissance

The American Renaissance was the mid-nineteenth century movement that established American literature as a distinct way of imagining the world. Some of the nation's greatest and most influential classics were written during the American Renaissance. It was our declaration of cultural independence and a deliberate break with English and European traditions.

From 1835 until after the Civil War, American writers turned aside from the religious and political essays that characterized seventeenth and eighteenth century rationalism. They produced instead a more emotional, imaginative, personal, and symbolic literature in which they celebrated the land and its people. The American Renaissance is the romantic period in our literature, and though it gave way to realism after the Civil War, it left America with themes and topics that we are still talking about today. These themes include our identity as a people, the special dignity of the self-reliant individual, the need for reform, the value of nature for society, and the value of books and ideas.

It may not seem precisely accurate to refer to our mid-nineteenth century literary culture as a re-birth, but as F. O. Matthiessen pointed out, that was how the writers themselves judged it: "Not as a re-birth of values that had existed previously in America, but as America's way of producing a renaissance, by coming to its first maturity and affirming its rightful heritage in the whole expanse of art and culture."

In its recreation of the American Renaissance in Greenville, South Carolina and Asheville, North Carolina, in June 2001, Chautauqua has chosen six writers of the period who represent most, if not all of the themes of the literature of the time. **Nathaniel Hawthorne** will talk about the romances in which he criticized the nation's Puritan roots. He will also tell of his rejection of the reformers of his own day, including his famous Concord neighbors. Yet, those who hear him will be able to ask him about his sense of sin and guilt. **Louisa May Alcott**, the only writer of the group who made a good living at her craft, will represent important themes of popular culture. She will describe the great success of *Little Women* and its sequels as well as the popular demand for her anonymous thrillers. **Henry David Thoreau** may have gone to the woods to live alone and deliberately, but he wrote about his life there, as he said, "to wake up his neighbors" and to show them how to live truer, simpler lives. Audiences will be able to ask him about Transcendentalism and his friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson, its leading proponent. **Frederick Douglass** will speak of his life as an American slave and will dramatize the chief issue on the agenda of reform during the American Renaissance. **Herman Melville** will engage in "ontologic heroics," and "discuss the universe" as he did with Nathaniel Hawthorne, his new friend and neighbor. He will also call for America to "prize and cherish her writers," not for the writer's sake but for the nation's sake. **Walt Whitman** will sing of America, claiming, "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem." And, in all of this there will be such frequent talk of Ralph Waldo Emerson that it will seem as if he were present himself.

Chautauqua

The old traveling tent Chautauquas grew out of the success of the Chautauqua Institution in New York. They flourished all over America in the first years of the twentieth century only to decline rapidly and disappear with the advent of radio and the movies. Now, after more than fifty years, the old tent Chautauqua is making a come-back as a popular humanities program. With help from the National Endowment for the Humanities and many state humanities councils, Chautauqua (shuh-taw-kwa) brings discussions about history, literature, and philosophy to the general public in an informal summertime setting. One scholar said recently: "The Chautauqua tent has become the humanities summer home."

This is the third season of Chautauqua's return to Greenville and the second season of its revival in Asheville

Chautauqua audiences hear a costumed scholar speak the words of a famous historical figure. They then have the opportunity to ask questions of both the figure and the scholar. The humanities Chautauqua is designed so that everyone in the audience knows what a famous historical or literary figure has said and can engage in a discussion with him or her, with one another, and with the scholar. The goal is to create a meeting of minds—a meeting of the past and the present, as well as a meeting of scholars and the public.

Contents

Walt Whitman America's Poet By Carrol Peterson	3
Herman Melville Democratic Novelist By George H. Frein	4
Nathaniel Hawthorne Master Storyteller By Douglass Watson	7
Louisa May Alcott Two Authors By Anne Bail Howard	9
Henry David Thoreau A Deliberate Author By Kevin Radaker	11
Frederick Douglass American Slave and Freeman By Charles Everett Pace	13

Walt Whitman

America's Poet

By Carrol Peterson



Alfred North Whitehead was asked what America had produced that was uniquely American. He answered "Whitman." Perry Miller explained Whitehead's remark by pointing out how Whitman realized that being American is "not something to be inherited" but "something to be achieved."

What Whitman personally wanted to achieve was first of all a new poetry for "these States." But Whitman felt that the nation also had a purpose: to become the exemplary democracy for the world. Whitman supported the belief that America was ordained to spread the gospel of democracy and freedom through the world, a belief that led to war with Mexico in Whitman's time—and has continued to lead America to international involvements. Whitman is a poet, but he is far from non-political.

Whitman and his father, admirers of Tom Paine, accepted Paine's interpretation of history—that the establishment of the American republic was a rejection of the feudal past. This view focused not only on politics and history, but also on literature. Whitman thought even Shakespeare carried the mental burden of medieval feudalism. This view of history explains also Whitman's enthusiasm for signs of progress. His accounts of his pleasure in riding on trains, or of his delight in New York's crowded streets, for example, are distinctive. Politics, poetry, and progress are connected in Whitman.

His long poem "Song of Myself," thus, is not just a celebration of one life. It is a statement of possibilities not known before the establishment of the United States. Underlying Whitman's political faith in democracy and his poetic practice is his endless delight in the variety of life. He is an ecologist of all life. Whether listing aspects of nature, human occupations, or the parts of his own body, Whitman is the rhapsodist of variety and the individual. He emphasizes America's potential not for Tocqueville's tyranny of the majority but for ever proliferating and mutually enhancing differentiation. Even his remarkable poems on sex are celebrations of individuality. Here Whitman is a religious seer, convinced of the harmony of democracy with nature itself. Politics, poetry, and religion unite.

Yet the work which voices Whitman's claim to be the poet of democracy, *Leaves of Grass*, was not a popular success in any of the many editions Whitman supervised. True, ten days after the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman received a letter from the famous Ralph Waldo Emerson, saying, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start." And without Emerson's

permission, the poet used the letter for publicity, sending copies to reviewers and printing it in the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. In addition, Whitman published anonymous self-reviews in various newspapers and periodicals and he had a group of close friends who trumpeted his merit and came to his defense. Despite all these efforts, however, in *A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads* (1889), Whitman admitted, "I have not gain'd the acceptance of my own time," and that "from a worldly and business point of view *Leaves of Grass* has been worse than a failure."

If the book did not attract the public it represented, the poet's own "long foreground" (to use Emerson's phrase) in family experience was even less obviously related to the ebullient spirit of democracy his poetry celebrated. Young Whitman, second of nine children in a Long Island family, moved from house to house almost yearly with his parent's changes in fortune, for his father (also Walter), apparently a slow and not entirely sympathetic man, was a carpenter—a house builder who was in constant danger of financial failure. Walt's more affectionate mother came to consider Walt her pet, and he seems to have been a mama's boy. Of Walt's siblings, one brother, alcoholic and syphilitic, became mentally deranged, one was severely retarded (both eventually died in institutions), another died from complications of alcoholism while living with his prostitute-wife, and one sister seems to have been oddly willing to endure the beatings of her unbalanced artist husband. Whitman's family "foreground" seems odd preparation for writing such optimistic lines as these:

Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born /
Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother, . . . /
Democracy! near at hand to you a throat is now inflating
itself and joyfully singing . . . / And I will show that there is
no imperfection in the present, and can be none in the future,
/ And I will show that whatever happens to anybody it may
be turned to beautiful results, . . . / And that all the things of
the universe are perfect miracles, each as profound as any.

Evidently the same refusal to succumb inspired Whitman in both home life and literary life: he was "unstopp'd and "unwarp'd," he said, "by any influence outside the soul within me."

Whitman's non-literary experiences outside the family prior to his publishing *Leaves of Grass* were not the sort that would obviously inspire ecstatic poetry either. He had been a printer or editor for a number of newspapers, never for long at one place. He had been a short term teacher at a variety of country schools on Long Island and had been involved in Democratic party politics. He had written a temperance novel, demonstrating the evils of drink. It was composed, so Whitman said later, in three days "with the help of a bottle of port or whatnot. . . . It was damned rot-rot of the worst sort." Whitman had also written several sentimental stories and sketches for various newspapers.

Yet there are some identifiable foreground events in Whitman's experience prior to 1855. "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (composed in 1858) records an experience as a boy when (hearing a mocking-bird's lament for a lost mate) "in a moment" the poet knew his vocation. Considering Whitman's long subsequent period of poor writing, this boyhood event, however important, could be only an indirect cause for the magnificent poem it eventually inspired and for the other remarkable poetry of *Leaves of Grass*. Another significant event was in 1848, when he

experienced America's bigness during his trip to New Orleans to help start a newspaper. Also Whitman frequently reviewed books for newspapers, and he had encountered much of the great literature of present and past. In addition he had begun to go to the theater and opera—a great influence on his poems.

But perhaps the most important part of the foreground of *Leaves of Grass* was that he had read and heard Emerson, whom he acknowledged as his "master" in an open letter in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*. He had read Emerson's *Essays* in 1854. Even earlier, in 1842, he had heard Emerson give his lecture "The Poet." "I was simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil," said Whitman in 1860. Emerson's transcendentalism, his emphasis on the poet as representative of society, standing "among partial men for the complete man," and his appeal for a distinctly American literature all become part of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, but especially of "Song of Myself."

Most notable is Whitman's adaptation of Emerson's view that language has power because it represents nature, which is itself a symbol of deeper truth and energy. Here is Whitman's 1856 "Poem of the Sayers of the Words of the Earth":

Earth, round, rolling, compact—suns, moons, animals—all
these are words, / Watery, vegetable, sauriod
advances—beings, premonitions, lispings of the future,
these are vast words. / Were you thinking that those were
the words—those upright lines? those curves, angles, dots? /
No, those were not the words—the substantial words are in
the ground and sea, / They are in the air—they are in you.

This view of language tallied with Whitman's distaste for the anemic poetry of his day. "This is no book. Who touches this touches a man," says one of his poems. He wished to "well nigh express the inexpressible."

If Whitman's personal achievements as poet received little encouragement from the public, from his family, or from private experience, the nation's achievement as exemplary democracy seemed even less obvious in Whitman's lifetime: the Civil War began in 1861. Walt himself was too old, but his brother George volunteered for the Union army. In December of 1862 Walt read in a New York newspaper that George had been wounded. He left immediately to find him. George was not seriously hurt, but the episode began Walt's war-long career as volunteer nurse to the wounded in the military hospitals around Washington, D.C.

Whitman's war writings face up to the worst. The most impressive poem Whitman wrote in the 1860s is, no doubt, his lament for the death of Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," where the three symbols of the drooping star (for Lincoln's death), lilacs (for regeneration and spring), and hermit thrush's song (for Whitman's own song/poem) unite to provide one of the most moving elegies in all literature. His poems *Drum Taps* and *Sequel to Drum Taps* (1865), later incorporated into *Leaves of Grass* (which grew in each new edition) and his notebook *Memoranda During The War* (not published at all until 1875 but later incorporated in the 1882 *Specimen Days*) remain the best literary record of the Civil War experience. The poet's sympathy for the suffering of the soldiers on both sides is never sentimentalized as can be seen in "The Wound Dresser":

From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand, I undo the
clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood,
/ Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and
side-falling head, / eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares

not look on the bloody stump, / And has not yet looked on it.

But even after viewing the most horrible effects of war, Whitman did not lose hope for the future. The Union had been preserved, and America, he felt, could finally begin to build a nation free of slavery. What *could be* achieved by America seemed as clear as ever to Whitman.

Having seen the worst of the war, Whitman was not glib in his optimism. He also saw the short-comings of peace-time America. In *Democratic Vistas* (1870) he expressed severe criticism of American Democracy as currently existing.

He had read Carlyle's *Shooting Niagra*, a diatribe against the spiritual debasement Carlyle saw resulting from democracy, and after a moment of anger at Carlyle, he was forced to agree that "never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present and here in the United States." Yet, after twenty paragraphs of Carlyle-like criticisms, he turns to his own "vistas," and concludes that "the democratic formula is the only safe and preservative one for coming times."

Before his death, Whitman ordered a large mausoleum built to house his remains and the remains of his immediate family. The grandeur of his interment seems paradoxical for a poet of the people. Yet that very paradox, the conflict between individualism and equality, is embedded in American life and in Whitman's poetry:

One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person, / Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

What Whitman achieved in his poems is an ongoing, frequently revised, statement of that paradox. What the nation achieved was stated by Whitman in 1855: "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem." And as with his own poems, Whitman looked forward to the revision of "these States."

Suggested Reading

Whitman revised and expanded *Leaves of Grass* from its first appearance until his death in 1892. Useful paperback editions currently available are published by Bantam (includes *A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads*), by Norton (includes all the poems, even rejected ones, footnotes highlighting revisions, and essays on Whitman and his poems), and Penguin's *The Portable Walt Whitman* (includes *A Backward Glance*, *Democratic Vistas*, and *Specimen Days*).

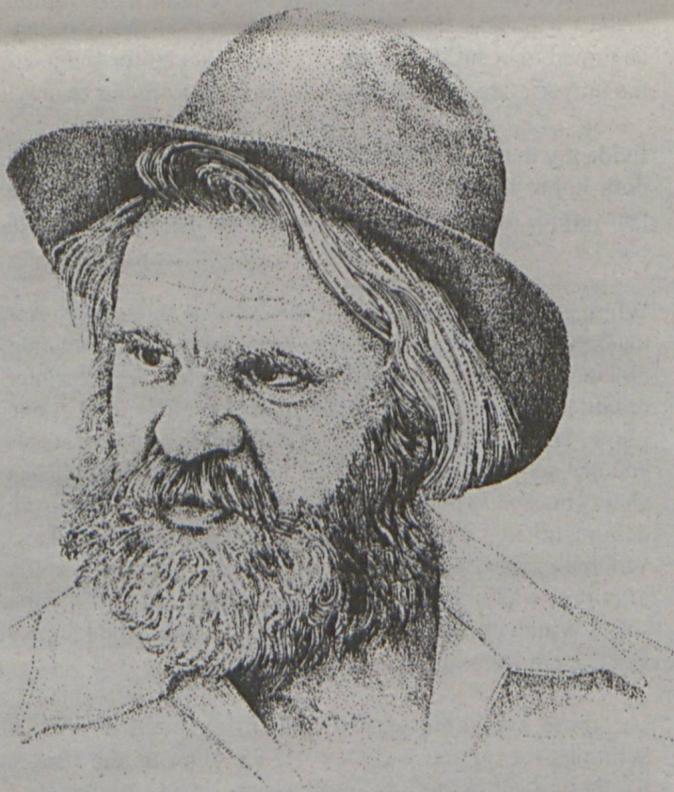
F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, 1941, Van Wyck Brook's *The Times of Melville and Whitman*, 1947, and Perry Miller's *The Raven and the Whale*, 1956, provide cultural and literary context. R. W. B. Lewis' *The American Adam*, 1955, concentrates on Whitman, Melville, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and other American writers who dealt with the American experience as a new beginning for humanity.

There are numerous biographies, Gay Wilson Allen's *The Solitary Singer*, 1955, being the most comprehensive, and Justin Kaplan's *Walt Whitman*, 1980, the most readable and current.

Among the hosts of articles and books of criticism, the following should be mentioned: Gay Wilson Allen's *The New Walt Whitman Handbook*, 1975, Barbara Marinacci's *O Wondrous Singer* 1970, and the easily accessible "Liberty and Union," (*New Republic*, January 23, 1984, pp.26-30) by Samuel H. Beer, "Half Songthrush, Half Alligator" (*American Heritage*,

October-November, 1980, pp. 62-67) by Justin Kaplan, and "Body Language: *Leaves of Grass* and the Articulation of Sexual Awareness" (*Harper's*, October, 1986, pp. 62-66) by Helen Vendler.

Carrol D. Peterson retired last month as Senior Professor of English at Doane College, Crete, Nebraska, where he has taught since 1964. His doctoral dissertation was on the radical political theorist and novelist William Godwin, father of Mary Shelley. His special study is American and British writers of the past two hundred years. He began his Chautauqua experience in 1989 by presenting Thomas Paine. Since then he has presented Jack London and James Thurber, in addition to Walt Whitman. Carrol welcomes correspondence from Chautauqua audiences. His e-mail address, at least for the time being is: cpeterson@Doane.edu.



Herman Melville Democratic Novelist

By George H. Frein



The American Renaissance was America's "declaration of cultural independence" from English and European letters. The writers of the American Renaissance took it upon themselves to create a literature worthy of the political liberty gained in the American Revolution. What they wrote became, in the words of F. O. Matthiessen a "literature for our democracy."

From the time of Homer and the Greek dramatists to Shakespeare, it was thought that if literature was to be worthy it had to be written about great and noble people. It had to tell the stories of kings, queens, princes, aristocrats and the retinue of priests and philosophers who served them. American literature could not meet such a standard for the obvious reason that it had no nobility and the king it had it rejected in 1776.

When Herman Melville came to write *Moby-Dick* in 1850 he was conscious of the long European tradition that identified noble literature with an elite nobility. He called his readers' attention to this tradition and defended his departure from it. In the passage in which he introduced his characters he wrote:

"The august dignity I treat of, is not the dignity of kings and robes, but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture. Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The Great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality.

"If, then to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities then against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind."

Melville was not the first to write of ordinary people nor even the first to write about common sailors. Others had done so before him. Melville's contribution to a "literature for democracy" consists not in the characters he wrote about but in what he made them think.

As an American, Melville believed in democracy and was happy to dispense with the aristocracy. But he also had an inquisitive mind and was unwilling to put aside the age-old questions about good and evil, fate and freedom, God and Satan. These questions, he believed, must now come to trouble the minds of democratic citizens—farmers, laborers, and sailors included. The American Revolution, he believed, had democratized thinking as well as governing. Melville helped Americans celebrate their liberty, but he also wanted them to do the thinking such liberty entailed. In book after book he invited his readers to ponder the age-old questions and themes that once occupied the leisure time of kings and their counselors.

In Melville's own time, the reading public enjoyed his stories but declined his invitation to think deeply. The Melville revival which began in the 1920s thirty years after his death, and which still continues, offers Americans the opportunity to be a democracy intellectually as well as politically. In 2001 one hundred years after his death, and one hundred and fifty years after the publication of *Moby-Dick* we are still far from finished with Herman Melville.

Melville wrote about the sea, but he always had America in mind. He wrote his first book in 1846 after a sea voyage of almost four years. The book was *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*. It was a tale of adventure and romance and the first book to give a first-hand account of life in the South Sea Islands. Partly autobiographical, the book told of a sailor jumping ship to escape from an unbearably cruel captain only to find himself and his companion captives of the cannibal Typee. Apart from worry about his eventual fate, Melville seems to have enjoyed his life among a people untouched by civilization. He certainly appreciated the uninhibited maidens of the island. Especially memorable was the beautiful Fayaway, with whom he spent many idyllic hours swimming and canoeing. In such a Pacific paradise among nature's children, even captivity seemed less threatening than civilization. His readers were meant to agree in the end with what Melville said in the introduction: "Sailors are the only class of men who nowadays see anything like stirring adventure; and many things which to fireside people appear strange and romantic, to them seem as commonplace as a jacket out at elbows."

Typee was immediately popular. But the book was more than just a vision of paradise. As the Melville scholar Harrison Hayford observed: "In his first book Melville already was aware of the darkness and sorrow that underlie light and joy, and of Western man's restless mind, which will not let him relax into a happy physical existence."

Melville's mind was as restless as any in America and he would soon deepen his own and his readers' restlessness. In less than a year Melville completed his second novel, *Omoo* a sequel to *Typee*. This time, however, he told of Polynesians recently converted to Christianity and very much the worse off for the foreign influence. *Omoo* is both more entertaining and thought provoking than *Typee*. Melville told a more humorous tale of native innocence now disturbed by civilized absurdities, featuring especially the mischief caused by missionaries. Most reviewers of the time praised the book, as Walt Whitman did, for its "richly good-natured style." A few objected to its "raciness" and to its blunt criticism of missionaries.

With *Omoo*, Melville proved that he had more than one story in him. He also established a habit and method of composition. Both *Typee* and *Omoo* were written from three sources: experience, imagination, and research. The core of each book was formed by Melville's recollections. But where memory could not provide a sufficiently large story, Melville did not

hesitate to fill it out with elements from his imagination and from his very extensive reading. His chief concern was to tell a good story and along the way to ask troubling questions for his readers to ponder.

Melville's third book was a failure. *Mardi*, the book's eventual title, began as another South Sea adventure only to stop suddenly and turn into a rather clumsy philosophical and political allegory. As Melville biographer, Leon Howard, put it: "Books had become more exciting to him than cannibals and whales . . . and *Mardi* turned out to be a record of Melville's "adventures among books."

Stung by the public's rejection of *Mardi*, a project he himself liked very much, Melville's next two books, *Redburn* and *White Jacket*, were written to give readers the straightforward adventure stories they wanted. Both were written in the summer of 1849 at the rate of 3,000 words a day. When finished, he liked neither book, though both were better than he thought and both raised important questions.

Redburn is the story of Melville's own first experience at sea when he was only a lad of 19 and sailed as a "boy" on a merchant ship to Liverpool and back. Beyond the excitement of learning the sailor's trade there was little to write about and Melville had to call on his powers of invention more than he had before, and he did so competently. But that was not all. Melville did a second thing in *Redburn*: he wrote a novel that made a social statement. The poverty he found in the slums of Liverpool was graphically described and placed against the shocking indifference of polite English society. Then, Melville brought his social judgement home to America. He told of the horrors aboard a plague-ridden immigrant ship as he made the return voyage to America.

He concluded: "Let us waive the agitated national topic, as to whether such multitudes of foreign poor should be landed on our American shore; let us waive it, with the one only thought, that if they can get here, they have God's right to come. . . . For the whole world is the patrimony of the whole world."

White Jacket or the World in a Man-of-War, the second book of the summer, reflects Melville's experience in the American Navy aboard the U.S. frigate *United States*. In his fourteen-month tour he witnessed 163 brutal floggings of American seamen. The book spoke forcefully to the issue of Naval reform. The question *White Jacket* put to its readers was essentially this: Why was it necessary for a democratic country to subject sailors in its Navy to the same inhumane articles of war that obtained in the navies of tyrants like the Czar of Russia? U.S. Navy regulations made one doubt that the nation really was a democracy.

"No school like a ship for studying human nature," Melville said in *White jacket*, and in this book he succeeded better than he thought. He had begun to learn how to do his philosophy while he kept the story going. It was not necessary for him to stop the narrative in order to create symbols as he had done in *Mardi*, much to the irritation of his readers.

After a brief trip abroad to see to the publication of *White jacket* in England, Melville returned home with sea memories reawakened. He planned to write a story of adventure based, he told a friend, "upon certain wild legends in the Southern Sperm Fisheries," and illustrated with his own experience as a harpooner. The book was *Moby-Dick*.

The *Moby-Dick* Melville finished in 1851 was not the

Moby-Dick he had begun upon his return from England in February 1850, nor the one he said was "mostly done" at the end of the summer. What began and was "mostly done" was a romance of adventure. What resulted after a year of very intense and substantial revision was a powerfully dramatic, philosophical, and even theological novel.

What transformed and deepened *Moby-Dick* was a picnic Melville took on Monument Mountain in the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts on August 5, 1850. During the picnic Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and other friends and neighbors got into a debate about literature. The question was whether English or American writers were superior and whether America would ever produce a literature as vast as its prairies or as sublime as its mountains. Holmes defended the English; Melville upheld the Americans.

Melville and Hawthorne became friends on that picnic, and the next day Melville read Hawthorne's collection of stories, *Mosses from an Old Manse*. With the picnic debate still fresh in his mind, he wrote a review of the book and offered Hawthorne as proof positive of the genius of American authors. What especially fascinated Melville in Hawthorne's stories was their "blackness of darkness." It was the same true blackness, Melville said, one found in the plays of William Shakespeare.

It was this blackness that Melville worked into his year-long revision of *Moby-Dick*. What began as a romance about the whale fishery became a book about the white whale and Captain Ahab's insane pursuit of it in a compulsive desire to wreck vengeance on it for having taken off his leg in an earlier encounter.

Mr. Starbuck, the First Mate, points out his captain's mistake: "Vengeance on a dumb brute . . . that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! to be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous."

Ahab answers from a darker corner of the soul than Starbuck had ever explored. He says about the whale: "He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me."

Ahab's quenchless feud with the whale infects the whole crew. Each sailor wants to win the gold doubloon Ahab nailed to the main-mast as a reward for the first man to sight the white whale. The voyage that began as a business venture is transformed into a voyage across the black darkness of the commander's soul. In *Moby-Dick* Melville raised questions about the business of whaling; and more deeply, about the sort of leaders Americans follow; and more deeply still, questions about evil and the absence of God. All were questions for democratic America.

The first readers of *Moby-Dick* liked the book only a little better than *Mardi* and complained that all the philosophy spoiled an otherwise good story. Though he was exhausted from writing *Moby-Dick*, the sorry state of his finances left Melville no choice but to begin another book at once. He began by again resolving to give readers just what they wanted—a good story, without any troubling questions. Melville planned a book for women readers since women bought most of the novels on the market. It was to be a book of mystery and Gothic romance. As he told Sophia Hawthorne, instead of another "bowl of sea water," this time he would serve up "a rural bowl of milk."

Pierre or the Ambiguities began as a rural love story, but it soon enough turned into a psychological novel in which Melville explored the darker side of innocent idealism. In *Pierre* the darkness had to do with incest. And incest, though it had been acted out on the ancient Greek stage, was not a topic American readers would allow an author to explore fully, in a Victorian novel. Melville knew that he had to kill off all his leading characters in the end and his final chapter has more deaths than the last scene of *Hamlet*. Melville again found himself unable to write an entertainment. Writing had become a way of thinking for him. Unfortunately, reading had not yet become a way of thinking in America, and *Pierre* sold more poorly than any of Melville's books.

After *Pierre* Melville turned to writing stories for magazines and his next novel, *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, appeared serially at first in *Putnam's Monthly*. It was an historical novel about one Israel Potter, a hero of the Revolutionary War. When Melville sent his manuscript to George Putnam he wrote: "I engage that the story shall contain nothing of any sort to shock the fastidious. There will be very little reflective writing in it; nothing weighty. It is an adventure."

Melville almost kept his promise to Putnam. But, he could not help casting doubt on the popular heroes who appear in the story. He called into question the nation's veneration of Benjamin Franklin, Ethan Allen, and especially John Paul Jones. The degree of Melville's skepticism about military heroism is evident in the way he told the story of Captain John Paul Jones' famous naval victory. When the British captain thought the fight was over, he invited Jones to surrender. The American shouted back his well-known defiance: "I have not yet begun to fight." And he fought fiercely on till he turned the battle around and won, though he destroyed his own ship in the process. Melville introduced the story of the battle with this string of epithets: "... intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart, America is or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations." Melville then ended the story with a question: "In view of this battle one may well ask—What separates the enlightened man from the savage? Is civilization a thing distinct, or is it an advanced stage of barbarism?"

Once again Melville went back on his resolve. His story of adventure led him into the troubled waters of weighty reflection—and not the sort of reflection most people find easy to do about their heroes. Melville had become a sort of Old Testament prophet: a "troubler"—as King Ahab had called Elijah—of Israel's conscience.

The troubling questions Melville seemed driven to raise in his novels turned up in his short stories as well; but in his magazine writings readers could hardly find them. As Melville scholar Hershel Parker said, "[Melville] . . . mastered a sort of secret writing in which he palmed off upon his genteel publishers a series of innocuous tales which concealed highly personal allegories not meant to be understood."

His next book, however, *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade*, was an open, if not entirely obvious, satire. The story of *The Confidence Man* begins in St. Louis on April Fool's Day when the Devil boards a steamboat bound for New Orleans. Taking many disguises, the Devil gets one passenger after another to put their confidence in him. What the Devil in disguise offers his victims as he talks them out of their money is an all too familiar and popular parody of Christian doctrine. The mysterious impostor sells and elicits, not authentic faith, but a confidence that is nothing more than typical 19th century optimism. America had become a land of boundless optimism in which even the churches had forgotten man's fallen and sinful state. Melville asked his readers to remember original sin and suggested that American confidence is not true faith but only a devil's substitute that will lead us to shipwreck

without a life-preserver. In *The Confidence Man*, perhaps more than in any other of his books, Melville showed that American democracy will not work unless citizens have the intelligence to know when they are being sold a bill of goods.

After *The Confidence Man* Melville no longer tried to make his living by writing fiction. He got a job as a customs inspector at the port of New York and held it for almost twenty years. Though he continued to write poetry, most of it was printed privately. Not long before his death, however, he wrote one last novel. It was *Billy Budd, Sailor*; and it ranks next to *Moby-Dick* as Melville's best work. The text was extensively revised, but not quite ready for the printer when Melville died in 1891. It was not published until 1924, just as the Melville revival began.

Billy Budd is the story of a handsome, though innocent young sailor, whose popularity and evident honesty generates a malicious hostility on the part of one of the ship's officers. In time, the officer, John Claggart, accuses Billy to his face and in the presence of his captain of plotting mutiny. Dumbfounded by the wholly unexpected accusation, Billy struggles mightily to answer Claggart but is convulsively tongue-tied. The more violently Billy tries to speak, the more confirmed his paralysis becomes, until suddenly he strikes Claggart a blow that kills him instantly. Captain Vere calls a drumhead court into session. Though he knows Billy is innocent of the charge of mutiny, the captain must testify that he saw him strike the blow that killed the officer. The court finds Billy guilty, and he is hung the next morning from the yardarm.

Readers have long debated the meaning of this last novel. Melville told the story clearly, but he did not tell his readers what to think about the case of Billy Budd. Nor did he tell them in what tone the tale was to be read or where in the story they should focus their attention. Harrison Hayford and Merton Sealts, the editors of the definitive text of *Billy Budd*, have shown that Melville's repeated revisions of the novel removed indications of his own initial understanding of events and motives. In just so many words, in the chapter in which he describes Billy's trial, Melville says of the reader, "... every one must decide for himself by such light as this narrative may afford."

In the same chapter, over against this democratic "every one" Melville holds up to view "professional experts"—lawyers, doctors, and the clergy. What these experts do, he shows us, is this: they clarify what cannot be made clear—for a fee. There is no lawyer in Melville's cast of characters because there would have been none on board a navy frigate. But he alludes to them, and what sort of professional a lawyer would be can be surmised from the character of the obtuse surgeon and the obsequious and vacuous chaplain.

In his final novel, Melville seems to suggest that in a democracy professional experts—no more than kings and philosophers—can be called in to do the people's thinking. Every one must decide. Every one must play a part in the administration of justice and in its subsequent evaluation. In a world as iniquitous as this one, in which innocence mysteriously generates evil and then not entirely without reason is found guilty—America must be a democracy intellectually as well politically.

Melville wrote a literature for such a democracy and, in the end, though he gave us much to think about, he was careful not to do our thinking for us. What Melville did as a novelist and what he could not keep from doing, though he often resolved to do otherwise, was to write about the real world even when it was dark and troubling. He played the part of the prophet who by his stories would "catch the conscience of the king," though in democratic America the king was a nation of farmers, laborers, and sailors. As he wrote in *The Confidence Man*, "It is with fiction as with religion: it should present another world, and yet one to which we feel the tie." In books

of fiction, he said, "readers . . . look not only for more entertainment, but, at bottom, even for more reality, than real life can show."

America is not yet done with Herman Melville because it is not yet done with the realities of life that democracy must both govern and understand.

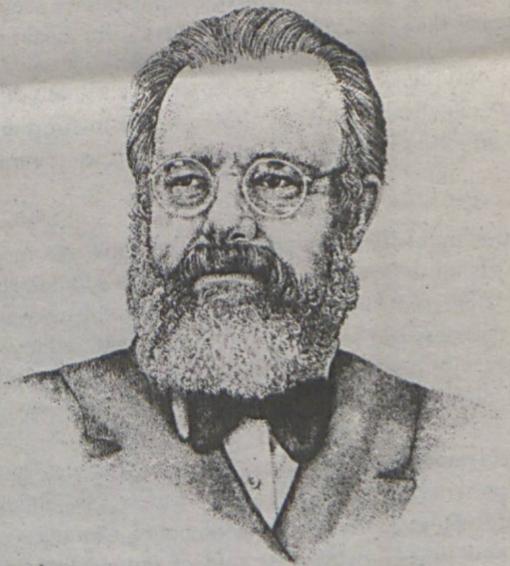
Suggested Reading

Melville's fiction was published in book form as follows: *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), *Mardi* (1849), *Redburn* (1849), *White Jacket* (1850), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Pierre* (1852), *Israel Potter* (1855), *The Piazza Tales* (1856), *The Confidence Man* (1857), *Billy Budd* (1924). Other short fiction, published in magazines, has been gathered together with the *Piazza Tales* in volume nine of the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *The Writings of Herman Melville*.

Melville's poetry appeared as follows: *Battle Pieces* (1866), *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* (1876), *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888), *Timoleon* (1891).

Most of Melville's writing is available in inexpensive editions. The Northwestern-Newberry edition of *The Writings of Herman Melville* is the standard critical text of Melville's complete works. Melville's fiction is available in almost every library in the three Melville volumes of the Library of America series, a series funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The best biography of Melville for a long time was Leon Howard's *Herman Melville: A Biography* (1951). Now, Hershel Parker, the leading Melville scholar today, published his long awaited *Herman Melville, A Biography*, Volume 1, 1819-1851. He is writing volume 2 while preparing an enlarged edition of *The Melville Log*. Laurie Robertson-Lorant's *Melville, A Biography* (1996) is the best one volume biography at present.

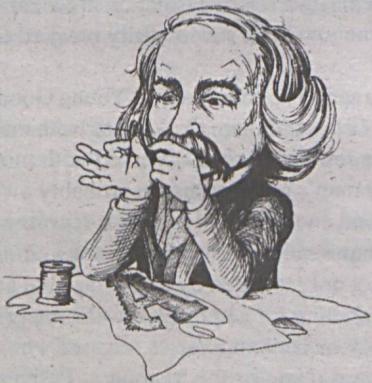


George Frein is retired Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks and Adjunct Professor of Religion at Furman University. In addition to Herman Melville, he has also portrayed the Jesuit missionary, Father De Smet, Henry Adams, and Mark Twain. George is a member of the National Chautauqua Tour, a group of humanities scholars who offer programs of historical characterization to the general public nationwide. George earned his Ph. D. from the Catholic University of America. He welcomes correspondence from Chautauqua audiences. He lives with his wife and two children at 943 Rutherford Road Greenville, SC 29681. His e-mail address is gfrein@bellsouth.net.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Master Storyteller

By Douglas Watson



Nathaniel Hawthorne, perhaps the foremost American fiction writer of the 19th century, never enjoyed the financial success that cultural preeminence almost inevitably accords today. The quality of Hawthorne's writing was acknowledged by numerous critics both at home and abroad during his lifetime.

Even so, the work that Henry James called his "unhumorous fictions" never won Hawthorne the broad popularity enjoyed by some of his contemporaries or by many more recent but less able writers. During his life, he struggled to maintain financial security for his family, and he could not do it by writing alone. His friends and publisher sought to obtain for him the security of political and cultural patronage, but such efforts were only partially successful. A private and complex man, Hawthorne knew personal happiness—family, friends, a degree of recognition—but died as he lived much of his life, not so much in the mainstream of human society as on its border, an observer more than a participant, an interior man reflecting the darker shades of man's nature more than its sunshine.

It seems worthwhile to consider one's preconceptions about this man who wrote many stories and at least three novels or "romances" that remain a part of the central canon of 19th century American literature (*The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and *The Blithedale Romance*). Some of the traditional ideas about Hawthorne's haunted and haunting interior sense of sin and evil, though perhaps not altogether wrong, are often given too much importance. Too little attention is paid to his enjoyment of outdoor pleasures, his belief in the virtues of constructive, physical toil, and his interest in the life of public office. He grew to young manhood in the woods of Maine. The young Nathaniel considered bypassing college altogether to adopt a life of outdoor action, and to the end of his life he considered physical labor, exercise, and outdoor activity revitalizing.

At Bowdoin College, Hawthorne was a good but not an outstanding student. The most enduring effects of his years there were his friendships with classmates including Horatio Bridge, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and the future president Franklin Pierce. All of these men, each one his social better, were among his lifelong friends.

Hawthorne's post-college years in the family house in Salem were spent in self-reflection and absorption in familial and cultural history. Whether they were years of such total isolation and social aversion as they have sometimes been described

seems doubtful, but the absence of personal journals from this period and the author's own hyperbolic descriptions of his aloofness in the house he called, variously, his dungeon, his owl's nest, and his cell, leave the years a mystery in the story of his life. What is certain is that from 1825 to 1837, Hawthorne did spend considerable time alone, reading, thinking, and writing. Numerous tales and sketches published anonymously in periodicals were products of the period.

Another result, frequently reflected in these tales and sketches, was an intense investigation of the New England Puritan culture and several of its historical personages, not least of whom were the author's own forebears: early Salem magistrate William Hathorne and 1692 Salem witch trial judge John Hathorne his great-great-grandfather. Hawthorne was fascinated not only by the historical events but also by the mental machinations of these Puritan ancestors. The dark, brooding attitudes and the sometimes cruel, brutal actions of these folk appear in characters at the center of his stories, including "Young Goodman Brown," "The Gentle Boy," "Endicott and the Red Cross," and "The Maypole of Merrymount." Such attention to the 17th century past developed in him an intense focus on questions of right and wrong, issues of sin and guilt and man's depravity. That the author found in that age affinities with his own mind appears likely. That the self-searching of his own heart and mind, in light of these affinities, colored the remainder of his life and became his most vital habit of thought is certain. But that the mid-19th century author emerged from the isolation of these years a social misfit cut from the same cloth as his Puritan forebears and completely out of touch with life's realities is a mistaken idea.

After two years' work at a custom house appointment in Boston, Hawthorne invested his savings in the social experiment being conducted at Ripley's Brook Farm, where he hoped to mix thought and writing with outdoor life and physical toil in a balance that seemed at least theoretically desirable. Also, he hoped to make an inexpensive home there for himself and his soon to be wife Sophia. For Hawthorne the experiment was a failure. In fact, his whole career testifies to his not having attained the desired balance of toil and thought, of outdoors and in. Before Brook Farm, he had spent much of twelve years secluded in the family house in Salem. When he left Brook Farm in 1841 after only a few months, he was disillusioned by the reformist schemes of some of its residents, but he was mostly disappointed at having found insufficient time to write between shoveling manure and feeding stock.

Years later, after writing the three successful romances, he agreed to turn his writing talents to a public purpose. He agreed to write a campaign biography for his college and lifetime friend Franklin Pierce, then set aside his writing career to fill a post in Pierce's Presidential administration. The Liverpool consulate his friend offered seemed to him an opportunity to attain the financial security his writing had not provided, but he also coveted the chance to travel to see parts of Europe before known only in his imagination, and he wanted his children to know a broader range of the world than he himself had known growing up in Salem and a small Maine village. He was pleased, too, at the opportunity to represent his native land in the "old home" of England, for he was devoutly democratic, even if no idealistic dreamer about the inevitable virtues of life in the New World and no believer in reformist schemes to attain such a world.

Apparently Hawthorne himself was sensitive to the accusation that he was removed from the "reality" of life. An 1837 letter to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow addresses the issue as a factor of Hawthorne's having lived so long away from society during his years in Salem: "I have seen so little of the world, that I

have nothing but thin air to concoct my stories of, and it is not easy to give a life-like semblance to Such shadowy stuff." The letter, coming as it did almost concurrent with the publication of his stories collected in *Twice-Told Tales*, may represent an early self-evaluation of fitness for the "author's trade" to which he had set himself after leaving Bowdoin College. Certainly, it seems connected to an important personal habit and authorial technique that characterizes much of his mature life—the keeping of a notebook to record and store impressions of the life around him and to use in creating scenes and characters for subsequent books and stories.

The notebooks, though they did not revolutionize the subject matter of the author's attentions, did begin to serve an important function as a source book—for ideas, background details, and illustrations—and they may have provided him a means of working toward larger, longer-term goals than the tales and sketches of *Twice-Told Tales* and *Mosses from an Old Manse*. It may also be that the turn toward book-length works was spawned by a hope for greater profit from his writing. Particularly when he was not directly engaged in the work of composing, the notebooks provided an outlet for his keen skills in observation.

This is most dramatically illustrated during the years in England and Italy, 1853-59, when consular duties and a conscious commitment to travel and sightseeing kept him from full-time attention to authorship. These notebooks he kept with the hope and intent of collecting impressions to be used in romances he planned to write once back in the United States. The fruits they bore—*The Marble Faun* and *Our Old Home*—seem in some ways less satisfying than the notebooks themselves.

Even if they are not so widely accessible as his fiction or so intimate as the journals of some other authors, Hawthorne's notebooks can provide today's reader a more humanized perspective than is to be gotten from the stories and romances. This is especially true of the "restored" editions, which reveal the author somewhat more directly than his wife apparently wished when she edited them for publication, after his death.

For all his importance as a central figure in American literature, Hawthorne spent a surprisingly short period of his life in the actual work of productive authorship. To say so perhaps discounts too much the numerous stories that he wrote during the extended years in Salem before and in Concord after his marriage to Sophia Peabody in 1842. Yet, it is remarkable that the three best known romances, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, and *The Blithedale Romance*, plus a campaign biography of Franklin Pierce and two books retelling classic myths for children, *The Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales*, were all written and published within a period of about four years, between 1849 and 1853. Set against his "career" as an author, ranging from perhaps 1826 to his death in 1864, this brief, intense flurry which corresponds to the half decade that also saw the publication of Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Thoreau's *Walden*, and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* constitutes a mini-American Renaissance of its own. After such a flurry, Hawthorne must have found the change of pace and relative leisure of life that followed in Liverpool a welcome and deserved reward, even with what he later called its "tedium" of diplomatic duties.

If there is a single central theme in Hawthorne, perhaps it is Truth, or man's struggle to discover and come to terms with it. But Truth is neither singular nor simple, and for Hawthorne it did not have, as it may have had for some of his Puritan ancestors, a single source or authority. Though he seems to share with the Puritans a dark vision of fallen man ultimately unable

to redeem either himself or the society to which he belongs, there is always an "and yet"—a recurring tentativeness or hesitation, even a deliberately ambiguous posing of situations that might or might not be true, scenes that might be historical but are more likely to be fictional. In the balance of such possibilities lies the truth of the "romance," as Hawthorne himself explained it.

A familiar example is his claim, in "The Custom House," of having found a manuscript, together with a tattered scrap of cloth in the shape of a letter A, in the office's attic storeroom. From this manuscript and its supposed relic, the narrator claims to have prepared the romance that is *The Scarlet Letter*. Is the reader to believe this tempting explanation? And if so, is such a belief in a physical source to make more powerful the essentially spiritual romance of the novel? Does it degrade the role of the author as creator?

Hawthorne seems to delight in such ambiguities, as a further look at *The Scarlet Letter* suggests. Had the rose bush at the door of Hester's cell "sprung up" under the footsteps of the sainted Anne Hutchinson or was it there merely "by a strange chance"? Did the light in the Salem sky one midnight actually form a letter A? And if so, did it suggest John Winthrop's passage into angelic heaven, or Arthur Dimmesdale's adultery, or neither? Was Pearl a human or an inhuman child? Was Roger Chillingworth a wronged husband distorted by desire for vengeance or a devil taking a man's shape? Each of these questions the author poses; none of them does he answer with finality. Rather, he seems to say to the reader, as his Puritan ancestors would never have done, "It is in your hands . . . make of it what you will." So Hawthorne demonstrates that the relation between fact, or at least isolated bits of factual evidence, and a broader Truth is a tentative one. One must find one's own truth through long and careful probing of his or her own mind and heart and experience—much as the 17th century Puritan might have probed for personal tokens of God's favor or disfavor. Thus, the reader is made an active responder to and participant in Hawthorne's storytelling search for Truth. And yet, the author does not permit the "what you will" conclusions to go unexamined; repeatedly he casts across them the dark and perhaps ultimately destroying shadow of man's fallen nature.

Such a balancing vision yields neither utter despair nor unbridled optimism, but Hawthorne was clearly interested in exploring the possible consequences of embracing either extreme. At the dark end of the spectrum he tests the proposition of an unpardonable sin in the story "Ethan Brand;" at the other end one finds characters like Hester and Zenobia displayed, though only for fleeting moments, in the bright sunshine of total freedom.

Arriving at each extreme, he reveals a counterbalance, the "and yet" which retains a hope for grace in the face of despair but refuses to allow unshadowed happiness. It is thus he seems to have understood his own life, as he neared the end of it. He had known much happiness, but shadows remained over his judgment of the whole of it. Perhaps he did not assume for himself the "no hopeful verse" he had imagined on Goodman Brown's gravestone, but neither could he have lain easy under a naively hopeful consolation. The truth was more complex than either.

Hawthorne has been accused of strong anti-feminine biases in his life and his fiction. True, he was no radical feminist. He sometimes associated equality of the sexes with other social utopian schemes he rejected. He found strong, bold women like Margaret Fuller a bit intimidating, perhaps even

unnatural, but also richly attractive.

Certainly he knew something of women. He grew up with a mother but without a father, with sisters but no brother. His greatest romance may finally be found in his courtship and marriage to Sophia, not in his fiction. Though she had been treated by her family as a semi-invalid, Sophia proved her capability for activity after the marriage. She brought Hawthorne immense joy, and together they had three children, two of them girls.

The most memorable and remarkable characters of his longer fiction are female—Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, Phoebe Pyncheon in *The House of the Seven Gables*, Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*, and Miriam in *The Marble Faun*. Though different from one another, each is a complex individual about whom the author has thought deeply, toward whom he feels admiration and sympathy. Each one, though ultimately unfulfilled, possesses a level of commitment to principle lacking in her male counterpart or foil. Hester, who may owe a good deal to the author's mother, whose death might have sparked *The Scarlet Letter's* creation, is miles beyond Arthur Dimmesdale in her strength of passion and in her ability to endure the guilt for their adulterous act. Zenobia, partly a reflection of the young Margaret Fuller, falls victim to her passion, but displays a bold, luxuriant quality of womanhood next to which the observant but withdrawn Coverdale pales and the manipulative Hollingworth is proven brutish. And, in the shorter fiction, there are few more memorable characters than the beautiful but damned Beatrice Rappaccini.

In Hawthorne's mind, Sophia epitomized what a woman ought to be. Sophia's health seems never to have been good before they met, and she continued to suffer periodic maladies that limited her strength and activity, but she was mentally alert and physically attractive, possessing a face that son Julian declared so lovely as to be worthy of long and deep contemplation. Of characters in the fiction, Phoebe in *The House of the Seven Gables* and Hilda in *The Marble Faun* partly reflect her manner and appearance; Phoebe brings light and happiness into a dark world, just as Sophia had brightened Hawthorne's life. Hilda is reserved but retains integrity and vision. Marriage seems to have actually increased Sophia's strength, but she never turned that strength toward assertions of female aggressiveness or independence. Theirs was a conventional Victorian marriage. She was his "Dove"; most often he remained to her "Mr. Hawthorne." He encouraged her talents in illustration, thought her a very capable writer, trusted her judgments about books as well as people. They sheltered each other and seem to have been very happy.

If truth is Hawthorne's central aim, his primary human good, then the primary human evil is pride, and particularly pride in knowing. Such pride leads to sin, the sin to guilt, the guilt to suffering and, often, self-destruction. Hawthorne's interest is not in the act of violation so much as in the interior aftermath of the sinful act; much of his fiction broods on this matter. *The Scarlet Letter* is not about Hester and Arthur's adultery but about the corrosive effects of Arthur's unacknowledged guilt, Hester's haughty defiance, and Chillingworth's secret vengeance. Pride perverts each of them. If Hester survives the ordeal, it may be because she cannot so easily hide her guilt as can the minister and the leech. The Puritan community forces her to confront her limits and her social responsibility, and she realizes, as does Miriam in *The Marble Faun*, the extended "educational" benefit of her sinful passion. She returns to the outskirts of Salem near the story's end, perhaps to accept a penitential duty in that same world in which she has fallen.

Most of Hawthorne's prideful sinners do not approach so near to redemption. Ethan Brand perishes in the very pride of assuming himself beyond pardon. Goodman Brown's pride in his own virtue, or presumed lack of sin, cuts him off from all human society. John Endicott's pride in his Puritan virtue, his intolerance of any rightness not his own, makes him seem a very devil. Prideful artists, too, appear in Hawthorne's fiction, and their single minded bent on attainment of beauty destroys or denies them any human sympathy. No wonder Hawthorne looked back on his own relative isolation in Salem and marveled that he had somehow been successfully recalled to society.

Readers whose early experience with "Young Goodman Brown" or *The Scarlet Letter* left them thinking of Nathaniel Hawthorne merely as a depressing Puritan obsessed with moral judgment and haunted by man's guilt for his sin probably owe themselves at least a second look at this complex representative of the American Renaissance. Perhaps the renewed attention will reveal a man not only tortured by a dark familial and archetypal past but one searching for genuine hope and integrity of thought amid a company of contemporaries most of whom he thought too grossly materialistic or too visionary. Perhaps a revisit to the work of Hawthorne may even show the reader a measure of his or her own growth into a truer adult world of shadow and struggle, a vision of failure and loss and yet of hope and happiness too.

Suggested Reading

Hawthorne published books in the following order: *Fanshawe*, 1828; *Twice-Told Tales*, 1837 (expanded 1842); *Grandfather's Chair*, 1841; *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846 (revised 1853); *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850; *The House of Seven Gables*, 1851; *The Snow Image and Other Twice-Told Tales*, 1852; *A Wonderbook for Girls and Boys*, 1852; *Life of Franklin Pierce*, 1852; *Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys*, 1853; *The Marble Faun or the Romance of Monti Beni*, 1860; *Our Old House*, 1863.

The authoritative edition of the collected works is *The Century Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, William Charvat, Roy Harvey Pearce, and Claude M. Simpson, general editors. Ohio State University Press, 1964.

The following are among the many fine studies of Hawthorne:

James R. Mellow's *Hawthorne and His Times* [biography], 1979.

Randall Stewart's *Nathaniel Hawthorne, A Biography*, 1948.

Arlin Turner's *Nathaniel Hawthorne, A Biography*, 1979.

Unfortunately none of the standard biographies are in paperback.

Nina Baym's *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career*, 1976, considers the major works chronologically. Baym's *The Scarlet Letter: A Reading*, 1986, is a useful introduction to criticism of the novel and is available in paperback.

Richard H. Brodhead's *The School of Hawthorne*, 1986, offers the tradition of Hawthorne's fame and influence—available in paperback.

Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, 1957, considers the central element of romance in Hawthorne and other novelists—available in paperback.

Michael J. Colocurcio's *New Essays on 'The Scarlet Letter,'* 1985, discusses Hawthorne's interest in New England Puritanism—available in paperback.

Frederick Crews, *The Sins of the Fathers: Hawthorne's Psychological Themes*, 1966, gives the classic Freudian interpretation.

Richard Harter Fogel's *Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark*, 1964, analyzes imagery and symbolism in the novels and stories.

Roy R. Male's *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision*, 1957, considers the novelist's concept of tragedy as seen in the fiction.

Terence Martin's *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 1983, is a general overview of the life and works—available in paperback.

Hyatt Waggoner's *Hawthorne: A Critical Study*, 1955 discusses Hawthorne's departure from the dominant optimism of his contemporaries.

Doug Watson is professor of English and director of the honors program at Oklahoma Baptist University. He teaches courses in American Literature, Western civilization, poetry, classical literature, and children's literature. Watson has been involved with Chautauqua historical characterization programs since the summer of 1991, when he began to do Nathaniel Hawthorne for the Great Plains Chautauqua Society. Since then, he has also presented Stephen Crane and Will Rogers. Including programs done for the History Alive series of the Kansas and Oklahoma state humanities councils, as well as a number of presentations for the Florida Humanities Council, he has presented more than 300 programs since 1991.

Doug is a native of Texas but has lived in Shawnee, Oklahoma since 1980. His wife, Kay, is a middle school English teacher. They have one daughter, Erin, a graduate of Bard College.

Louisa May Alcott Two Authors

By Anne Bail Howard



"I would have her humble, self-reliant; gentle though strong; man's companion, not his plaything; able and willing to face the storm as well as sunshine and share life's burdens as they come."

In an early portrait of her own ideal woman, Louisa May Alcott declared her difference from the mass of women of the nineteenth century. She continued to declare that difference even after she created the model of domestic bliss that made *Little Women* a lasting classic of American literature and made Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy members of millions of families.

In a world that celebrated a cult of true womanhood dedicated to domesticity and submission, Alcott won her fame standing for self-reliance, independence and a woman's right to a life of her own. She joined in the sanctification of home and the domestic woman and yet she wrote of strong, willful women who lived passion fired lives, won vengeance, and defied the conventions.

She was LMA, "Aunt Wee," "Aunt Jo," "the children's friend," a writer of what she called "moral pap for the young," and she was A.M. Barnard, perpetrator of bloodcurdling and passionate tales that were long on murder, mesmerism, vengeance, and violence. She declared that "families were the most beautiful things in the world," but she praised spinsterhood; most of all she believed in sisterhood, literally and figuratively. It is sisterhood that triumphs in *Little Women*—and it is a broader sisterhood that Alcott develops as a goal in *Work*, *An Old Fashioned Girl*, and in her lifelong championing of equality, suffrage, and independence for women.

Just as her works span two literary worlds, her life both demonstrates devotion to the sentimental ideals, the reformist spirit, and the optimistic idealism of Transcendentalism and challenges those attitudes with a practical pragmatism that covers a passionate rebellion against them all. Her works for

children preach self control, self reliance, obedience, charity, love of duty for its own sake—a host of moral dicta for the young. Her sensation stories glorify the paths to female power, respectable or not.

Immersed even in childhood in the waves of reform that swept America in the first half of the century, Louisa Alcott was a true child of the American Renaissance. Margaret Fuller had observed the Alcott sisters as "model children" in Bronson Alcott's Temple School; Concord was Louisa's home for much of her life, Emerson the object of her girlhood crush, Thoreau the guide to her childhood rambles, the mysterious Hawthornes occasionally friends and frequently neighbors. Forced by her father's idealism into the practical role of family breadwinner, she tacked her romantic beginnings to a realistic maturity. Plain living and high thinking and a perpetual re-enactment of a Pilgrim's Progress toward moral perfection guided the family just as the March girls move to control their faults in the novel.

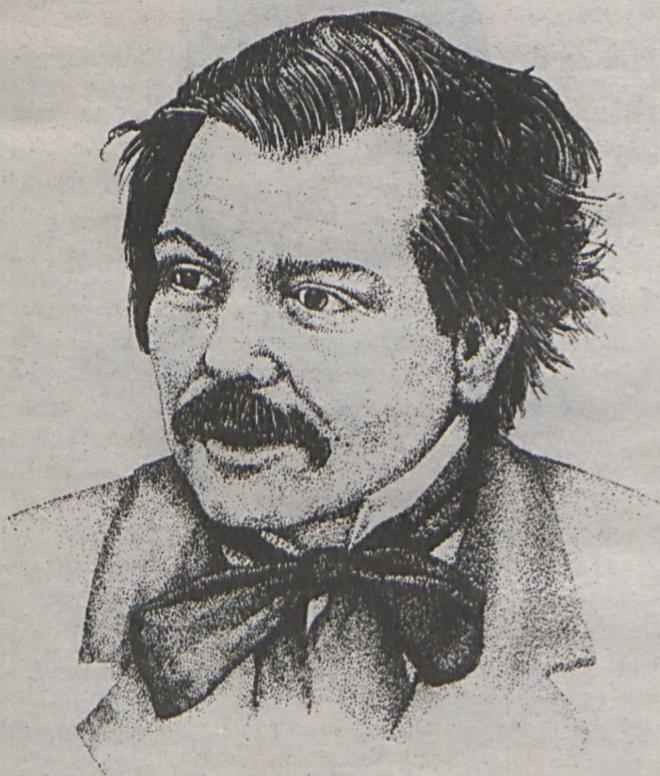
Thoreau had not yet demanded "Simplify! Simplify!" when in 1843 an intentional community Bronson and Charles Lane established around the Alcott family moved to Fruitlands to begin a New Eden a few miles from Concord. The material existence was austere: potatoes, apples, water. Ever observant, eleven year-old Louisa sensed the tensions of the strange Utopia. But she struggled to play her role as Alcibiades to Lane's Plato in endless dialogues and to overcome her vices: "impatience, willfulness, impudence, love of cats." The willfulness she never lost, and her earliest tales explore the battle of wills and of the sexes as a major theme, perhaps an echo of the familial strains that led Bronson to declare at one point that he was "not yet divine enough to subdue the mother fiend and her daughter."

After the experiment at Fruitlands failed, the Alcotts moved to Concord where the girls watched their mother find first one, then another way to keep the family afloat. Louisa read Goethe and Carlyle and her favorite Dickens, and produced theatricals in the village barns, dramatizing the works herself, generally playing the dashing male lead, for she was a classic tomboy who complained she was "born with a boy's spirit" under her bib and tucker, and like Jo March, dreaded growing up to be a woman.

Over the next fifteen years, Louisa held every position possible for a respectable woman in her time: propriety forbade her making a profession of the acting she loved, but she was a devoted amateur performer and producer, a governess, a companion, a nurse, a servant, a teacher, a seamstress, a writer, sometimes following two of these occupations at the same time, always committed to the family housework and nursing in addition to everything else. Throughout her life, she believed work was her salvation and could be that for others. Most of all she loved her writing, and she particularly relished the writing fit she described as a "vortex" in which she was consumed until the work was done.

In the sixties she wrote in two modes at a time, producing conventional and sentimental tales for children and genteel audiences: *Flower Fables* and stories for *The Atlantic*, and passionate tales for the popular press, tales "easy to 'compoze' & better paid than moral and elaborate works," but she carefully supplied a nom de plume, A.M. Barnard, or published them anonymously, sending the money home, keeping the lurid publications secret from the family.

When the Civil War came, Louisa again resented her womanhood. She liked the "stir in the air" and longed "for battle



like a war horse when he smells powder." Shortly after her thirtieth birthday, eager for experience, she left for Washington to be a nurse, feeling as if she were "the son of the house going off to war."

Union Hospital was worse than she could have imagined it: writing home, she chronicled the smells and terrible sights of the hospital, short on doctors and supplies, the pain and the good humor of the men, many of whom had reached the hospital only to die slowly from infections, inoperable wounds, other diseases, vanishing, "like a drop in that red sea upon whose shores so many women stand lamenting." She bathed, she fed, she ministered in every way to the mud covered soldiers. In the unsanitary world of the hospital, the nurse became a patient. Typhoid and pneumonia removed her from the wards and after some days of confinement to her room, delirious, dosed with calomel, she woke to see her father, come to take her home.

Louisa paid a heavy price for her few weeks of hospital service. Although she joked about the loss of her hair—her one beauty, she believed—as better than "a loss of wits inside," the calomel treatment ruined her health for life. She recorded her "strange fancies" during delirium that included visions of a stout, hand-some "Spanish spouse," the Pope, a terrible threat in Baltimore of being "hung for a witch, burned, stoned and otherwise mal-treated," and a "temptation to worship the Devil." Heaven she found was very "dismal and ordinary."

Hospital Sketches, a collection revamped from her letters home, won her an adult audience; she had won \$100 for "Pauline's Passion and Punishment" and she put time into revising her first novel, *Moods*, for publication. A cautionary tale of the dangers of loveless marriage, *Moods* meant a great deal to her, but it failed with the public and the bewildered author found herself accused of advocating everything from Free Love to spiritualism.

Louisa, who sincerely believed her natural bent to be for the lurid, continued the thrillers; even years later she made no excuses for the behavior of her characters, simply noting that they could not be admitted to the "proper grayness of Concord . . . what would my own dear father think?"

Bronson Alcott might have had many a question about "Behind a Mask, or a Woman's Power," serialized in *The Flag of Our Union* in 1866. This *Jane Eyre* in reverse is a tale of a governess's success at using her apparent innocence and her hidden experience (she is, after all, a one-time actress) to attract and reject two young men who have patronized her and then to win money, position, and a title to boot by marrying their rich uncle.

The weapons of Jean Muir, the main character, are the standard female flatteries and flirtations, but her intent is power. Such is the female goal in almost all of the thrillers Alcott wrote. Whether she consciously rebelled against the propriety of her life, unconsciously wrote out her rage at her father, or at the dependent condition of women, or worked out her repressed sexuality in these exotic heroines, she presented them with relish, only occasionally delivering them to their just deserts. She spiced her narratives with mesmerism, hashish, thuggee killings, but always the violence of human emotions, of female power. Only rarely does a male take action—it is the classic femme fatale who occupies center stage.

It was Thomas Niles who persuaded her to write "a girl's book." She objected: "never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters, but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting,

though I doubt it." *Little Women* proved to be "the first golden egg of the ugly duckling." The immediate success of the book surprised both Alcott and her publishers.

In a few months, she finished the second part, already famous, already pursued, much to her consternation. But her goals had been met; she could happily record "All bills paid!" and even put aside money for investment. She took little rest, wrote *An Old Fashioned Girl* first as a serial, then as a book for a hungry audience that demanded more and ragged their adored author furiously. "I asked for bread," she complained, "and got a stone, in the form of a pedestal."

Demands for her works poured in and she dashed them off, seldom rewriting, pulling in her childhood memories, fleshing out her father's theories. Her popularity was such that she had little peace to enjoy the money. Unwilling to speak in public, she once simply stood on a platform and turned slowly so that all in a large room could look at her. A fan from Wisconsin swore to her that "if you come to Oshkosh your feet will not be allowed to touch the ground." Once established as a celebrity, she signed petitions for woman suffrage, but she had little time or taste for public appearances.

For the rest of her life she labored with dogged energy, supplying the wants of all of her family, seeking a peace she seldom found for herself. She was proud to vote in municipal elections in Concord, and she continually supported the improvement of the lot of women, rejecting prevailing sentiments consistently in her belief that women had a right to all that they could achieve, demonstrating that belief in her sustained support of her sister May's artistic ambitions, even as she envied the more favored daughter and groaned under the constant labor of writing moral fables for the young.

Her four novels for adults never achieved the success she longed for, and as the years passed the stories for children grew repetitive as their author tired. She never found the freedom she sought: "I need to be alone to spin, like a spider," she knew, but constant care of first her parents, then her niece, constant demands from her "little friends" for more works did not allow her to enjoy the fruits of her labors. "When I had the youth I had no money, now I have the money I have no time and when I get the time, if I ever do, I shall have no health to enjoy life."

Generous with simple advice to children, she found little for herself. "Life always was a puzzle to me, and gets more mysterious as I go on. I shall find out by and by and see that it's all right, if only I can keep brave and patient to the end." And so she tried, true to her father's description—"duty's faithful child."

Suggested Reading

The March Family Series and Similar Works for the Young: *Little Women*, *Little Men*, *Jo's Boys*, *An Old Fashioned Girl*, *Eight Cousins*, *Rose in Bloom*. The first three take the Marches from girlhood to maturity; the second three are similar tales of development and education.

A work primarily for adults, Elaine Showaller's editing of other works entitled *Alternative Alcott*. This collection has a feminist slant, incorporating *Behind a Mask*, excerpts from *Work*, *Hospital Sketches*, and some complete shorter texts. Although some of these works remain in print, they are not readily available in most libraries or book stores. *The Journal of Louisa May Alcott* has been edited by Joel Myerson, David Shealy, and Madeleine Stern (1989).

Good secondary works include:

Cornelia Migiss, *Invincible Louisa*, a Newberry Medal winner is a lively biography for young people.

Sarah Ebert, *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott's Place in American Culture*.

Madeleine Stern, *Louisa May Alcott*, a 1971 biography. Available in paper.

Anne Bail Howard has spent more than thirty years teaching at the University of Nevada, Reno, after completing academic work at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and the University of New Mexico. She has taught courses in American literature, particularly specializing in nineteenth century and women writers. Anne has long been interested in public humanities as a participant in programs and as a board member of the Nevada Humanities Committee. She presented *Louisa May Alcott and Kate Chopin for the Great Plains Chautauqua* and *Dorothy Parker as a scholar with the National Chautauqua Tour*. Now that she is retired, she especially welcomes notes from Chautauqua audiences. Her e-mail address is abhoward@equinox.unr.edu.



Henry David Thoreau

A Deliberate Author

By Kevin Radaker



In declaring that he wished “to live deliberately [and] to front only the essential facts of life,” Henry David Thoreau stated the central theme of his masterpiece, *Walden* (1854), now recognized as one of the greatest books in American literature.

Though he is widely known for his thoughts on political reform in “Civil Disobedience” and for his sentiments on nature and conservation in his natural history essays, his place in American literature and culture is secure by virtue of the remarkable artistry of *Walden*, where the radically individualistic and affirmative voice of Thoreau’s fictive persona urges his reader to “live deliberately,” to pursue his own way and not his neighbor’s.

Based upon Thoreau’s experiment in living on the shore of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts from July 4, 1845 to September 6, 1847, *Walden* is the finely-structured creation of Thoreau’s extraordinary poetic imagination, rendered in a language rich in images, metaphors, and symbols. Widely recognized for the wit, vigor, and beauty of its prose, *Walden* is a book that is concerned with several matters and may be defined in a variety of ways: it is a critique of the materialism and conformity of his neighbors, it is a personal declaration of independence from society and its institutions, it is a celebration of the ability within each individual to elevate his or her life by a conscious endeavor, and, most of all, it is a search for the absolute reality and spiritual truths to be found within and through the material world around us.

Although Thoreau unapologetically admitted that he devoted more of his time and energies to nature than to man, his search for reality often caused him to criticize the common modes of living that he witnessed in his native New England. Many of his writings, but especially *Walden* and his essay entitled “Life Without Principle” (1863), contain his major objections and reservations concerning society and its attendant ills, including

conformity, materialism, and technological advancement—all of which function as major themes—in Thoreau’s writings. As Thoreau witnessed his Concord neighbors conforming to the “common mode of living” as if they preferred it to any other, he urged his readers in *Walden* to reconsider the worth of their “desperate enterprises”: “I am convinced that to maintain one’s self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we live simply and wisely.” In warning his readers of the “quiet desperation” that can result from a life dedicated to securing material wealth only, Thoreau espoused a life of simplicity, dedicated to the cultivation of the soul: “Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, . . . Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul.”

“Economy,” the first and longest chapter of *Walden*, is devoted primarily to Thoreau’s criticism concerning the materialistic life and conventional beliefs of his neighbors. Before Thoreau can offer his vision of how we should live our lives, he must expose the foibles of contemporary society, but because he is quite aware that strong criticism can sound sanctimonious and somber, he is careful to employ a variety of comic effects throughout “Economy,” and in other chapters of *Walden* as well. Far too often, readers new to Thoreau read his prose literally, and thus, misread a large portion of *Walden*, and “Economy” in particular. Thoreau possessed a wry and witty sense of humor, and throughout his masterpiece, he employs a number of humorous devices, including puns, understatement, exaggeration, irony, paradox, satire, and parody. In criticizing the lavish homes of his day, for example, he employs hyperbole, claiming that any man who is hard pushed for a house could live comfortably in one of the wooden boxes by the railroad that the laborers use for storing their tools at night. In addressing the work ethic, he produces a clever parody of Adam’s curse: “It is not necessary that a man should earn his living by the sweat of his brow, unless he sweats easier than I do.” And in responding to a meat-eating farmer who claims that Thoreau’s vegetarian diet fails to furnish the raw material of bones, Thoreau ironically notes that the farmer “talks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plow along in spite of every obstacle.”

Though Thoreau was certainly no primitivist—he ventured into the woods to intensify his experiences, not to repudiate civilization—he was often skeptical concerning the value of technological “progress,” asserting that the new inventions that were inundating the market in the 1840s and 1850s were “but improved means to an unimproved end.” Thoreau was quite aware of the increasing number of luxuries and conveniences, but he wondered if they truly represented improvements in the condition of man. In recognizing the “great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas,” he asserts that Maine and Texas may have “nothing important to communicate.” He was more concerned with the quality and depth of our thoughts than with the speed and efficiency of our tools. In like manner, Thoreau was skeptical concerning the true advantages of the railroad, the greatest symbol in his day of the advance of industrial power. Though Thoreau could admire the convenience of the railroad, he takes pains in *Walden* to describe how its noise and smoke disturbed his meditations at the pond, and through a series of metaphorical associations, he identifies the railroad with the mechanistic outlook that has assigned his neighbors to a life of unending, routine toil. “We do not ride upon the railroad,” warns Thoreau, “it rides upon us.”

Thoreau’s concern for the freedom and improvement of the individual members within society informs his views on government as well. In July of 1846, during the second summer

of his residence at Walden Pond, Thoreau was arrested for nonpayment of his poll tax to the state, a tax that he had refused to pay for several years in protest against the government’s condoning of slavery. Though he spent only one night in jail (his Aunt Maria promptly paid his tax in order to avoid any further family embarrassment), the events surrounding Thoreau’s arrest inspired his essay “Civil Disobedience,” the most famous and influential essay of political reform ever written by an American. Because he believed that individual conscience is a more reliable test of a truth than the voice of the majority, Thoreau urged his reader in “Civil Disobedience” to follow his conscience rather than the law when he is convinced that a law is unjust. “I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterwards. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right.”

His powerful argument urging action based upon moral principle and individual nonviolent resistance against the state has inspired such great reformers in this century as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. . . . If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the state will not hesitate which to choose. . . . This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution.”

In “Civil Disobedience,” Thoreau put forth his famous argument for passive resistance, but his later political essays, including those in support of John Brown’s violent actions at Harper’s Ferry, demonstrate that he could condone violent action against the government as a means to end social and political injustice. In short, Thoreau was inconsistent in his approaches to reform; nevertheless, the trenchant prose within his political essays continues to challenge each of us to consider the proper role of government and the duties of the individual in relation to the government and its laws.

Although Thoreau did care about the social and political issues of his day, nature in all its manifestations was the absorbing passion of his life. Because he believed that the ideal was to be found within and through the natural world, he devoted the majority of his time and his writings to the physical and metaphorical exploration of nature. In nature, Thoreau argued, man could confront “the essential facts of life” and enjoy a healthy relation to the universe that he could not find in society. As he wrote in his journal for December 31, 1841: “In society you will not find health, but in nature. You must converse much with the fields and woods if you would imbibe such health into your mind and spirit as you covet for your body.” This faith in nature’s curative powers lies at the heart of *Walden*.

Though a substantial portion of *Walden* is devoted to criticizing the materialism and conformity of society and its members, the prevailing and final tone of the book is affirmative, not negative. The first chapter finds Thoreau sadly asserting that most men “lead lives of quiet desperation,” but the second of its eighteen chapters finds him announcing the optimistic point of view that informs the bulk of the book: “I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor.” In order to elevate his life, man must seek reality, not the illusions of money or status, but the sublime reality to be realized in nature, in the here and now.

Thoreau’s desire to seek reality and for others to seek reality is stated most forcefully in the final pages of the second chapter

of *Walden*, entitled "Where I Lived and What I Lived For," where Thoreau suggests that the inhabitants of New England live a "mean life" because their "vision does not penetrate the surface of things." Thoreau is convinced, however, that he and his readers can apprehend the sublime reality around them if they work through the illusions perpetrated by society: "Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance . . . through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through church and state, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality." If man learns how to practice "the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen," he will come to realize that truth is not "remote in the outskirts of the system," but all around us, just waiting to be applied by the sensitive human perceiver. Convinced that eternity can be perceived now and here, Thoreau confidently proclaims that "God himself culminates in the present moment and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages." But if we wish to apprehend God, the most sublime reality of all, we will be able to do so, argues Thoreau "only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us." Most of *Walden*, therefore, is Thoreau's attempt to "drench" himself and his readers in the reality that surrounds us in order to find God there. On September 7, 1851, Thoreau wrote in his Journal: "My profession is to find God in nature, to know his lurking places."

As a Transcendentalist, Thoreau believed in a perfect correspondence between the inner nature of man and the structure of the external world, between the soul and nature; thus, to contemplate the rhythms and laws of the natural world was to begin to understand the rhythms and laws of our inner beings. In addition, because Thoreau believed that nature was a materialization of spirit and a physical realization of divinity, he referred to it as a sacred place worthy of man's respect and awe. In short, Thoreau's thoughts on nature represent his search for spiritual truths, for the reality that all men crave and that is why the descriptions of his experiences in nature move from the seen to the unseen, from observation to revelation. *Walden* contains several passages that demonstrate Thoreau's conviction that man may come to know himself and God intuitively through sensuous experiences in nature. The "Solitude" chapter, for instance, begins thus: "This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself."

Three paragraphs later, Thoreau writes: "There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still." By providing his readers with a unique sense of immediacy through close description and by investing the natural world with metaphorical significance, Thoreau reminds us that nature should be experienced with a sense of wonder and awe. Whether listening to the sounds of an owl at night or following the trail of a fox in the snow, measuring the depths of ice on the pond or studying the hieroglyphic forms of thawing sand and clay on the side of a railroad embankment, Thoreau's purposes were aimed at combining scientific accuracy with poetic insight in order to reveal the "living poetry" animating all of nature.

In reading *Walden*, readers often conclude that Thoreau's ultimate aim is to extol the seasonal cycle of nature as the greatest sign, or promise, of man's immortality. After all, in the "Spring" chapter, when Thoreau celebrates the renewing powers of the season's "influx of light," he boldly proclaims: "There needs no stronger proof of immortality. All things must live in such a light." But those who think that Thoreau would

have us fully embrace the natural cycle overlook the importance of the concluding chapter of *Walden*, where he urges his readers to venture forth on a journey of self-exploration and self-transcendence, a journey that will take them on "a tangent to this sphere." In "Conclusion," then, Thoreau suggests that to study nature's cycles is to learn eventually how to transcend those cycles and, thus, how to transcend time itself. Much earlier in *Walden*, however, Thoreau does reveal his desire to transcend time in a poetic passage remarkable for its blend of nature and transcendence. Directly addressing the issue of time, he writes: "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars."

In order to "live deep," Thoreau found great satisfaction in embracing the earth, but he wished to embrace the heavens even more so.

Suggested Reading

The primary writings of Henry David Thoreau include "Civil Disobedience," 1849, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 1849, *Walden*, 1854, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," 1860, "Walking," 1860, "Wild Apples," 1860, "Life Without Principle," 1863, *Cape Cod*, 1864, and *The Maine Woods*, 1864.

The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau, 1971- , published by Princeton University Press, is projected for 25 volumes, 10.

Charles R. Anderson. *The Magic Circle of Walden*, 1968.

Joan Burbick. *Thoreau's Alternating History: Changing Perspectives on Nature, Culture, and Language*, 1987.

Stanley Cavell. *The Senses of Walden*, 1972. Expanded edition, 1981.

Frederick Garber. *Thoreau's Redemptive Imagination*, 1977.

Walter Harding. *The Days of Henry David Thoreau: A Biography*, 1982. The standard biography of Thoreau.

Richard Lebeaux. *Young Man Thoreau*, 1977 and *Thoreau's Seasons*, 1984.

James McIntosh. *Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist: His Shifting Stance Towards Nature*, 1974.

Michael Meyer. *Several More Lives To Live: Thoreau's Political Reputation in America*, 1977.

Leonard N. Neufeldt. *The Economist: Henry Thoreau and Enterprise*, 1989.

Sherman Paul. *The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration*, 1958.

Robert D. Richardson, Jr. *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, 1986.

Robert Sattelmeyer. *Thoreau's Reading: A Study in Intellectual History*, 1988.

Richard J. Schneider. *Henry David Thoreau*, 1987.

William J. Wolf. *Thoreau: Mystic, Prophet, Ecologist*, 1974.

Kevin Radaker is chair of the English Department at Anderson University in Anderson, Indiana. Kevin portrayed Thoreau for the Great Plains Chautauqua Society from 1991 to 1993. Since that time he has presented his Thoreau more than 150 times to audiences at schools, colleges, and libraries around the country. For three summer seasons Kevin performed as Thoreau for the Missouri and Illinois Chautauqua, "American Voices."

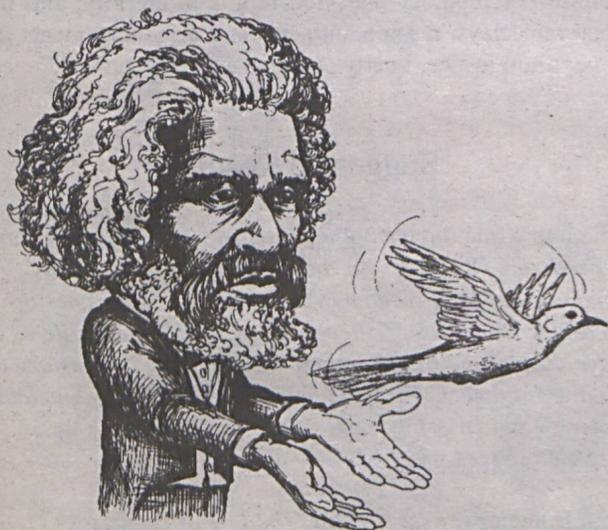
Kevin lives with his wife Linda and their two boys in Anderson, Indiana and he welcomes correspondence with his audiences. His e-mail address is kradaker@anderson.edu.



Frederick Douglass

American Slave and Freeman

By Charles Everett Pace



Frederick Douglass, editor, orator, writer, abolitionist and statesman, was the most important African-American and one of the most significant Americans of the 19th century.

On February 20, 1895, just six days following his 77th birthday, his last full day this side of death, Frederick Douglass attended a women's suffrage rally. William S. McFeely reports: "When he entered the hall the presiding officer interrupted the meeting, and the women rose as Susan B. Anthony and Anna Shaw escorted him to the platform."

Douglass delivered his last public address. Later that evening at his home atop Cedar Hill, his cherished estate overlooking Washington, D.C., Douglass began to mimic, (as he enjoyed doing), one of the rally's speakers. He rose from his chair, dipped to his knees with a grand gesture and in an instant horrified Mrs. Douglass by dying, in as dramatic a fashion as he had lived. The next day following, with no intention at making a pun, former South Carolina congressman Robert Smalls announced to the world: "The greatest of the race has fallen."

Douglass was born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey of a slave mother and white father, in Tuckahoe, Talbot County, on Maryland's Eastern Shore in 1818. He believed that he was born in 1817, but was unsure as he relates in the first of his three autobiographies, *Narratives of a Slave Life*: "I have no accurate knowledge of my age . . . By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs."

He escaped to freedom in 1838. Adopting a character's name from a Walter Scott novel, he assumed the name Frederick Douglass. Douglass became a successful newspaper editor. He went on to serve his country as a U.S. Marshall, Director of the Freedman's Bank, Keeper of the Deeds of Washington, D.C., Resident Minister and Consul General to the Republic of Haiti and advisor to eight U.S. Presidents. A self-made man, Douglass embodied, in dramatic form, the American ideal of the power of individual initiative and personal excellence devoted to a life of human service. "I do now and always have attached

more importance to manhood than to mere kinship or identity with one variety of the human family' Race, in the popular sense, is narrow, humanity is broad. The one is special, the other is universal. The one is transient, the other is permanent."

Douglass believed in humanism, that is, he was concerned about the whole of humanity, male and female, those of his country and those of others. He was most active as an abolitionist and an untiring worker for the liberation of the bondsmen and bondswomen after emancipation. He immediately launched into the effort to gain the vote for black males and the franchise for women as well. He felt that all Americans, regardless of race, class, gender or national origin, should enjoy the same rights as white men. This set of liberal ideas, backed up by an uncompromising personality and highlighted by the vigor of the high profile manner through which he pursued them, often caused him to run afoul of friends as well as foes. However, his principles were also the source of his great pride, strength and personal success throughout his long and active life.

Frederick Douglass' education for social action began during the twenty years he was held in the American system of institutionalized terror. He learned to read from a kind mistress, Sophia Auld, until her husband Hugh called this illegal practice to an immediate halt, telling his wife, "If you give a nigger an inch he will take an ell . . . learning will spoil the best nigger in the world . . . knowledge unfits a child to be a slave."

Later, through his own efforts, Douglass sharpened his reading skills and even conducted a slave "Sabbath school," reading and teaching the skill to others. After escaping to freedom in 1838, he began speaking publicly in several New Bedford churches about his experiences as a slave. His professional career as a public speaker was launched at an anti-slavery rally held on Nantucket Island in Massachusetts in 1841. Though he wrote profusely throughout his life, his renown rests on his prowess as a public speaker. He thought of himself more a public speaker than a writer. He joined the American Anti-Slavery Society and spoke widely across the northeastern and mid-western United States.

After the first of his speaking tours to England and the British Isles, he ran afoul of his friend and mentor William Lloyd Garrison, the founder and chief theorist of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The Garrisonians adhered to three primary theses. First, the Constitution of the United States was "a pro-slavery document," the foundation of a flawed political system in the United States. Therefore, members of the Society were to shun all involvement in formal politics in their attempt to overthrow the slavery system.

Secondly, they held that the church was a pro-slavery institution. Thirdly, they thought that moral persuasion must be the major vehicle employed to bring about slavery's downfall. The Garrisonians worked to persuade others through the power of logical argument. Once convinced, the people, or at least a majority of them, so the theory went, would institute a non-violent end to the evil institution.

As Douglass began to travel at home and abroad and to enter into dialogue with a wider array of people, he came to the conclusion that each of these three fundamental tenets of the Garrisonian viewpoint was incorrect. He eventually concluded that the constitution is not at its source, a pro-slavery document, but is only interpreted as such. He further concluded that the teachings of Jesus Christ were—to use a contemporary term, "a theology of liberation,"—not pro-slavery at all. Finally, after several meetings with his friend John Brown, combined with the increasing obstinacy of the Southern planters, Douglass

came to see the practical value of armed revolt. He soon found that he had such irrevocable differences with the Garrisonians that he broke with them and joined Gerrit Smith and others who made up the Radical Abolitionists. He also became an active member of the Republican Party, campaigned for its candidates, spoke at national Presidential conventions and served in several national administrations of both parties. With the commencement of the Civil War, he issued his famous call, "Men of Color To Arms" and served as a recruiter for the Union Army, especially for the famous Massachusetts 55th Regiment, under the command of Colonel Shaw. Two of his three sons were Union soldiers, and Douglass, himself, hoped to become the first black man to serve as an officer in the Union Army. His promised commission never came however, and his friend Martin Delany upon receiving the rank of Major, became the first African-American to achieve that singular honor.

Douglass was a lifelong feminist. He spoke at the first national women's rights convention held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. He was admired by, and a great admirer of, strong, intelligent women, beginning with his grandmother, Betsy Bailey.

Some of the most active and most famous names of the day are included among his friends: Harriet Tubman, Julia Griffiths, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lucretia Coffin Mott, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. At that first women's rights conference, he took a stand on women's rights that all others, save Stanton who introduced the measure, were not prepared to take—full suffrage. He was active in the cause of women's rights until the very day he died. The issue of the vote for women was the only serious disagreement he had with women's rights advocates, and that disagreement centered on the timing for introducing a national amendment to settle the question.

After the Civil War brought about the emancipation of the slaves by a halting and vacillating President Lincoln, Douglass felt that the next most pressing fight should be waged in securing the vote for black men. This ran afoul of Susan Anthony and many other (though not all) women in the movement. Douglass sympathized with the suffragists, but he did not wish the issue of enfranchisement of women to distract the nation from giving the vote to black men. Some of the feminists of the time stereotyped black men as "sambos" and declared that "ignorant black men should not be allowed to vote while intelligent white women are not." The attack notwithstanding, after the passage of the 15th amendment in 1870, Douglass immediately issued the call for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the vote for women. Douglass had his problems with some black leaders as well. During his first visit to England, his decision to allow friends to purchase his freedom from his owner, (though in principle he rejected the idea that one human could own another), drew fire from both blacks and whites. His close association with John Brown led Douglass to flee the country with Marshalls hot on his heels. He fled to England and was roundly criticized in public. But it was his lifelong, close association with several white women which most irritated many of Douglass' critics, and a few of his friends. Julia Griffiths, later Julia Griffiths Crofts the English woman who worked at his newspaper (and for a while resided in his home) drew the greatest amount of fire. Eventually, in 1855, Julia returned to her native England and married a minister, but she and Douglass remained in constant contact by letter until his death. After Julia departed, he began a close relationship in 1856 with the German Jewish writer Otilia Assing and so kept his critics talking. After several years in this country, Assing returned to Europe suffering from severe mental strain. Soon after hearing of Douglass' remarriage she committed suicide,

leaving her entire estate to Douglass. Upon the death of his first wife Anna, in 1882, after 45 years of marriage, he married Helen Pitts, a white American woman twenty years his junior. The marriage caused a severe strain within his own family, particularly with his only daughter. Douglass' social life was as controversial as his political calling. Both controversies delighted him. Douglass saw himself as a *man* as well as a black man. He viewed them as complementary rather than, as some, contradictory. If the society could not see their complementarity it was society's problem and not his.

Great orator that he was, we know Douglass today, of course, through his publications. Three autobiographies, one work of fiction (*The Heroic Slave*), articles, speeches and letters comprise the Douglass literary record. His mind had early been challenged by the power of the written word to argue a point persuasively. As he informs us in *The Narrative*, "I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being a slave for life [emphasis his] began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled *The Columbian Orator*. Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book."

Later he recounts a captivating section about which he says: "In the same book, I met with one of Sheridan's mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts in my own soul."

The childhood habit of being a consumer of knowledge laid the foundation that culminated in the adult becoming a producer of thought. The crowning point to this striving was reached when he assumed the duties of publisher and editor of his own newspapers: *The North Star* (1847 to 1851), *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1851 to 1859), *Douglass Monthly* (1859 to 1863), and the *New National Era* (1870 to 1873). Once when asked how he wished to be addressed, he responded: "Mr. Editor, if you please."

More than a man of political action, Douglass was also a man of culture, a lover of literature, art, music and the theatre. He was an accomplished violist, and possessed a fine baritone singing voice. During his travels abroad he was often found visiting the art galleries of Paris, Naples, Rome, Greece, and Egypt and he understood the necessity of institutionalizing centers of culture. During his inaugural speech at the opening of the Douglass institute, a cultural center bearing his name, founded by black citizens of Baltimore "to promote the intellectual advancement of the colored portion of the community," he spoke, in part: "We who have long been debarred of the privileges of culture may assemble and have our souls thrilled with heavenly music, lifted to the skies on the wings of poetry and song. Here we can assemble and have our minds enlightened."

Douglass' scientific interest took him into the field of cultural anthropology. He bought texts on ethnology for his personal library. He was interested in the story of human history, and particularly the role of African peoples in that story. Knowing that the father of Russian literature, Alexander Pushkin, was black, as was the French romantic writer Alexander Dumas (*The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Christo*) he had a keen interest in the role of African peoples in the ancient world and their role as founders of Western civilization via the African high cultures of ancient Ethiopia and Egypt. During his final trip to Europe, he and Helen decided to expand their stay to include a visit to Greece, followed by a journey to Egypt and Africa. He was aware of whites' desire to suppress the seminal influence of Egyptian civilization on Greek culture,

thus denying the truth that Western civilization had its birth in Africa, and from black peoples rather than Europeans, as the myth which masqueraded for "science" proclaimed. Remarking on what he observed in Egypt he said:

"I have wanted the evidence of greatness, under a colored skin to meet and beat back the charge of natural, original and permanent inferiority of the colored races of men. Could I have seen forty years ago what I have now seen, I should have been much better fortified to meet the Notts and the Gliddins . . . in their arguments against the Negro as a part of the great African race. My knowledge on this subject comes to me late, but I hope not too late to be of some service; for the battle at this point is not yet fought out, and the victory is not yet won."

Later he wrote: "It has been the fashion of American writers to deny that the Egyptians were Negroes and claim that they are of the same race as themselves. This has, I have no doubt, been largely due to a wish to deprive the Negro of the moral support of Ancient Greatness and to appropriate the same to the white race."

History is a complex discipline, part humanities and part social science. Waldo E. Martin devotes an entire book to an attempt to understand the mind of Frederick Douglass. The essay certainly hints at more than it explains. Yet, it seems that Douglass' life was a classic example of the "two-ness" which Du Bois so eloquently wrote about in his classic work *The Souls of Black Folk*. Douglass spent most of his energy attempting to resolve this dichotomy, this "two-ness," of being both "a Negro and American." Dichotomy as an existential reality, confronted Douglass daily in his personal, social and political life. America, for nearly half of its existence, has been a country which was half slave and half free. Its labor force was black and white. Within the white world the male half had political rights the female half did not. Within the black world, 90 percent were slave, and the rest were free. His mother (like his first wife) was black, and his father (like his second wife) was white. From the day of his birth, Douglass was faced with the challenge of resolving contradictions which greeted him on all fronts. His most significant labor was devoted to the intellectual and political challenge of reconstructing his person and his country into one humanity, resolving the dichotomy, and in this he was only partially successful. His lack of success left a challenge for the rest of us. His success left a marvelously rich written record of a life of struggle in pursuit of a noble vision for a common humanity.

Douglass' vision still remains a potential rather than a reality. In the final years of his life, America took a giant step backward. All of the positive gains for African Americans were wiped out with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South. They were abandoned by the federal government and the Southern legislatures enacted a series of so-called Black Codes, which took away all of the political and social rights black Americans enjoyed during the brief period of Reconstruction following the Civil War. Their economic future was stifled for the next 70 years. After Douglass' death, Blacks were at the mercy of the worst elements in American culture. It was only with the signing of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, that African Americans began once again to enter the American political mainstream. It is a process that continues.

When Douglass crossed over to meet the ancestors on that February night in 1895, he was a man who, as his life flashed before him, may have heard again the words he spoke some five years before:

"I have seen dark hours in my life, and I have seen the darkness gradually disappearing and the light gradually increasing. One by one, I have seen obstacles removed, errors corrected, prejudices soften, proscriptions relinquished, and my people advancing in all the elements that make up the sum of general welfare. I remember that God reigns in eternity, and that, whatever delays, dis-appointments and discouragements may come, truth, justice, liberty and humanity will prevail."

Suggested Reading

Douglass wrote three autobiographies: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself: His early life as a Slave, his escape from bondage and his complete history to the present time*. (1881). See also *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, John Blassingaame, editor, published by Yale University Press, 1979-82. See also:

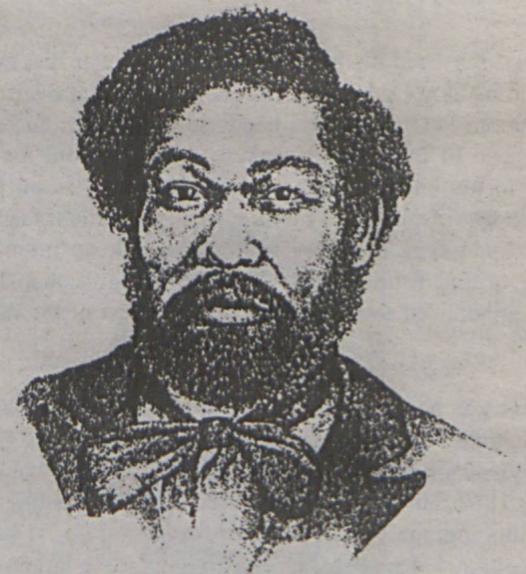
Arna Bontemps' *Free At Last, The Life of Frederick Douglass*, 1971.

Philip S. Foner, editor, *Frederick Douglass On the Rights of Women*, 1976.

—*The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, 5 volumes, 1950-55.

Waldo E. Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 1984.

William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, 1991.

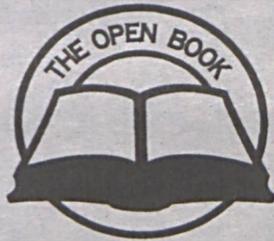


Charles Everett Pace is Assistant Professor of anthropology and American studies at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. He continues his doctoral studies at Purdue University. Charles has been doing public humanities programs for twenty years, portraying Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X, and W. E. B. Du Bois. He has presented his characterization of Douglass in nine African countries under the auspices of the United States Information Agency. This summer Charles is also portraying Booker T. Washington. Charles welcomes correspondence from Chautauqua audiences. His e-mail address is pacec@centre.edu.

Greenville Chautauqua
Thanks to our Sponsors



Community Foundation
of Greater Greenville

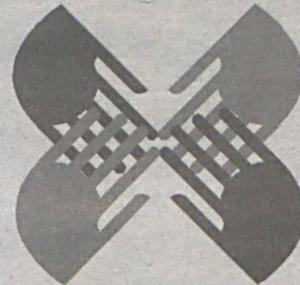


FURMAN
UNIVERSITY

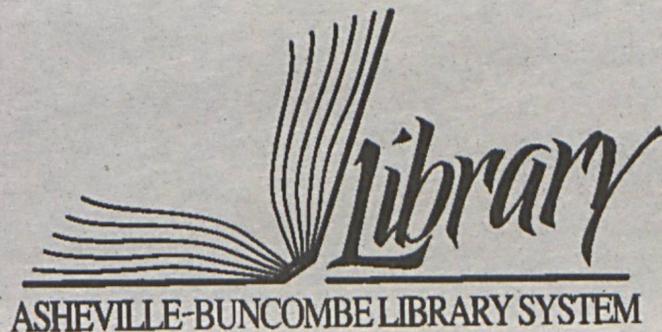
PECKNEL
music company



Buncombe County Chautauqua
Thanks to our Sponsors



North Carolina Humanities Council
Weaving Cultures and Communities



The Greenville News
GreenvilleOnline.com

Thanks to Greenville Chautauqua Workers

Lise Johnson, English teacher at Carolina Academy, is the Chairperson of the Greenville Chautauqua Society. She chaired the Chautauqua Society meetings, set up the film series, all before going off to Breadloaf.

Sally Potosky arranged for music, set up the workshops, and organized pre-Chautauqua programs at Senior Centers.

Joan Scripture and Debbie Willingham, Greenville School District Coordinators for English and Social Studies got us in touch with teachers.

Lucy Tiller, Dr. Thomas Tiller, and Carolyn McIntyre worked on publicity and watermelons.

Seth Harrison kept Chautauqua on the Internet with the help of JDR at RRCI and Rick Smith of MindSpring.

Carolyn Cody Fuller of the Greenville County Library System organized the Library Discussion Series.

Dr. Judith Bainbridge put the scholars up at Furman University.

Pecknel Music Company gave us a donation and the use of a keyboard.

Duff Bruce of the Open Book helped with publicity and gave a major donation for Chautauqua expenses.

Thanks to the Buncombe County
Chautauqua Committee

Laura Gaskin (Chair), Ed Sheary, Peggy Weaver, Philip Banks, Robert Rollins of the Asheville-Buncombe Library System. Mary Parker, Jack Sherman, Ann MacPherson, Robert Todd, Diane Tuttle, Deborah Compton, Dana McDowell, Paul Bryant, Christiana Dillingham of Friends of Buncombe County Libraries, Inc. Kim MacQueen of Gold Hill Associates; David Holcombe of the Smith-McDowell House Museum.

Thanks for Donations and Support:

Pack Place Education, Arts, and Sciences Center
Royal Crown Bottling Company
Malaprops Bookstore/Cafe
Mountain Area Information Network

Thanks for the Music:

The Haywood Ramblers

Greenville Chautauqua Schedule Shows at Reedy River Falls Park Downtown Greenville

Henry David Thoreau <i>(A special Father's Day nature walk along the Reedy River for Dads and kids with Kevin Radaker as Thoreau. Meet at the tent in Reedy River Falls Park.)</i>	Sunday, June 17	2:00 p.m.
Walt Whitman <i>(All are invited for a watermelon social following the show.)</i>	Sunday, June 17	7:00 p.m.
Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne	Monday, June 18	7:00 p.m.
Henry David Thoreau and Louisa May Alcott	Tuesday, June 19	7:00 p.m.
Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville	Wednesday, June 20	7:00 p.m.

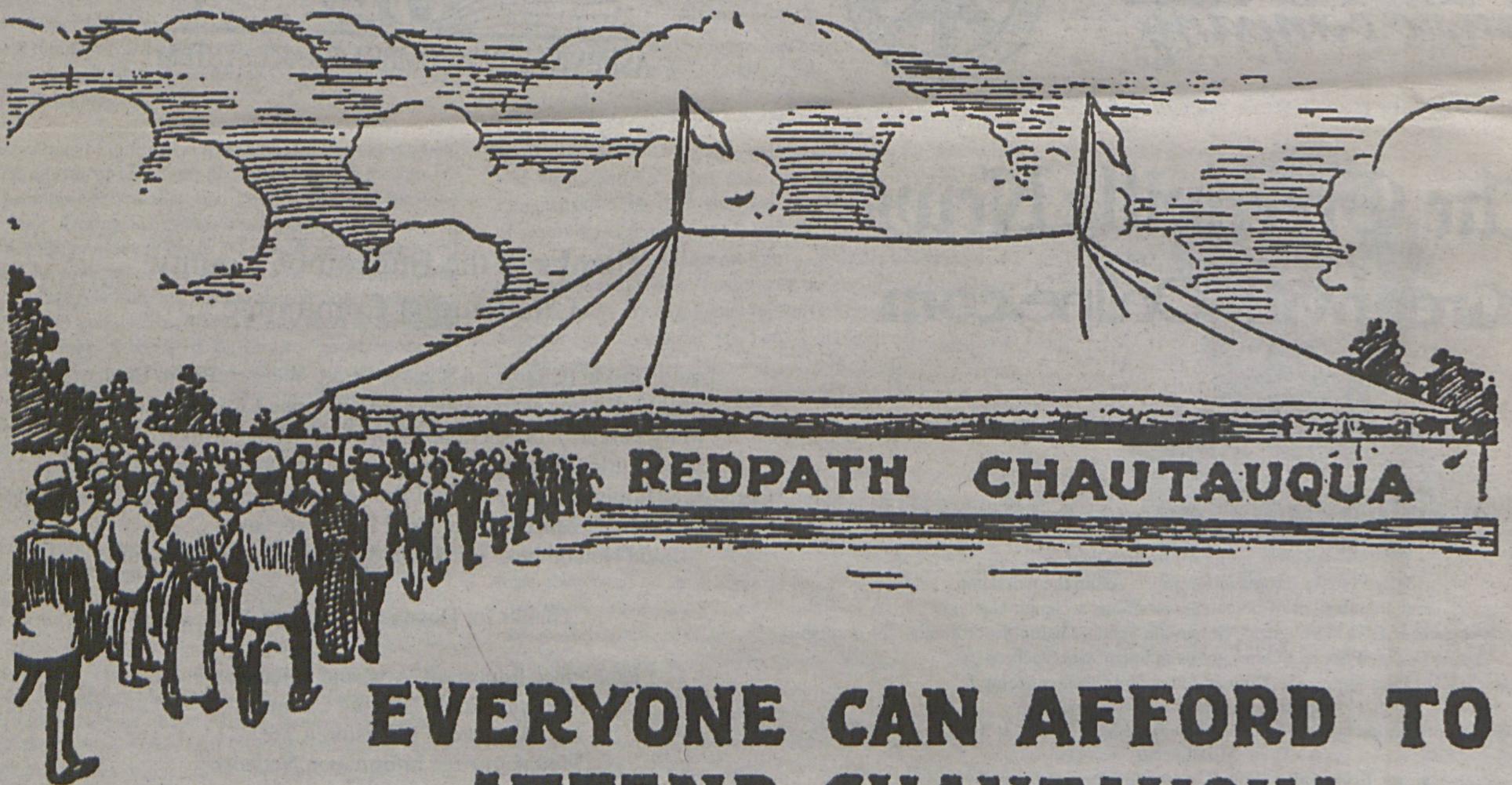
All shows are free. Everyone is invited.

Buncombe County Chautauqua Shows are at the Smith-McDowell House Museum 283 Victoria Road, Asheville

Walt Whitman	Monday, June 18	7:00 p.m.
Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne	Tuesday, June 19	7:00 p.m.
Henry David Thoreau and Louisa May Alcott	Wednesday, June 20	7:00 p.m.
Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville	Thursday, June 21	7:00 p.m.

All shows are free. Everyone is invited.

Thanks to Lili Stewart Wheeler of Dickinson, North Dakota for the cartoons of the characters and of the scholars. Special thanks to the Greenville County Library's Media and Public Relations Department for their help in creating this publication.



**EVERYONE CAN AFFORD TO
ATTEND CHAUTAUQUA.**