Chapter –I

Nathaniel Hawthorne –An Enigma

“No one would try to write about him, for no one can know enough to do it”.

Sophia Peabody

Nathaniel Hawthorne [1804-1862] was writing at the time when his contemporary writers had generated a strong interest in the romantic histories of the past. The writings of Walter Scott and James Fennimore Cooper were fantastic narratives of heroic explorers. They captured the adventures of the military men passing through extraordinary scenes in their fiction. Their characters were stereotyped. Initially, Hawthorne was impressed by their romantic histories and tried to recapture the same type of character and story in his first novel Fanshaw [1828]. The people’s indifference to this venture dampened his spirit to such an extent that he did not dare to write any extended narrative for the next two decades. Editorial problems and policies contributed to Hawthorne’s anonymity for a very long period, denying him the kind of recognition which he deserved.

After his graduation, he stayed in Salem and spent most of his time in reading about his countries past which enlarged his consciousness of that time. Hawthorne’s social exile ended when his old acquaintance with Peabody family was re-established.
Hawthorne’s courtship with Sophia Peabody who was younger sister of transcendentalist Elizabeth Peabody became one of the reasons for his closeness to the transcendentalism. Sophia’s sister Elizabeth Peabody opened a book store in Boston in 1839 where transcendentalist used to gather for discussions and to review new books. In the Peabody book shop, Hawthorne got the opportunity to meet the sages of Concord thoughts which laid the foundation for his joining the socialist community, Brook farm at West Roxbury in 1841. Here, he got a chance to be familiar with transcendentalist ideology which played a significant role in shaping his fictional text *The Blithedale Romance* [1852]. Margaret Fuller was a frequent visitor at this book store therefore; here, Hawthorne met this outspoken female activist who inspired his many female characters.

After his marriage to Sophia Peabody in 1842, Hawthorne stayed in Concord till he moved to Salem in 1846 for a job in Salem custom house. Here, his neighbors were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau, and Ellery Channing. His stay at Old Manse in Concord further provided him with an opportunity to learn about New England transcendentalism from a close quarter. Transcendentalists believed that all people had access to divine inspiration, hence sought freedom, knowledge, and truth. They were convinced that some institutes of the society were obstructing the path of democracy; therefore, they demanded liberty from all age long corrupt institutions which had lost their essential meaning. Their Principles were strongly connected with the democratic ideology. They worked for liberty of slaves and equality of females. Various scholars considered the impact of transcendentalist belief on Hawthorne which was the moving force of the 19th century. Bliss Perry in “The Centenary of Hawthorne” first published in
The Atlantic [1904]) and later reprinted in Park Street Papers [1908] stated that Hawthorne through his readings, friendship and association along with the intellectual environment in his time was in fact a transcendentalist. F.O. Matthiessen and Floyd Stovall in a passage on Hawthorne in American Idealism [1943] asserted that Hawthorne accepted some of the tenets of transcendentalism. Stovall cited Hawthorne’s concern with the human soul and his distrust of intellect devoid of human affection as a few of the examples.

Henry James spoke about Hawthorne’s closeness with Thoreau. “He [Thoreau] was as shy and ungregarious as Hawthorne; but he and latter appear to have been socially disposed towards each other, . . .” (85). In “The Old Manse”, Hawthorne wrote about the time, he spent with Thoreau: “But the chief profit of those wild days, to him and me, lay- not in any definite idea-not in any angular or rounded truth, which we dug out of the shapeless mass of problematic stuff-but in freedom which we thereby won from all custom and conventionalism, and fretting influences of man on man” (25).

In the same essay, Hawthorne spoke out his mind on Emerson, a leading exponent of this movement “It was good, nevertheless, to meet him in the wood paths, or sometimes in our avenue, with that pure intellectual gleam diffused about his presence, like a garment of shining one; and he so quiet, so simple, so without pretention, encountering each man alive as if expecting to receive more than he could impart” (31).

Hawthorne was in agreement with some of the beliefs commonly held by the transcendentalists but the temper of his mind was skeptical. He reached at conclusion by observing life rather than a doctrine. Some of the tenets of the transcendental movement were alien to his nature, for example, abolitionism, a radical branch of anti slavery
crusade. Hawthorne condemned slave trading but he could not see any wisdom in the violent views and remedies of the abolitionists. As far as his views regarding women were concern, they were conservative.

Hawthorne was expelled from the Salem Custom House through a political manoeuvring. His untoward experiences in the Salem custom House formed the moral basis for the introduction to The Scarlet Letter [1850], entitled as “The Custom House”. His creative power was well recognized and acknowledged only after the publication of The Scarlet Letter. After his dismissal from the Custom House, he settled in Lenox in the Berkshires. Here, he wrote his next novel, The House of the Seven Gables [1851]. From here he moved to Roxbury, where his next book The Blithedale Romance was written. This novel reflected Hawthorne’s distrust of all kind of reform movement along with other relevant issues of the 19th century society.

His contemporaries were James Fennimore Cooper, Simms, Longfellow, Edgar Allan Poe, R W. Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. During his college days, the foundation was laid for his enduring friendship with Franklin Pierce, Horatio Bridge, Jonathan Cilley, and Longfellow. All of them were known as democrats and recognized as well known public figures. This circle of democrats unconsciously played their role in formulating Hawthorne’s democratic sensibilities.

Hawthorne wrote a campaign biography for Pierce to assist him in his political ambition to become the president of America. After attaining the presidential office, Franklin Pierce appointed him on a political post as consulate at Liverpool. Pierce’s election as the president provided Hawthorne with an opportunity to see political world from a very close quarter and his democratic preferences became more vocal. He
maintained his friendship with Pierce throughout his life along with several other worldly politicians. In 1853, Hawthorne went to England along with his family and from there to Italy in 1857. His experiences of England are recorded in “Our Old Home”. His last published novel was *The Marble Faun* [1860].

There is a lot of biographical information available on Hawthorne. But it is surprising to note that even after publication of such a large amount of personal records on Hawthorne, his character remains an enigma. The contradictory nature of the biographical information available on him makes the study of the details of his life an interesting reading. Austin Warren sums it up in these words:

Critics of ability and acumen urge contradictory interpretation of author’s mind: he was, we are told, the defender of Puritanism, its opponent and satirist; a transcendentalist, an adversary of the movement; a believer, a skeptic, a democrat; a moralist of New England rigor and even prudery; a prophet (albeit perhaps unaware) of the Freudian gospel; a romantic imbued with the belief in essential rightness of human instincts and faith in the masses; a Christian and realist with suspicion of reform and no credence of “progress”. (112)

Henry James, one of the biographers of Hawthorne, wrote that he “had few perceptible points of contact with what is called the world, with public events, with the manners of his time, even with the life of his neighbors” (James 9) however, James recognized his historical consciousness. It nullified Henry James’s own claim of the previous line.
Hawthorne’s college mate Jonathan Cilley has expressed his love and appreciation for Hawthorne in the following lines, “I love Hawthorne; I admire him; but I do not know him. He lives in a mysterious world of thought and imagination which he never permits me to enter” (Stearns 306). This statement contributes in perpetuating the myth of Hawthorne’s being a solitary figure. In the light of the preceding statement, it is difficult to understand the man who was so extensively and significantly involved in the affairs of his time.

This myth is further perpetuated by Hawthorne himself. Nina Baym in an essay entitled, “Hawthorne and His mother” writes that Hawthorne’s being a secluded person is a myth. This myth was propagated by Hawthorne himself. His denial of his mother’s role in his life was misleading. In his early love letter to Sophia Peabody, he described his mother and sister as “recluse” and pointed to the morbid atmosphere of the house as “castle dismal”. Baym went on to prove that so much assertion on isolation by Hawthorne was part of lover’s strategies. He wanted to appear to Sophia as a lonely man who was desperate for her company. On 4th Oct, 1840, he wrote to Sophia as already his wife:

Here sits thy husband in his old accustomed chamber, where he used to sit in years gone by . . . Sometimes [ for I had no wife then to keep my heart warm] it seemed as if I were already in the grave, with only life enough to be chilled and benumbed . . . till at length a certain dove was revealed to me, in the shadow of seclusion as deep as my own had been . . . so now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so many years in this lonely
chamber, and why I could never break through the viewless bolt and bars.

(Baym 5)

The Image of a recluse was a self created legend, since we knew that he made a number of trips and enjoyed social life during this time. This reading is an attempt to demystify Hawthorne’s claim of being a solitary figure because of perverse family traits. It provides a different perspective on Hawthorne’s personality as a man, normal in his activities and thoughts. After exploring various sources of his writing and studying his ideas, it appears that he breathed the episteme of his time. G.E. Woodberry offers a characteristic early attitude towards Hawthorne in these lines:

He took practically no interest in life except as seen under its moral aspects as a life of the soul; and this absorption in the moral sphere was due to his being a child of New England. It was his inheritance from Puritanism . . . The moral world, the supremacy of the soul’s interests, how life fared in the soul, was his region; he thought about nothing else” (Stovall 106).

It is curious to note that the image of the author Nathaniel Hawthorne has undergone a considerable change in the last century. He appears to be better adjusted and more in tune with his fellow human beings and the life of his period in the recent studies on him by his critics and biographers. Randall Stewart was particularly instrumental in expounding this new image of Hawthorne. He challenged the erroneous traditional image of him as a secluded figure. He maintained that despite of Hawthorne’s criticism of politicians and weaknesses of political practices, Hawthorne was surely democratic with definite political and social ideology. In 1932, Stewart offered “Hawthorne and politics:
unpublished letters to William B. pike [NEQ]” as a proof that the author was not passive in politics. N F Doubleday in Hawthorne’s Criticism of New England Life [1941] cited examples of The House of Seven Gables and The Blithedale Romance for asserting the point that

Hawthorne was focused on the issues of his time. His own proclamation that his tales should be read as “Romance” was misleading. Like Stewart, Robert Cantwell was also interested in correcting his image of narrow and lop-sided portrait which focused on the brooding seclusion of his subject.

Hawthorne’s close relations to the currents of thoughts in his time have been focused during the studies of the last three decades of the 19th century. The latest researchers have used his notebook to cite examples, utilized materials previously ignored or partially explored to portray a new image of him. In the new picture, he appears to be less unworldly, dreamy, and brooding than earlier critics have portrayed him.

L.S Hall, through a thorough survey of the official records, personal correspondences, and writings asserted that Hawthorne was not aloof from the happenings of his surroundings. He attempted to establish that Hawthorne was highly knowledgeable about the political, social, and economical issues of his time. In his work Hawthorn: Critic of Society, Hall wrote about Hawthorne as an active and practical politician, an admirer of Jackson and an ardent advocate of egalitarian society. Sophia found that “although he was shy, he was by nature profoundly social” (Cowie 332). Instead of shrinking from reality, Hawthorne was eager to maintain contact with the world because he was afraid of “walking in a shadowy world” (Cowie 332).
Hawthorne’s concern with the past led him to read Increase Mather’s *Remarkable Providence* and Cotton Mather’s *Wonders of the Invisible World* and *Magnalia Christi* along with Felt’s *Annals of Salem*, Samuel Sewell’s *Diaries*, and John Winthrop’s *Journal*. He was the proprietor of Salem Athenaeum library from where he drew the local histories of Salem, Andover, Haverhill, Plymouth, Lynn, Scituate, Portland, and Nantucket. He drew also volumes from the collections of the Massachusetts historical society. He studied Puritan history with persistence that some scholars along with Hawthorne himself considered obsessive.

During his indulgent reading of New England history, Hawthorne found the role of his paternal ancestors in the establishment functioning of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. His ancestor William Hathorne migrated to the new world in 1630 soon after the new colony came into existence. His energetic and outspoken character made him an important figure of the colony. His son John Hathorne also played a significant role in the colonial history as the judge of Salem witchcraft trial. He was at the top of the official affair when the Salem witchcraft trial took place in 1692.

The life of both of his ancestors is written in prominent letters as successful administrators and jurisprudence in the Puritan chronology. It is significant to view the attitude of Hawthorne towards his ancestors. Hawthorne was persistently haunted by the memories of his 17th century ancestors. Belief in the witchcraft has always had its strong hold among the foggy and gloomy world of the North. James I brought it with him from Scotland to England and in the course, it was transplanted into the American soil. Joseph Story in 1828, a judge of supreme court of USA said that behind the dark saga of witches were beliefs, “which had universal sanction of their own and all former ages; . . . Which
the law supported by its mandates and the purest judges felt no compunctions in enforcing” (Mather 66).

Hawthorne was fascinated as well as repelled by the prominent role of his forefather William in denunciation of Quakers and his son judge Hathorne in deciding the fate of so many so called witches in the witchcraft trial of 1st March 1692. About John Hathorne who acted as a judge in the witchcraft delusion, Hawthorne wrote in “The Custom House” of The Scarlet Letter: “(He) inherited the persecuting spirit, and made himself so conspicuous in the martyrdom of the witches, that their blood may fairly be said to have left a stain upon him. So deep a stain, indeed, that his old dry bones, in the charter street burial ground, must still retain it, if they have not crumbled utterly to dust!” (8).

Early Puritans were hostile to the freedom of speech, thought, and conduct. The Puritan strain was clear in Hawthorne’s blood as the consciousness of sin was the most important fact of his life but their fanatical temper was averred by Hawthorne of Democratic America. Though he was basically a religious man who praised his progenitors for their energy, accomplishment, and determination but simultaneously condemned them for their ruthless acts of injustice:

I know not whether these ancestors of mine bethought themselves to repent, and ask pardon of heaven for their cruelties; or whether they are now groaning under the heavy consequences of them, in another state of being At all event, I, the present writer, as their representative, hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them –as I have heard, and as the dreary and unprosperous condition
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of the race, for many a long year back, would argue to exist – may be now and hence-forth removed. (S L 8-9)

The period between 1825 -1837 had been traditionally labeled as the years of recluse. The traditional biographers projected a picture of Hawthorne as an isolated being who was secluded from his surroundings and aloof from its problems yet brooding over them fancifully. They portrayed him as morbid recluse but these exaggerated accounts were corrected by recent scholars. His seasonal trip to New Haven in the fall of 1828 with his uncle Samuel Manning and again his visit to New Hampshire with him belied these claims. Here, he got the opportunity to observe closely Shaker Settlement in Canterbury which formed the basis of his two tales “Shaker’s Bridal” and “Canterbury Pilgrims”. During this time, he also worked on a magazine in Boston with his elder sister Ebe.

After leaving Bowdain, Hawthorne’s years of seclusion served for him as period of his apprenticeship. His long absence from Salem made him a foreigner in that place and left scant possibility of communication, “I doubt whether so much as twenty people in the town were aware of my existence,”( Mellow 37) he recounted. It provided him with an opportunity to explore the colonial past as well as to enrich his reservoir of knowledge of the literary spectrum. It was always difficult for him to define his life in Salem. At times, he remembered it as cheerful period when he enjoyed the very best of health. His so called reclusiveness neither made him melancholic nor misanthrope. The only negative aspect of this period was that it reminded him of his frustration which he felt at not being recognized by the world. In that small chamber on the Herbert street house he, “ . . . sat a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me, and
sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all—at least, till I were in my grave. and sometimes . . . it seemed as if I were already in my grave . . .” as recorded in Hawthorne’s note book (James 50).

Julian Hawthorne in his biography of Hawthorne quoted his father as saying: “We do not live at our house, we only vegetate. Eli [Hawthorne’s elder sister] never leaves her den; I have mine in the upper storey, to which they always brings meal setting them down in a waiter at my door, which is always locked”(as qtd in Mellow 37). Once Elizabeth Peabody asked Hawthorne, “do you think it is healthy to live so separated?” to which he replied:“ Certainly not—it is no life at all—it is misfortune of my life. It has produced a morbid consciousness that paralyzed my powers” (Pearson 266-68).

Elizabeth Peabody wrote about Hawthorne’s mother that most of the time she was confined to her room but at the same time found her as a woman of fine sensibility. It contradicted her own statement because she would not have formed opinion about her character if she rarely met her. On one hand, Julian Hawthorne attributed the reason of the alienated temperament of his father to Hawthorne’s mother’s unnatural behavior but at the same time, admired her for her views on education. Julian Hawthorne appreciated Hawthorne’s mother’s role in shaping the literary sensibilities of her son by encouraging him to read poetry, romances, and allegory. It highlighted the inconsistencies of Julian’s narration (1:123-125).

Elizabeth Hawthorne recalled, how sometimes they discussed political affairs, “upon which we differed in opinion, he being a democrat and I of the opposite party” (Mellow 38). Hawthorne shared his literary plans and even his frustration with his mother and sister. His imposed seclusion at Herbert Street was intentional to get some
uninterrupted hours of writing in which his whole family cooperated whole heartedly. It misled to the notion of the perverted influence of his family on his personality. His sisters and mother knew of his first novel which Sophia never knew till after his death. His family even helped him in collecting the copies of the pieces printed in *The Twice-Told Tales* and to prepare a manuscript for publication.

Hawthorne’s sister Ebe Hawthorne used to select books for him from Salem Athenaeum because he could not afford time to go out. Hawthorne’s sister Ebe had an avid interest in the affairs of the Salem and the world. She used to read the newspapers faithfully and kept herself abreast of the knowledge of American political affairs. She had her firm opinion on most of the topics of the day (Mellow 38). While Hawthorne was at Bowdoin, he was in constant contact with his sister Louisa through letters as he did not want to miss even the trivial details of her life. He mentioned in one of his letters that he made an appearance on the platform with congregation in chapel, “I would send you a printed list of the performances if it were not for the postage” (Mellow 22-23). Louisa maintained her correspondence with him when he was at Brook farm and deplored the infrequency of his visit and letters like in any normal intimate filial relation (Mellow 185).

“All his notebooks display a lively interest in the everyday human spectacle and abound in comments on place, with wide variation in one” (Stout 19). Hawthorne expressed his interest in thronged streets and the bustle of human life and took interest in all nooks and crannies and every development in his time. Hawthorne and Louisa Hawthorne “attended dancing school” (Stearns 4). They founded the Pin society and brought out several issues of the “Spectator”, a hand printed paper which featured poetry
by Louisa and assorted essays and humorous editorials by Hawthorne (Stearns 4). He also worked as a book keeper at his Uncle William’s shop and earned a salary of a dollar a week to make himself financially independent. He was interested in the accelerating process of urbanization and engaged with this public issue of widespread concern.

James R. Mellow wrote in his biography *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* that he was popular among his college friends and often asked by them to visit their home, particularly by Bridge whose family lived in Augusta. Hawthorne wrote in the spring of 1823, “I believe I shall go to Augusta, if mother and uncle R have no objections” (Mellow 32). A habitual recluse would never look forward with excitement to spend his days among strangers in the home of his friend and would never “talk with everybody” (Matthiessen 211). He was conscious of the real life of the 19th century. Matthiessen denied that Hawthorne was only a recreator of a dim past oblivious to the major obligation of the artist to confront actual life. He wrote “Many have remarked his tragic depth” but, “Few have realized that his thought bore an immediate relation to the issues of his own day” (Matthiessen 192).

Arlin Turner, a renowned biographer of Hawthorne wrote in the Preface to his biography on Hawthorne that, “Few, if any, of our major authors have been as extensively and significantly involved as he was in the affairs of his time”. Melville appreciated Hawthorne’s intense feeling of the “usuable truth” (Matthiessen 192) When he was nine year old he was struck in his foot by a ball, which made him invalid for more than nine years. His aunt Priscilla wrote to her brother in Maine that he realized the severity of his confinement, “more on independence day than he ever done before . . . he cannot even ride out, to witness the celebrations of that event in which he has taken such
delight” (Mellow 19). It was observed by James R. Mellow that, “He developed a taste for the casual gossip of local tavern, preferring it to polite parlor discourse. He had marked preference for democracy, rather than aristocratic occasions” (Mellow 10).

Hawthorne found interest in old Almanac and newspapers as they had been written by the interests of the age itself. He wrote that, “only way to endure posterity is to live truly, for ‘your own age’ ”or that, “all philosophy that would abstract mankind from present is no more than word” (Matthiessen 195-196). Hyatt. H. Waggoner found him ordinarily cheerful and sociable. Hawthorne wrote three biographical sketches which were printed in the Salem Gazette in the late 1830s. Sir William Phipps (Nov 23) Mrs. Hutchinson (Dec 7) and Dr. Bullivant (Jan 11). These sketches are evidence of Hawthorne’s awareness of his nation’s and region’s past and his familiarity with the public figures and events of the colonial time. They reflect his endeavor to understand the ideological structure of society and the mindset of people.

Elizabeth Hawthorne wrote about her brother’s attraction for public figures, political meetings, and military drills. Whenever there was public gathering he always went out. “He liked a crowd” and when General Jackson, of whom he had professed himself a partisan visited Salem in 1833 “he walked out to the boundary of the town to meet him. . . .”(Mellow 46).

It is important to begin this proposed reading of Hawthorne’s Select novels and Tales by establishing the author as man of his time. The present reading defies the traditional approaches to Hawthorne and attempts to elucidate convincingly a belief upheld by critics like Van Wyck Brooks that he is “most deeply planted of American writer, who indicates more than any other the subterranean history of the American
character” (Mathiessen 210). Paul Elmer More’s Shelburne essays on Hawthorne treats him as a missing link, establishing the continuity between such ancestors as Cotton Mather and such writers of the present as Mary Wilkins Freeman (Brodhead 9) which this thesis endeavors to establish firmly in the forthcoming chapters.

Hawthorne was a man keenly aware of the problems of his time; He had studied them, and took his own stand. This reading tries to see in the Annals of the past, the story of the living forces which struggled to express their historical identity and reality through the framework of his so-called romances. This reading will be a rewarding exploration as it will help to recover a repressed personal, social, religious, and political history obscured in Hawthorne’s allegory, symbolism, and romance.

The thorough combing of the context and minute reading of the available documents of the 17th and 19th century will help in deepening our understanding of Hawthorne’s work and guide us in comprehending the author’s intention. This reading indulges in a species of cross cultural montage in which once untraditional sources, women’s letters, author’s personal diaries and notebooks, novels, essays, biographies, newspaper clippings, historical documents, pamphlets even séances are used along with public texts, parliamentary debate, religious and social writings, medical journals, literary and critical works on the author. Hawthorne was a critic and interpreter of American cultural history and can be read most convincingly as chronicler of his time.
It is be rewarding to discuss in the very beginning the constituent of history. In a book called *The New History* [1912], James Harvey Robinson rejected political history for telling the stories of the great leaders and wars while neglecting the other areas of human life. He believed that the fuller account of the past can only be given if it covered economical, psychological, social as well as political life of the commoners. It should not be an account of the lives of an elite few. Before the application of New Historicism on the fictional world of Hawthorne, it is important to explain in brief, New Historicism and its difference from the earlier historical approach.

New Historicism is shaped by the Post Structuralism and Reader Response theory of the 1970s as well as Feminist, Cultural, and Marxist Criticism. It was a term first noticed in a book *Renaissance Self Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* in 1980 by an American critic Stephen Jay Greenblatt. It occurred in response to the formalistic and text centered approach to literary work. It strongly objected against the New Criticism’s emphasis on the study of a work of literature as the finished product without any reference to the life of the author, historical, social, political, and religious background of its production. New Historicist’s efforts evoked unsuspected borrowing and lending among institutions, archives, metaphors, ceremonies, dances, emblem, items of clothing, and popular stories; previously held to be independent and unrelated. Selves and texts were defined by their relation to hostile others [despised and feared] for e.g. Indians, Jews; Blacks, and disciplinary powers such as religion and masculinity.

New Historicist is particularly indebted to a French philosopher and historian Michael Foucault’s works such as *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality.* In
these works, Foucault rejects the repressive hypothesis of his earlier studies of the working of power. He turns to the investigation of the ways in which power operates. It does not work by repressing dissenting forces but by organizing and channeling them. Power for the later Foucault is not merely a physical force but a pervasive human dynamic determining our relationships to others. All people exert certain power over us in so far as we defer to their needs and desires. The moment we deny the power over us we cease to acknowledge their humanity and human rights.

Foucault believed that no historical event was the result of a single force but there were various economic, sociological, and political factors responsible for its happenings. He viewed history not as repressive power but as a combination of forces responsible for a particular event. Since one who is empowered will be empowered by discourses and practices that constitute power, for e.g. power of the judges in the Salem witchcraft trial. Power triumphs over opposition not by negating it but by producing it according to its peculiar requirements. What passes traditionally for transgression or rebellion against power as in the case of the modern discourse of sexuality turns out to be another face of power, a mean by which power reproduces, distributes, and extends itself.

Power can also be surreptitious in a way when a dominant group exerts its influence over others. The hegemonic power refers to the use of institution to formalize power as ministers and church leaders make power seem abstract in *The Scarlet Letter*. It is not attached to any particular individual. The opinion of the populace at the time of Hester’s appearance on the scaffold reveals how the ideals of hegemonic group are inculcated in public through various means, e.g. fictional text. The patriarchy in *The
**Blithedale Romance** and *The Scarlet Letter* is bent on maintaining forces of containment and hegemonic forces are attempting to consolidate the status quo.

According to Foucault, the constructions of the past are inevitably implicated in the present networks of power and domination and thus never seem disinterested. New historicism is attentive to the issues of power and ideology and to the ways in which these regulate and reproduce culture. Dominant discourses inhabit our consciousness, our practices and can hardly be evaded.

New Historicism avoids making any claim of universal and total meaning of a particular historical and cultural context and concentrates on the specific aspects of it. It defines literature not as a mere play of imagination, nor as a solitary caprice of a heated brain. Historicism, both old and new is always reactive against a prior idealism. New Historicists’ prime assumption is that all cultural and social phenomena particularly the individual self like other natural phenomena can only be understood as influenced and are shaped by imperious agents, cultural traditions, institutions, race, ethnicity, relations of gender, economics, physical environments and above all by disposition of power.

New Historicism is different from Old Historicism of 1920-1950. Old historical critics viewed history as the background of literature. They were concerned with the discovery of a single political vision which they believed to be held by the entire literate class or indeed the entire population. This single vision is challenged by New Historicists who are less fact oriented because they doubted the objectivity and purity of the recorded happenings.

New Historicists are self conscious and state that an objective historical understanding is impossible contrary to the old historicist’s faith. They assert that the
author and poets are not secular saints; rather they are more involved in their society than an average citizen. No one can rise above his/r own social formation, his ideological upbringing. It shifts the focus of literary research from the formal analysis of verbal artifacts to the ideological analysis of discursive practices.

They believe that all cultural phenomena bear certain relation to one another because they are thought to be expressions of an invisible *cause* or *center*. New Historicists insist that attitudes towards concept like feminism, love, reform are the products of a culture. Our deeply held feelings are the result of certain historical events and occurrences, “This just seemed fantastically exciting to me because it meant that things that just seem given are not given, that they’re made up. And if they’re made up that means they can be changed” (Stephen Greenblatt). They assume that there is no objectivity in creation and criticism and we experience the world through language and all “our representations of the world, our readings of texts and of the past are informed by our own historical position, by values and politics that are rooted in them”(Newton 88).

Stephen Greenblatt used all sorts of obscure writings of a period in which he was interested in and from the other periods also for his New Historicist reading. He called them “literary traces”. He was able to discover irrefutable connections between events and texts that might seem inconsequential because of his ability to notice more than what appeared on surface.

The present reading of Hawthorne’s texts detect a repressed historicity behind their over highlighted aesthetic dimension. To begin with, this reading takes into account the books on New Historicism to understand the nuances of it apart from essays on
Stephen Greenblatt and other New Historicist material on the internet. The present work has also used books available on American social, political, religious, and economical history in the library and on the internet to juxtapose them with the fictional works of Hawthorne. This reading also takes into account- American journals, documents available on colonial history, works published during Hawthorne’s time in form of fiction, pamphlets, poem or any other form of documents to use them as context. It has also used Hawthorne’s letters and note books, letters and essays of Emerson, works of Henry David Thoreau, Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. It has not even overlooked works of Hawthorne’s contemporary fiction writers especially focusing on those works which have addressed similar subjects which are explored by Hawthorne.

This reading attempts to relate interpretive problems such as why does Zenobia commit suicide in *The Blithedale Romance* or why do Hephzibah and Clifford go to count ry side at the end of *The House of the seven Gables* to the cultural, social, historical, and political context; aiming simultaneously to understand his work through its historical context and to understand the cultural and intellectual history through his fiction.

[Note: The quote from Sophia Peabody in the beginning of the chapter has been derived from the Preface to *Nathaniel Hawthorne* by Arlin Turner, N Y: OUP, 1980.]
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