

Call for Papers: Pandemics 101: Hawthorne's Advice for Prevention and Survival,  
Special Issue of the *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*

Recently, in April, 2020, Ron Fein, in the midst of the current pandemic, published a satirical essay (in *McSweeney's.net*), taking on the persona of Thoreau and in that voice critiquing faculty for teaching him improperly, not giving him enough respect, and for not taking his advice about the benefits of self-reliance, simplicity, and solitude seriously. Although a jocular piece, Fein's work reminds us that the pandemic has brought to the fore some of the issues that the Transcendentalists took on in earnest as they considered questions of responsibility and the role and importance of solitude and reflection in human life. Although Hawthorne was clearly not a Transcendentalist, he does share some of his fellow Concordians' (and other American Romantics') ideas and feelings. One might wonder what advice Hawthorne would have for us during these difficult pandemic times.

In this CFP for a special issue of the *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, we are looking for a scholarly analysis of writings by Hawthorne (including his journals and correspondence) that deal with many issues that have come up during the pandemic. Please submit proposals of 250-500 words by Sept. 30, 2020; completed essays of 6,000-6,500 words will be due by March 2, 2021. Send to the editor of the *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, Monika Elbert, Prof. of English, Montclair State University: [elbertm@montclair.edu](mailto:elbertm@montclair.edu)

Essay topics might include:

- 1) Being alone and liking it: Hawthorne's (and his characters') deep regard for solitude and mindfulness;
  - a) Perhaps a comparison piece between Hawthorne and Thoreau and the positive value of silence and solitude. Possible comparison between Hawthorne's "The Artist of the Beautiful" and Thoreau's *Walden*. Living deliberately, living frugally, living with imagination.
  - b) Or Hester's self-reliance and resounding silence compared with Thoreau's at Walden Pond. They have much to teach about the positive value of isolation, as it relates to our current need for self-isolation.
  - c) Or, bad, fearful solitude (Coverdale's in a treehouse and in his Boston apartment) vs. positive solitude (going only so far into the community, as in Hester's case). And Roderick Ellston's negative seclusion (in "Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent") leading to the serpent growing within his chest.
- 2) It's not nice to mess with Mother Nature/What can go wrong in a laboratory situation?-- Hawthorne's mad scientists working in a laboratory, messing with mother nature, with the unfortunate upshot of death in stories such as "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "The Birth-mark"; mixing up scientific fact with superstition or fantasy (basis of science fiction?).

Or a variant thereof: re: our relationship to nature: the incursion of the unnatural into the natural realm, and the industrial into the environmental; the idea of our rapacious, improper relationship to the environment because of the zoonotic aspect of COVID when we intruded into habitats. Compare the laboratory stories by Hawthorne, or Hawthorne's

ambivalence toward the construction of the Erie Canal, with Thoreau's condemnation of the train's appearance in the bucolic Concord landscape, or his condemnation of the loggers industrializing the Maine Woods. Dominating our landscape instead of finding our place within it.

- 3) Pandemic/contagion fears—comparison of smallpox epidemic in Hawthorne's "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" and Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," and the arrogance of the wealthy
- 4) Catastrophic Thinking: Thoughts of the apocalypse and fearing God's wrath—Hawthorne's stories about the Millerites ("The Hall of Fantasy," "Earth's Holocaust," "The New and Eve," "The Christmas Banquet")
- 5) Don't eat raw animals (don't eat a woodchuck raw), and eat in moderation to avoid weight gain—

Thoreau's diet of moderation in *Walden* (as he suppresses a desire to eat a woodchuck raw), compared with unhealthy eating and drinking in various Hawthorne texts, among them Coverdale's excessive food episodes in the tavern episodes of *Blithedale*—those pictures on the wall of sirloin, deer, salmon, ducks, and various "pictorial viand" and the excessive description of various cocktails;

Or stress and over-eating: Dimmesdale stuffing his face after his final encounter with Hester in the forest, when he returns home and realizes he has to rewrite the election sermon for the Governor's installation the next day.

Thoreau's and Hawthorne's healthy vision of gardening and savoring of food (in *Walden* and in the "Old Manse" preface).

- 6) Wearing a mask and maybe liking it (making a statement), or Masks as survival—What a difference a mask or emblem makes: "The Minister's Black Veil," Hester's scarlet letter as badge of honor (and as a shield to fend off Indian arrows), the Veiled Lady's veiled appearance in *Blithedale*
- 7) Fears of medicine, fears of vaccinations, fear of magical potions, fears of unproven science—Hawthorne's "The Elixir of Life," "Rappaccini's Daughter," and *Septimius Felton*, "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment"
- 8) News stories: Fake news/rumors vs. real/authoritative news. Hawthorne's "Old News" and "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe"; Thoreau's contempt for fake news in *Walden* and in "Slavery in Massachusetts"; Official information—who controls news?
- 9) Home-schooling as superior (as, in Hester's education of Pearl in nature vs. the education of intolerant Puritan children); compare Emerson's idea of self-education in "The American Scholar" and "Self-Reliance"
- 10) Redefining or reconceptualizing our notion of work. Losing job fears—creativity stemming from job loss, as in Hawthorne's "Custom-House" description; compare to Emerson's view of work in "The Transcendentalist"
- 11) How do long hours of solitude lead to revolutionary action? How Hester becomes a feminist, revolutionary thinker in her remote peninsula cottage, and how Thoreau finds his political voice at Walden Pond?

