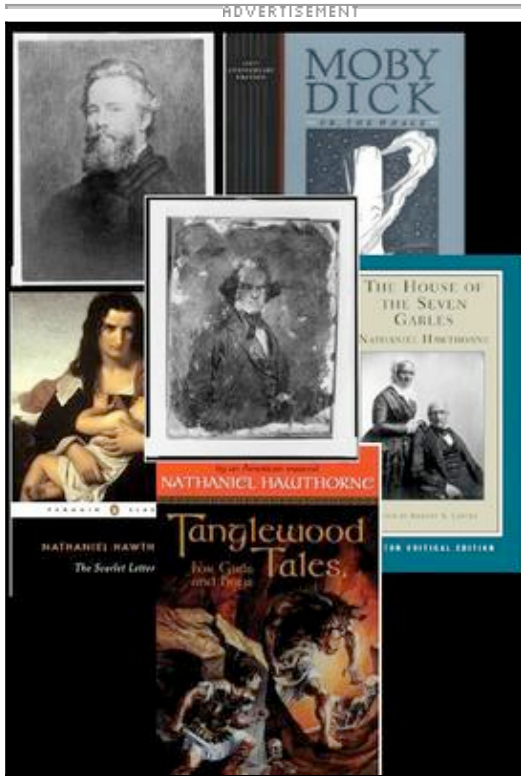


Inside the friendship of Melville and Salem's own Hawthorne



By Maggi Smith-Dalton/Naumkeag Notations
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Salem -

(Author's note: This week's Naumkeag Notations column is offered in celebration of two birth anniversaries: Nathaniel Hawthorne, born July 4, 1804, and Herman Melville, born Aug. 1, 1819.)

Aug. 23, 1850

"All I can say is that I religiously seclude myself, every morning ... and remain in retirement till dinner-time ... But the summer is not my natural season for work; and I often find myself gazing at Monument Mountain, broad before my eyes, instead of at the infernal sheet of paper under my hand," Nathaniel Hawthorne writes his publisher, James Fields, from "La Rouge Maison" — the little red Lenox farmhouse in which he and his family have lived since spring.

The Hawthornes rent the house for \$150 a year from the Tappan family. Though he had arrived in the Berkshires "harassed in spirit," a recent refugee from an unfortunate turn of events in Salem.

There, in his hometown, an intense political scandal had erupted, with Hawthorne at the center. The fracas cost him his position at the Custom House — and Hawthorne himself had contributed to the volatility of the situation, which resulted in his firing.

Hardly is he an innocent caught in the storm. In a contemporary letter to Longfellow, he wrote, "I must confess it stirs up a little of the devil within me to find myself hunted by these political bloodhounds... I may perhaps select a victim, and let fall a little drop of venom in his heart, that shall make him writhe before the grin of the multitude for a considerable time to come."

Strong words, stormy feelings.

Yet after this much-bruited "public decapitation" (suitably rendered after he boiled awhile in a seething cauldron of political porridge) the effect has been positive: his literary spirit has been set free.

Energized, and bolstered by his understanding and encouraging wife Sophia, he has exchanged a materially-safe if stolid existence for the freer yet uncertain one of imagination and literary success. His prospects for that success are solid however, since Hawthorne's literary reputation has finally taken firm hold with the success of his novel, "The Scarlet Letter."

Written with a pen dipped in the gloom of his political donnybrook and in the shadow of his mother's death,

this novel has set him on his true path.

He blooms with the encouragement of a supportive and appreciative publisher, turning out his most successful work with such nurturance. In Lenox, he hammers away at the House of the Seven Gables, wiping his pen on the red lining of his royal purple writing-gown, fashioned by his wife. (Sophia would eventually sew an appliqué, shaped like a butterfly, on that spot — to defend the cloth.)

Outside, Hawthorne children spill from this “smallest of ten-feet houses,” laughing and playing on the idyllically beautiful Stockbridge Bowl lakeshore and in the thick woods of Highwood, immortalized as “Tanglewood,” in Hawthorne’s books for children.

Yet, paradise is finite.

“I find I do not feel at home among these hills ... I do not get acclimated to the peculiar state of the atmosphere ... and am none so vigorous as I used to be on the seacoast.” On a sleety winter day, the family finally leaves the Berkshires.

Left behind are the household cats — and friend and neighbor Herman Melville. His masterpiece, *Moby Dick*, dedicated to Hawthorne in “admiration for his genius,” is newly published. Melville’s own literary talents are in sudden and lush bloom.

Melville has pursued his friendship with Hawthorne, which inspired him to do the greatest work of his life, as single-mindedly as Ahab followed the fin. The departure of his idol throws him into deep depression. From this, he struggles to rise by a hand-over-hand-pull up the lifeline of intense work.

Melville and Hawthorne met on a mountain climb in a summer storm, during a party. The rocky walls rang with poetry (Bryant’s “Monument Mountain,” declaimed to its very last syllable) and heads bubbled with champagne.

The parting of these two literary figures closes a chapter in one of the most oddly intriguing relationships in American literary history — a relationship fraught with undercurrents and overlaid with obfuscation.

Melville to Hawthorne — November 1851

“Appreciation! Recognition! Is love appreciated?your appreciation is my glorious gratuity ... A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book. I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb....Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips — lo, they are yours and not mine. I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling ... when the big hearts strike together, the concussion is a little stunning.

Farewell ... I shall leave the world, I feel, with more satisfaction for having come to know you. Knowing you persuades me more than the Bible of our immortality...”

When big hearts strike together, indeed, the concussion is a little stunning. Hawthorne and Melville ... thunder, lightning, mountains ringing with poetry ... and a triumphant baptism of immortality in churning rivers of ink.

Musicians and historians Maggi Smith-Dalton and her husband Jim are specialists in 19th- and 20th-century music from parlor and stage. They have performed and taught American and Celtic music and history, in concert and by giving public history courses, nationwide. They've shared their passion for both performance and historical/musicological research under the rubric, "Understanding History Thru Music," for over two decades. Jim and Maggi are preparing a book and a recording on music in Salem's history; are founders of the upcoming American History and Music Festival; and are founding members of the Salem History Society.

Maggi probably will never write a "wicked book," at least in this lifecycle. But she has been known to declaim poetry on mountaintops, with or without the benefit of summer storms and champagne to inspire her.

However, if you want to send a few flagons of her favorite wine, she'll accept the honor. Just send them there flagons right on to Maggi@singingstring.org or visit the Web site www.singingstring.org.

Jim and Maggi Dalton

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ABOUT JIM & MAGGI

Jim and Maggi Dalton perform music of popular/vernacular, folk and cultivated traditions, covering time periods from the Middle Ages to the present, focusing largely on American, Celtic and British Isles repertoire. They specialize in music of the 19th and 20th centuries. Instrumentation: mostly plucked strings and voices.

Concerts and programs contain commentary designed to place the music performed in historical context for the audience. Programs reflect the continual and ongoing research in which the two delight. They also perform original songs and compositions.

Jim and Maggi have released two recordings to date, and have designed a full spectrum of programs which they present nationwide. They have been featured often on radio and television. (PBS, ABC, NBC, CBS affiliates, Cable Networks; NPR stations, NewsRadio, interview programs across the USA; feature stories in newspapers and magazines, i.e., *The Philadelphia Inquirer & Courier-Post*) They have performed at nationally-known venues (i.e., Colonial Williamsburg, Seneca Falls, the Harriet Beecher Stowe House) and countless local and regional venues nationwide.

They have served as artists-in-residence at various colleges, public history sites, community and educational centers, presenting series addressing American history and other topics in the humanities, using music as the core of each session.

Previous audiences and sponsors have said:

"engaging, scholarly, delightful, warm, intelligent, flexible, humorous, talented, versatile, enthusiastic, personable, joyful ..."



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descriptions of our programs, classes,
and concerts ~

Multi-instrumentalist *Jim Dalton* is an educator, conductor and award-winning composer and arranger.

As a performer, he specializes in historical and ethnic playing styles on a variety of plucked string instruments including guitar, mandolin, banjo, mandocello, Renaissance lute, bouzouki etc.

He also plays piano, organ, recorder and tin whistle.

In addition to duo performances with his wife, soprano and guitarist Maggi Smith-Dalton he maintains an active career as a freelance musician -- playing in chamber music ensembles, jazz and world music groups and in opera/theater and symphony orchestras.

He is a member of the New England Mandolin Ensemble.

His compositions have been performed across the U.S. and Canada and in Europe.

His choral composition, "The Rocky Road to Dublin," won first prize in the 1997 Toronto Camerata Competition. Two of his pieces for carillon have been published in anthologies by Fenwick Parva and the Friends of the Albany Carillon.

His composition for solo mandolin, "Gifts of the Bard," is published by Wolfhead Music.

His works are available through these publishers and Singing String Music Publications.

Jim is on the faculty of The Boston Conservatory, teaching music theory, ear training and world music courses for both the Music Theory and Music Education Departments. He has written articles for Blues Revue Magazine and is the author of *Mandolin for Beginners*, published by Workshop Arts, Inc./Alfred Publishing.

He is a frequent guest lecturer on topics such as composition, choral arranging and Irish traditional music. In the 2004-2005 year Jim received a MACRO research grant (Univ. of Wisconsin) to study and analyze palindromic compositions in concert music repertoire and presented this work at the 2005 Macro Musician's Workshop in Madison, WI.

Singer and musician, independent scholar, author and educator, *Maggi Smith-Dalton* has sung as a soloist with choirs and choruses both here and abroad, acted and sung in professional theater productions and produced/participated/performed in radio and television projects and programs.

She is a frequent guest lecturer -- on the integration of humanities and the arts, on folklore, and on American music and history, to name a few topics.

She has given lecture/demonstration programs at the college level (i.e., The New England Conservatory, The Boston Conservatory) and in numerous professional-development courses for educators and teachers at all grade levels.

Maggi enjoys an active performing career, which, after eleven years of work in cabaret, musical theater, and nightclub singing, has included more than two decades of concert performance nationwide and abroad, in partnership with her husband and as a soloist with choirs and in concert.

In addition, she authored a prize-winning short story and writes often for newspapers and magazines (including history and cultural/arts/educational feature articles, and a regular history column for the *Salem Gazette*).

Maggi's work in mainstream media included producing a cable TV series and programming and hosting musical theater, arts interview, and classical music shows for NPR public radio, commercial, and community stations.

A former Chairperson of the Haverhill Cultural Council, Maggi served as Musical Theater Director at Hill House (a community Arts Center) in Boston's Beacon Hill; as Director of "Adventures in Art," a summer arts program; and as a director of children's choirs.

With a background in teaching multiply-handicapped children, Maggi continues interest in and study of music therapy. She is working on a children's book; and is always working on a variety of writing projects.