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Thompson and Lokke, Ruined Eden of the Present: Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe – Critical Essays in Honor of Darrel Abel

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G. R. Thompson and Virgil L. Lokke. eds. *Ruined Eden of the Present: Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe Critical Essays in Honor of Darrel Abel*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1981. xix, 383 pp. \$15.75.

This handsomely printed festschrift divides neatly into three discrete sections: a brace of essays on general critical concerns; a constellation of six essays on Hawthorne; and a final group of essays on Melville and Poe, four of which focus on "The Fall of the House of Usher." Some contributors exploit Abel's work as a starting point for further investigation, while others either take issue with points in his scholarship or range more widely over central issues of the American Renaissance.

Virgil Lokke begins Section I by discussing Abel's skepticism about New Criticism. According to Lokke, Abel can best be understood as an eclectic critic whose scholarship evinced a keen interest in authorial moral stances although it acknowledged the competing claims of mythic, linguistic, and textual approaches. Lokke having dubbed Abel an exemplary academic critic of his time, Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker argue, in their subsequent polemical essay, for a "New Scholarship" that seeks out the aesthetic implications of historical, biographical, bibliographical, and textual evidence. Many reputable academics take their lumps from Parker and Higgins, especially the New Critics, whose ignorance of textual changes and inattention to the complexity of authorial revision and excision are unflaggingly scored.

Nina Baym begins Section II also by regretting mistaken New Critical readings. Her defense of plot in Hawthorne's romances produces spirited appraisals of characters in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun*. Roy R. Male argues that Hawthorne adopted implicitly an expressive attitude toward language, stressing its graphic and pictorial dimensions. Male's complex thesis, difficult to summarize, is convincing, though there is perhaps more pictorial interest in Poe's response to language, as in his "Autography," than Male allows. Two other essays focus on individual works: Donald Ringe's discussion of the spatial symbols of city, sea, and island in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance* and Seymour L. Gross's investigation of the nineteenth-century medical milieu in "Rappacini's Daughter." Richard Harter Fogle's somewhat unfocused study of Coleridge's influence and William Shurr's biographical interpretation of "The

Old Manse" round out the Hawthorne section.

A more subtle biographical study introduces Section III: Buford Jones's essay should silence those who suppose that the last word had been said about the Hawthorne-Melville relationship. Linking for comparative purposes "Hawthorne and His *Mosses*" and "The Old Manse," Jones finds a rich thematic and verbal interlocking. These convincing connections enhance the significance of his bibliographical census of Hawthorne-Melville reviews in the *Literary World* (1847-1853). Taking a different juncture in Melville's life as his subject, Robert Milder argues that Goethe's comments on daemonology in his *Autobiography* asserted a crucial influence on *Moby-Dick*. Milder's argument might have been strengthened by acknowledging the wide exposure the concept of the classical daemon received among American Romantics like Poe and Emerson. A complement to this discussion of Goethe's and Melville's "Demonic," Barton Levi St. Armand's essay attends to Poe's "angelism" by putting "Israfel" in the context of Gnostic and apocalyptic lore. With the claim that "Israfel" is a secret allegory, St. Armand's interpretation is similar to Richard Boyd Hauck's reading of *The Confidence-Man*, a nine-part overview of Melville's protean figure which suggests that the reader may be the ultimate victim in this fictional con-game. Taking a cue from Abel's seminal essay on Poe's classic tale, essays on "The Fall of the House of Usher" complete this section. In point-counterpoint fashion, G. R. Thompson and Patrick Quinn debate the narrator's reliability, and Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV finds a comic perspective in "Usher," a possible result of Poe's tendency to exploit and attack his Gothic legacy.

The editors include a personal memoir of Darrel Abel by Chester E. Eisinger and a selected bibliography of Abel's writings. In sum, this fitting tribute to a respected scholar addresses many general and specific concerns that occupied Professor Abel's generation and that continue to engage students of the American Renaissance.

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