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3 ‘Native Son’: Julian Hawthorne’s
_Saxon Studies_

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Fated to stand in the shadow of his gifted father Nathaniel Hawthorne, Julian Hawthorne (1846–1934) might be forgiven for attempting to ‘go native’ when fortune took him to Dresden, capital city of the Kingdom of Saxony. Near the end of an undistinguished period of professional training that began in 1869 and dragged on until 1874, Hawthorne wrote a misanthropic tome entitled _Saxon Studies_.1 First published serially in the _Contemporary Review_, the book weighed in at 452 pages when it appeared in 1876. It may well have contributed to Hawthorne’s British and American publishers going bankrupt a few weeks later: the only copies that exist today are those sent out for review purposes. Hawthorne claimed that he set out to write an objective, candid appraisal of Saxon society. But if this was a ‘warts and all’ study, the face of Saxony quickly turned into caricature. Soon one saw nothing but warts. _Saxon Studies_ fits into no literary or scholarly genre: it is part autobiography, part travelogue, part social anthropology _avant la lettre_, and part _Heimat_ romance (stood on its head). Hawthorne did not seem to acquire much self-knowledge or even enlighten his readers about the local society in which he had, with some initial enthusiasm, immersed himself. Or did he?

To address this tantalizing but ultimately unanswerable question, in this chapter I want to pursue three others: Where did Hawthorne think he was coming from, so to speak, when he set himself up as an authority on Saxon society? Where did the reviewers of his book imagine that his Dresden sojourn had taken him? And why did the self-awareness that Hawthorne cultivated in choosing to explore Saxons’ ‘national’ character contribute only marginally to his own self-knowledge? These questions help chart our journey to a faraway land. The _Wanderlust_ that
took Julian Hawthorne to Dresden, the road that forked when *Saxon Studies* was caustically reviewed by Henry James, the literary Sonderweg that ran parallel with travel accounts written by other foreigners – these are the paths that lead through this chapter.

Along the way readers will discover that Julian did not inherit his father’s universalizing vision. Everyone in America knew his father, and Julian Hawthorne was no Nathaniel. Contemporary reviewers panned *Saxon Studies*. In Hawthorne’s text, local colour is presented with little of the wit or craft that made Mark Twain’s impish *Innocents Abroad* (1869) the first and best exemplar of the not-so-innocents-abroad genre. In Hawthorne’s not-so-nimble hands, Twain’s wry twists and self-deprecation become twists of the knife and ugly-American haughtiness. Nevertheless, reviewers did not fully understand the hybrid identities that shaped Julian’s lived experience in Dresden. Personally, and in his authorial voice, Hawthorne had more ironies in the fire than his critics knew. His self-doubts about why he was writing the book in the first place, and his self-distancing from the local society he depicts, may have gone over their heads. Therefore, lest we close the book on young Hawthorne too quickly, let us join the author and the little American colony in Dresden with an open mind, to discover for ourselves how *Saxon Studies* offers a novel perspective on local identities, cultural transfers, and the kinds of literary cross-fertilizations that either incubate or break down essentialist national stereotypes.

**Saxon Studies**

It is impossible to follow Julian Hawthorne on all his rambles to expose the foibles of Saxon society. But three aspects of Hawthorne’s analysis set it apart from other accounts of travel in nineteenth-century Saxony: his special interest in interiors and exteriors, the frequency with which Hawthorne pauses – both literally and figuratively – to contemplate Saxon landscapes, and the way Hawthorne forces ‘modern’ and ‘not-modern’ aspects of Saxon life into close proximity.

Hawthorne’s portrait has been aptly described as ‘dissonance abroad.’ Just as we savour early passages from Twain’s *Innocents Abroad* that are ‘a tad broad, proffering more burlesque than inspired satire,’ it may be permissible to select dissonant passages from *Saxon Studies* with a nose for effect. After all, landscapes viewed with an unremittingly jaundiced eye or served up as a rhetorical screed quickly become flat and wearying. Attention to rhetorical effect is important for
another reason. Julian Hawthorne in 1876, like Mark Twain in 1869, was on the threshold of his first major success: his authorial voice was just starting to emerge. Yet Hawthorne’s voice never gathered the assurance or force of Twain’s. It never insinuated itself, as Twain’s has, into how Americans spoke in the late nineteenth century and still speak today. It may be coincidence, but more than one critic has ascribed this difference to the question of forebears. ‘At least for an American writer,’ Roy Blount Jr has written, it is impossible ‘to parody Mark Twain. It would be like doing an impression of your father or mother: he or she is already there in your voice.’ That is not at all true of Hawthorne. Therefore we should not let incongruities in Hawthorne’s craft overawe or mislead us: sometimes a dissonance is just a dissonance. Hawthorne travelled to Dresden with his mother, not his father (who had died a few years earlier); the more important point is that Julian was determined to experiment with new artistic styles.

Tellingly, the first lines of Hawthorne’s *Saxon Studies* provide a self-imposed, pre-emptive leave-taking, in this case from the Saxon capital. As Hawthorne sets out for Dresden’s environs, the city’s charm ‘lurks’ behind him only in the towers of its churches and palaces. ‘The capital of Saxony,’ Hawthorne writes, ‘improves, like the Past as we walk away from it; until, seen from a certain distance, it acquires a smack of Florence. But cross this line in either direction, and the charm begins to wane’ (11). As Hawthorne climbs out of the Elbe River valley, his mood initially brightens. Like Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl before him, he has laced up stout walking shoes and he is determined to hike and hike and hike.5 ‘I refuse at the outset to be hurried,’ Hawthorne writes, ‘or to stick to the main road when the by-path looks more inviting’ (15). Soon, though, those by-paths have trapped Hawthorne into an excursus on modernization – again, not unlike Riehl.6 Hawthorne reads the contrast between modernity and the not-modern both from the landscape and on the piteous faces of the first peasants he meets. ‘The ignorance of the average Saxon peasant is petrifying,’ he writes. But Hawthorne’s analysis immediately broadens out to include Saxons in general: ‘The Saxon mind is capacious of an indefinite amount of information; but its digestion is out of proportion weak. There is not power to work up the meal of knowledge into the flesh and blood of wisdom. I have observed in the faces of the learned an expression of mental dyspepsia, – bulbous foreheads and dull pale eyes’ (15–17).

In chapter 2, more than fifty pages are required to squeeze every drop of meaning from the travel genre’s mandatory examination of German
drinking customs. Dresden is a beer-lake, ‘of which the breweries are the head-waters ... The fishes are the Dresdeners themselves, who, instead of swimming in the lake, allow it to swim in them’ (89). Exteriors and interiors meet in other ways too: ‘[The beer] draws a transparent screen between us and our mental processes,’ we read, as Hawthorne begins to identify with his Saxon comrades more than he wants to. Soon both he and they are engorged with feelings of superiority and complacency. We see them as foreigner and native, but they view each other across facing pages of Saxon Studies. On one side is Hawthorne, sitting ‘full-orbed and complete’; there, on the next page, we survey the rest of the room. ‘Who calls the Saxon cold?’ asks Hawthorne. ‘I like to hear him call for his beer – as though he had been wrongfully separated from it, and claimed it as his Saxon birthright’ (80–2). But the Saxon is caught out when he imagines that he has a higher purpose in life. With enough drink in him, writes Hawthorne, the Saxon ‘will sling his mug at anybody; and it is instructive to observe, when once his victory is secure, how voluble, excited, and indignant he becomes.’ These are not exactly Nietzsche’s Untimely Meditations (1873–6). Yet the chronological fit is uncanny. In Hawthorne’s study we encounter ‘the same Saxon in his beer-saloon as at Sedan!’ Hawthorne was in good company when he depicted the German philistine, drunk with victory, becoming ‘implacable and over-bearing towards his foe’ (88).

Subsequent chapters provide the inevitable treatises on German scholarship, German music, and German love of authority. In each case Hawthorne feels bound to demonstrate that if German professors, shopkeepers, students, and other citizens are a bad lot generally, they are nowhere worse than in Saxony. The section on music is typical. ‘The Saxons have a less correct ear for music than any people with which I am acquainted,’ Hawthorne blares. The average Saxon orchestra and the typical group of young students singing together are alike in that each is ‘exhaustively and indefatigably trained. Bismarck and Wagner are at the bottom of it’ (116). The ubiquitous beer tent is also to blame. The Saxon ‘is continually doing things false in harmony ... Who but he can sit through a symphony of Beethoven’s, applauding its majestic movements with the hand which has just carried to his lips a mug of beer, and anon returns thither with a slice of sausage’ (55).

For Hawthorne, the philistine Saxon is everywhere, and his training begins early. ‘A Saxon baby ... is stiffened out in swaddling-clothes: moving only his pale bluish eyes and pasty little fingers ... I am credibly informed, that they must be dashed with cold water in order to bring
their lungs into action. A dash of cold water would be apt to produce a spasm in a Saxon of whatever age’ (49–50). And so the ‘habit of following authority and precedent in all concerns of life grows with them. ... They swim everywhere in the cork-jacket of Law; and, should it fail them, flounder and sink’ (50–1).

Imagining Germans

Hawthorne’s book provided sufficient kindling to light a fire of protest under every group of Saxons who might have rallied in the name of political correctness. What Mordecai Richler said of Innocents Abroad also applies to Saxon Studies: were it to be released today, it would probably ‘be banned in schools, the author condemned as a racist, and possibly, just possibly, [find] himself the subject of a fatwa.’

In trying to embed Hawthorne’s book within primary and secondary literatures about American views of nineteenth-century Germany, one must take into account the inconsistent and fluctuating assessments of local and regional German cultures. Recent analyses focusing on nineteenth-century American accounts of travel in Saxony claim that Americans praised almost everything about German life and letters. Such travellers allegedly never forgot to accentuate the positive. They offered upbeat assessments of the Germans’ military firepower, their expert civil service, state support for the arts, local self-government, Bismarck’s social-welfare schemes, and German accomplishments in higher education (particularly science and technology rather than literature and philosophy). Such appraisals were not drawn from ignorance. From 1815 Americans had been invading Göttingen, Heidelberg, and other German university cities to study, tramp about, and hang out. This well-heeled elite, disproportionately from New England, was predisposed to praise Germany as the embodiment of academic ideals and high culture. American journals such as The Nation and U.S. diplomats such as George Bancroft enthused about how well Germans had learned about the separation of powers and other features of American republicanism.

On one level Hawthorne’s assessment ran with the grain of these reports. When he was writing in the 1870s, Americans still appreciated German (especially Protestant) support for the Union cause during the American Civil War. Having barely held their own nation together in the 1860s, Americans praised German unification in 1871. Yet the agony of the Civil War was a fresh memory. Therefore, the whole issue
of states’ rights, federalism, and the preservation of local customs was not only underplayed in American commentaries of the 1870s; it became almost taboo. American diplomats believed they had good reason to side with a strong state and a strong executive authority in Germany. They did so not to repudiate Germans’ own efforts to achieve greater individual liberty, still less to slow down Germany’s advance towards American ideals of Western civilization. Rather, they saw a strong, unitary, ‘modern’ constitution as the only framework within which individual liberty could flourish.\textsuperscript{13} ‘The emperor is the point of union’ – this was how American constitutional experts affirmed that a unified and militarily secure state precluded the ‘despotism’ of parliament, of the masses, or any secessionist threat.\textsuperscript{14} Thus Hawthorne, writing ten years after the end of the Civil War, wanted to explain what was progressive and what was retrograde about Saxon society, but he was relatively uninterested in Saxony’s role within Germany’s federal system or, indeed, in German politics at all.

But not all American commentators admired German styles of governance. A tendency to lump Saxons, Prussians, and other Germans together into a unitary ‘drilled nation on furlough’\textsuperscript{15} had already begun when Hawthorne was writing \textit{Saxon Studies}. We can date the genesis of this trend fairly precisely to the autumn of 1870, when the Germans encircled, bombarded, and attempted to starve Paris into submission in the final phase of the Franco-German War.\textsuperscript{16} By the time the new German Empire was proclaimed in January 1871, Walt Whitman spoke for many when he noted: ‘As the case now stands, I find myself now far more for the French than I ever was for the Prussians.’

Whether positive or more critical, rarely did American observers inject into their accounts any ironic or critical self-distancing – exactly those devices on which scholars in the field of imagology have focused their attention.\textsuperscript{17} In most appraisals written by foreign travellers in Germany one finds neither the accidental nor the intentional ‘false images’ (\textit{Trugbilder}) that are such a valuable source for scholars trying to distinguish between image and reality.\textsuperscript{18} What do we mean by ‘false images’? One might cite the German middle-class manager in David Lodge’s novel \textit{Nice Work} (1988), who clicks his heels in a way no bourgeois German of his day would do. Or the middle-ranking official, ‘Herr Rat,’ in Katherine Mansfield’s short story ‘Germans at Meat’ (1911), who allegedly – but implausibly – ‘fixed his cold blue eyes upon me with an expression which suggested a thousand premeditated invasions.’ These false images are as intriguing as they are perplexing. Their mul-
tiple alterities can leave us in a hall of mirrors – though one quite different from *la galerie des Glaces* in the Versailles Palace where a ‘unified’ Germany was so pompously – and prematurely – proclaimed on 18 January 1871. And so the question arises: what does this interpretative landscape offer to historians seeking reliable description and insight, not simply reinforcement of existing national stereotypes and polarizing rants?  

Imagology as a field of scholarly inquiry – mainly literary inquiry – is distinct from older forms of national stereotyping. It first gained currency among French scholars after the Second World War who tackled the topic of ‘how one nation sees the other.’ Such scholars were concerned not only with the origins and meanings of alleged national characteristics as portrayed in literature, but also with the ‘motivations and the effects of our habit of thinking, speaking, and writing in the form of prejudices, stereotypes and clichés.’ Since the 1980s, under the influence of cultural, postcolonial, and other studies, imagology has helped scholars explain how ‘thinking, judging, writing in the form of images reflects fundamental conditions of perception, imagination, and representation.’

It would explode the bounds of this chapter to do more than note the symbolic investments that patriots have made in such national figures as the German Michel, John Bull, Uncle Sam, William Tell, or Don Quixote. However, other touchstones can help us determine why Julian Hawthorne attempted to sum up attitudes and attributes that together constituted ‘Saxonness.’ Did he see Saxonness as something fixed, expressing itself in the same way from generation to generation or village to village? Or did it appear more protean and malleable than that? Was Hawthorne claiming to reveal eternal truths about Saxony, or Germany, or the human condition? Or was he satisfied to provide only glimpses of personal and societal behaviours in local settings?

Before we turn to contemporary reviews of *Saxon Studies* to seek answers to these questions, we should point out that Hawthorne’s caustic dismissal of Saxon society does not stand as far outside the mainstream of the genre of travel literature as both contemporary reviewers and recent historians have suggested. An instructive example is provided by Henry Mayhew’s *German Life and Manners as Seen in Saxony*, which appeared in 1864. Lest rhetorical excess be regarded as something on which Julian Hawthorne took out a patent in 1876, one line from Mayhew’s conclusion sets the record straight: ‘Never was such a lanthorn-jawed, sallow-faced, hollow-eyed, herring-gutted,
spindle-shanked, goître-necked, sore-mouthed, sad-looking, half-clad, tatter-demalion race of people, as the working population of Saxony, seen in any other part of the civilized world.'

The ‘Native Son’

Henry Mayhew’s book received much more positive reviews than did Hawthorne’s ten years later. Henry James’s review of Saxon Studies suggests why. James’s review is a thing of beauty: concise and cutting, a slap where a slap is needed. The opening line sets the tone: ‘Mr. Hawthorne is decidedly disappointing.’ The second line states the obvious: the son is not up to the father’s craft. Julian Hawthorne, we read, writes with ‘vigor and vivacity,’ but ‘the reader’s last impression is of a strange immaturity of thought.’

Henry James’s critique can be summarized under three points. First, Hawthorne’s depiction of Saxon society is criticized as mean-spirited. The lack of generosity towards a foreign people strikes James as unfair: Hawthorne seems to have been motivated by ‘the simple desire ... to pour forth his aversion to a city in which, for several years, he had not been able to guard himself against being regretfully irritable and uncomfortable.’ Therefore, Hawthorne’s humour is ‘acrid and stingy.’ His ‘reveries are ill-natured.’ His ‘ingenuity is all vituperative.’ Second, James objects to the method of the book. ‘It gives us the feeling,’ he writes, ‘that the author has nursed his dislikes and irritations in a dark closet, that he has never put them forth into the open air, never discussed and compared and intelligently verified them.’ This approach does not make for ‘good literature.’ Third, James feels that Hawthorne ‘has quite violated’ the canon. Exactly what canon, we are not told. One can surmise, however, that such a canon would certainly include Mark Twain. Indeed, according to James, Hawthorne did not understand why the tone he adopted is ‘not a rational, or a profitable, or a philosophic, or a really amusing one.’ Thus, Saxon Studies is ‘a brooding book, with all the defects and none of the charms of the type.’

James hints at the kinds of questions that imagologists might pose to Hawthorne had they the chance. He first quotes one of Hawthorne’s bolder denunciations of the Saxons’ ‘national’ and ‘individual’ character. ‘This is a sweeping but an interesting charge,’ James writes. The reader, he continues, would have profited if the author had gone a little further ‘into the psychology of the matter.’ But instead Hawthorne pulls up short in every chapter: he provides no verifiable social obser-
vations of private manners, public morals, opinions, conversations, or ways of life. In James’s view, Hawthorne is also silent on German theatre, literature, the press, and the arts. Implying that Julian’s father would not have missed the same opportunity, James charges that the son has failed to write a book that sees the large things and ignores the very small things. *Saxon Studies*, he concludes, is the kind of book that a very young man might write ‘in a season of combined ill-humor and conscious cleverness; but it is a book which most young men would very soon afterwards be sorry to have written.’

Was Julian Hawthorne sorry he wrote *Saxon Studies*? We return to that question later. His publishers were certainly sorry. Both Straham in England and Osgood in America went bankrupt immediately after the appearance of the book. Other reviewers were also sorry. None of them put the knife in quite so delicately as Henry James had; but many compared *Saxon Studies* unfavourably with Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *English Traits* (1856) and with Mayhew’s *German Life and Manners* (1864). The latter, it was said, provided a more mature, a more compelling, a less capricious picture of Saxon society, because it was ‘factual,’ not impressionistic. In fact, Mayhew and Hawthorne tackled many of the same topics – absurd place-names, the mendacity of Saxon servants and journalists, army and police regulations, and Saxon men who made their women work harder than horses and cows. *Saxon Studies*’ lively spirit of observation’ drew some praise from reviewers. But most wondered why he seemed so ‘unaccountably angry.’ Why, they asked, had he allowed his book to become so infected with the spirit of gratuitous denunciation and petulance? No one knew.

Opinion was more divided as to whether Hawthorne had caught any sense of the Saxon people’s ‘characteristic’ and ‘national’ traits. Most agreed he had not. One reviewer warned readers of *The Academy* that they could not expect to commune with nature in Saxony or be inspired by Dresden’s architecture without being caught in the downdraft of Hawthorne’s peevishness and his ‘misleading’ conclusions. For this reviewer, the caricatures Hawthorne drew were so unlike the real inhabitants of Dresden that the work might as easily have been entitled *Siberian Studies*.

Dresdener, other Saxons, and allegedly even Kaiser Wilhelm I gave the book a rancorous reception, as did a reviewer for the *Dresdner Nachrichten*. It is important to know that this newspaper represented the far Right in Saxony: its snobbish, antisemitic, and chauvinistic rhetoric perfectly mirrored the views of Dresden’s conservative elite. Yet the
two anonymous reviews of *Saxon Studies* that appeared in the first week of February 1876 ‘crackled with resentment,’ as the reviewer challenged Hawthorne in the name of all aggrieved Dresdener. Hawthorne of Boston, we read, ‘has perpetrated an outrageous libel on Dresden.’ But the reviewer does not stop there. The calumnies being hurled by this ‘pretentious American,’ this ‘snobbish blockhead,’ this ‘clownish upstart,’ we read, are actually aimed at Saxony and the whole of Germany. Did Hawthorne really expect that all Saxons should live ‘in the same style as wealthy people on Fifth Avenue in New York?’ asks the reviewer. Four days later, the reviewer directs his anger not only at Hawthorne but at all Americans – those ‘Yankees’ who offer ‘refuge to all the oppressed of the world’ but do so with ‘bombastic phrases.’ To nail this argument the *Nachrichten*’s reviewer hits Hawthorne where he thinks it will hurt most: by citing his father. Thus, he quotes the following lines from Nathaniel’s *English Notebooks*: ‘Nothing is so absolutely odious as the sense of freedom and equality pertaining to an American grafted on the mind of a native of any other country in the world. A naturalized citizen is hateful. Nobody has the right to our ideas, unless born to them.’ Here the reviewer observes: ‘Certainly one can expect no just estimate of Dresden, Saxony, and the Germans from a son who has learned from his father that freedom and equality are a monopoly of Americans.’ Lastly, this critic claims that Julian Hawthorne’s emphasis on the least cultured and least attractive elements of Saxon society is the natural result of having failed to gain admission to high society in Dresden – or even the higher ranks of the American colony in its midst. Now, it may be true that there is no more disgruntled outsider than the uninvited American. But the *Nachrichten*’s reviewer is too confident that he knew the score on this point.

How can we test the validity of these charges – that Hawthorne had rationalized accumulated personal irritations, frustrated social climbing, and an antipathy towards foreigners inherited from his father? We can do so by examining Hawthorne’s own circumstances during his years in Dresden and by following clues he provides in the opening and closing pages of *Saxon Studies*.

**Mr Hawthorne Sees It Through**

Our task is not to sleuth out disguised literary merit or to save Hawthorne’s book from historical oblivion. But it would be worth knowing what Hawthorne was up to in Dresden. What axe did he have to grind?
Was his father the only family member to provide the chip that rested not-so-lightly on his shoulder? If Twain’s *Innocents Abroad* is America’s classic ‘coming-of-cultural-age’ book, can we shoehorn *Saxon Studies* into a *personal* coming-of-age story? And can we find for Hawthorne a place in the historical and literary contexts of the late 1860s and 1870s – when, as the Canadian humourist Stephen Leacock once noted, ‘of American literature there was much doubt in Europe; of American honesty, much more; of American manners, more still.’

When Julian Hawthorne first visited Dresden in 1869, he was hardly a stranger to foreign travel. In 1853, at the age of seven, he had accompanied his parents to Italy and France. One wonders what early lessons Julian learned on that trip from his father, a man who habitually lived within himself (and seemed to find no better society, as Julian once remarked). Ten years later Julian entered Harvard. But he spent more time on rowing and other athletics than in the classroom. Eventually, in the same year that the Saxons met their match at the hands of Prussia in the Battle of Königgrätz (1866), Julian met his too: he was expelled from Harvard for neglecting his studies. Two years later he began to train as a civil engineer at the Lawrence Scientific School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. James Russell Lowell, Nathaniel’s old friend, was induced to give young Hawthorne some tutoring in German – what Julian described as ‘the mollifying of my barbarism.’ However, Julian’s subsequent stays in Saxony were most likely hampered by an inadequate preparation in the German language, rendering him incapable of Twain’s joyful grappling with German grammar and syntax.

Julian Hawthorne set out for Germany with his mother and sisters in October 1868. His first impressions were uniformly positive. He remarked on the pleasant German cafés and their ‘most excellent Bier’ served ‘in very large glass tankards, with covers.’ Hawthorne observed that not only the prices, but everything else, was ‘much better than in America.’ The first winter living in Dresden was a mainly happy one, spent visiting galleries, frequenting ‘hospitable kellers and breweries,’ and rhapsodizing at length about Raphael’s ‘divine’ *Madonna and Child* in Dresden’s Art Gallery. Thus, Julian would have dismissed the notion that his account of life in Saxony was immature, unschooled, or superficial. Nor were American and German reviewers of *Saxon Studies* correct in assuming that Hawthorne had mixed only with lower society or that he was perpetually angry with Dresden and its inhabitants. Later, for example, in the winter of 1872–3, we know that the Hawthornes joined happily in the social events that were *de rigueur* during the ‘sea-
son.’ An American friend who visited around this time found that the Hawthornes’ house at Waisenhausstrasse 13 was ‘one of the best houses on one of the finest streets in Dresden, amid luxurious surroundings.’

For almost a year after his arrival in 1868, Hawthorne put off taking up formal studies at Dresden’s Realschule – a training academy for civil engineers. So he certainly had the time to indulge in a congenial mix of socializing and observation. It was decided that Julian should attend a few lectures at the Realschule to prepare himself for the technical terms he would encounter in the lecture hall. However, by the time he could formally be admitted, in October 1869, Julian confided to his journal that he wanted above all to ‘get through by next fall and go home.’

We remain unsure exactly where Julian Hawthorne was during the next two years. After a semester or two of unaccomplished attendance at the Realschule, Julian returned to New York. There he was temporarily stranded by the outbreak of the Franco-German War in July 1870. And there he married May Amelung (‘Minne’) in November. Soon Hawthorne gained employment as a hydrographic engineer under General George B. McClellan in the New York department of docks. It was at this point that Hawthorne turned to writing full time. But before long he was back in Dresden, where he remained until September 1874. While there he published two novels, Bressant (1873) and Idolatry (1874). The mixed reception that greeted these novels helps explain why the author turned away from fiction when he conceived his Saxon Studies.

Hawthorne later conceded that Bressant was ‘a good book spoiled’: ‘were it not for the consideration of lucre,’ he wrote, ‘I would suppress the edition at once.’ Instead, Hawthorne gradually became comfortable with a style he used to good effect in a short piece entitled ‘A Golden Wedding in the Best Society.’ This scornful sketch described the golden wedding ceremonies of Saxony’s King Johann and his wife, which lasted for six days in November 1872. It prefigured the sharp, dismissive tone of Saxon Studies. Amid the ‘dangers, turmoils, and revolutions of the nineteenth century,’ wrote Hawthorne, here in Saxony this aged royal couple ‘have been living their royal little lives, doing their formal little duties, making their stiff little visits, enjoying their sober little glories, suffering the unimportant little misfortunes, worshipping according to the tenets of their bigoted old religion.’ Around the same time ‘A Golden Wedding’ was written, loutish German officers and other villainous caricatures began to populate Hawthorne’s short stories. Sometimes the author provided shrewd insight. As Maurice Bassan has
written, when Hawthorne looked down from his window or mingled with Dresden’s crowds, he was ‘a keen if not impartial observer.’ Nevertheless, in most of the fiction he wrote during this period, Hawthorne consciously avoided realism and preferred to poke fun at romantic stereotypes. The ‘fun’ we find in Saxon Studies is sparing. But we should not be deceived that Saxon Studies was ever meant to be a travelogue or a chronicle. Reliability and good faith were never Julian Hawthorne’s strong suits.

Given that The Nation’s reviewer skewered Bressant as containing ‘a morbid fingerling of unclean emotions’ and that the journal completely ignored Idolatry, perhaps Julian got off lightly with Henry James’s review of Saxon Studies. But these negative reviews help explain why Hawthorne was eager to turn from the racy, pseudo-philosophical, and unappreciated styles he had adopted in these two novels, preferring the richer material that a study of contemporary manners in a faraway land might provide.

**Saxons into Germans**

We now know enough about Julian Hawthorne’s situation in Dresden to interpret his intentions in writing Saxon Studies in a new light. This does not entail reading between the lines so much as sensitizing ourselves to the opportunities for ironic detachment that Hawthorne sought in tackling this subject. Doing so, it is not difficult to find passages in Saxon Studies where the outsider-as-insider-as-outsider speaks to the themes of localism, landscape, and the ambiguities of place.

Let’s start with geese. Geese, writes Hawthorne, ‘constitute a goodly proportion of the village population’ in any given Saxon locality – and ‘they are invariably at home.’ This goose-Gemeinschaft reveals something important about Saxon social relations, believes Hawthorne. ‘How happens it, now, that there should be so many geese in Saxon villages? ... I fear there must be an occult vein of sympathy between them and their owners, ... some mutual consciousness of similar dispositions’ (47). While not overly prideful of their military accomplishments, for Hawthorne these Saxons reflect a German tendency to over-organize everything and thereby privilege the needs of the community over the rights of the individual. It is a hateful ordering of priorities, Hawthorne implies – one that conjures up notions of enraged geese: ‘There is something very human in their hiss.’

Hawthorne is equally disenchanted with Saxons for the choices they
make about how to appreciate and manage nature. After visiting the majestic Bastei rock formation in the Saxon Switzerland, Hawthorne inverts the usual American wonderment at the beauty of the region. Because the Bastei contrasts so sharply with the rest of Saxony’s landscape, Hawthorne stresses that it is anomalous – literally and symbolically. Whereas German literature has produced ‘cloud-capped giants’ that give the land its reputation, Hawthorne asks: ‘Why so flat and tedious, O Saxony?’ The author is not talking just about wastelands and hollow men: he is disappointed that the march of moral progress has not yet reached Saxony. ‘Is there any remedy?’ Hawthorne asks. ‘I see none, short of a general eruption, whereby the whole surface might be broken up in volcanoes, and become a Switzerland indeed ... Mountainous tracts are generally inclined to freedom’ (62–3). Saxon forests, too, are to blame: Hawthorne can’t escape them. We are not in a position to say precisely why Hawthorne sought refuge in the dark Saxon woods or what sort of artistic inspiration he hoped to find there. But we can understand his peevishness about the German obsession with Ordnung by parsing his words describing the oppressiveness of the Saxon forest: ‘Who but a hypocrite would pretend to lose himself in a forest, all whose trees were numbered? ... We may find them set forth in the for-ester’s book thus: “No. 27. Oak. Heinrich the Stout.” “No. 28. Elm. Karl the Long-legged.” What is to happen to a people who can do such things as this?’ (57).

The brush with which Hawthorne tars the Saxon character is not so broad that it cannot render detail in portraying the built environment and daily customs. ‘When I read of a country unknown or only slightly known,’ wrote Mrs Alfred Sidgwick, the author of *Home Life in Germany* (1912), ‘I like to be told all the insignificant trifles that make the common round of life.’ Hawthorne agrees. Indeed, the details of everyday life become programmatic for him. This helps explain why the ‘trivialities’ that reviewers of *Saxon Studies* dismissed so readily hold value for historians. In a chapter titled ‘Sidewalks and Roadways,’ for example, Hawthorne takes on the mantle of a social anthropologist. At other points in the book he seeks to portray the relationship between the unique and the universal in the manner of a political scientist – albeit with more facetiousness than either travel writers or scholars generally endorse.

In the following passage, Hawthorne examines Germany’s fragile unity in the early 1870s with uncharacteristically broad humour – which may explain why it was never cited by contemporary reviewers.
Despite his avowed interest in unwrapping ‘a romantic and poetical enigma,’ Hawthorne’s analogy is more explicitly political than any other in the book. It turns on the question of where encroachments on local brewing customs might ultimately lead.

This liquor [German beer] can be neither brewed nor exported beyond the Father-land; nay, a journey of but a few miles from its birthplace impairs its integrity...

Now, the Berlin Government seems desirous of proving ... that people living, no matter how far apart and under what different circumstances, may be united in mind, sentiment, and disposition as one man. To this end, what method more effective than to ordain a universal beer, and forbid the brewing or drinking of any other? ... Two alternatives suggest themselves at once. The first, to create a uniform climate, soil, and water, throughout the Father-land...; the second, to brew the beer nowhere save in Berlin, to be drunk on the premises... If, as is believed, Germans are Germans by virtue of the beer they drink, if all drank the same beer, of course they all would become the same Germans.

Moreover, if this may be done with the nation, why not apply the principle to the individual? ... If a nation may be concentrated at a single point, as Berlin, why not concentrate the persons composing it into a single individual, as Bismarck? Having swallowed his countrymen, the prince could thereafter legislate to please himself, and might ultimately proceed to swallow himself into a universal atom (76–8).

Hawthorne’s logical but intentionally absurd conclusion is that the ‘life-blood of the country’ must remain local, not national. Otherwise, he suggests, the last iota of sub-national identity will disappear into the Black Hole of Bismarck’s centralizing tendencies.40

Leave-Taking, or: The Death of the German Cousin

Hawthorne was more than ready to bid farewell to Dresden in the autumn of 1874. In the final analysis, we cannot know whether he had gone to Dresden as a passionate pilgrim, to escape looming disappointments in New York, or because of the lure of ‘lucre.’ Nor can we know precisely what affronts he suffered in the Saxon capital. Hints in the text (23–8, 411–15) suggest the possibility that Hawthorne became either infatuated or actually involved with a Saxon woman while his wife was pregnant with their third child. From one venomous passage directed
against Saxon merchants, we can surmise that Hawthorne was cheated by local tradesmen (211–13). He may even have been the unnamed American who bled profusely (but who ultimately bettered his German opponent) in the requisite duelling scene (308–10). In any case, Hawthorne’s world travels and personal calamities did not end in 1874. In 1896 he began work as a journalist and was soon filing reports from India and Cuba. In 1908 Hawthorne became involved in a fraudulent scheme to sell shares in a Canadian mine: investors bought up some $3.5 million in shares but received no dividends. In March 1913 he was sentenced to a year in a federal penitentiary for fraud. During the First World War he moved to California, and in 1923 he began writing for the *Pasadena Star-News*, which he continued until his death on 14 July 1934.

To the end of his career, Hawthorne and his art were fascinating but shallow: neither succeeded in working the kind of magic that reveals all. Nevertheless, in the preface to *Saxon Studies*, which so baffled Henry James, Hawthorne may have come closer to that goal than any reviewer knew, claiming ‘that his interest in Saxony and the Saxons is of the most moderate kind, – certainly not enough to provoke a treatise upon them.’ But the ‘plan of his work’ required ‘some concrete nucleus round which to group such thoughts and fancies as he wished to ventilate.’ Therefore, he is not the least bit worried that a critic might discover nothing essentially Saxon in *Saxon Studies*: on the contrary, writes Hawthorne, he would ‘insist upon thinking such a verdict complimentary’ (3–4).

Hawthorne claims that he has also intended *Saxon Studies* to be a book that examines local environments and customs; but he is not presuming that he can improve either one. Hawthorne states boldly that he has no wish to be seen as a ‘patcher-up of dilapidated manners and morals’ (5). Indeed, his misanthropic appraisal of Saxon society and his determination ‘to speak home truths on this subject’ are motivated ‘by reason of the mawkish tendency, very observable of late, to make Germans of all people in the world, and Saxons with them, objects of sentimental hero-worship.’ Everything he includes in *Saxon Studies*, claims Hawthorne, errs on the side of being too mild rather than too severe (4). As historians, we may accept or reject Hawthorne’s pronouncements about the backwardness or modernity of Saxon society and about the centralizing or centrifugal tendencies in German politics. We may also doubt the accuracy with which he sketches the look and feel of Saxon villages, towns, and cities. But to dismiss Hawthorne’s book as inept caricature is to miss other, richer ways of seeing the local in literature.

Hawthorne’s personal disappointments are also reflected in the final
lines of *Saxon Studies*. As he takes leave of Dresden, Hawthorne wants the reader to know that his stay has not been a fleeting one. He has taken the time to learn some hard lessons about Saxon life – about life itself. The bookends of Hawthorne’s analysis emphasize that the allure with which Dresden envelopes the unwary traveller is deceitful. ‘[Dresden] charms at first sight – at a distance – or mirrored in the glass of the imagination.’ Nearer study, Hawthorne writes, ‘dispels all illusions: we discover various unlovely traits, intrinsic no less than accidental.’ At first sight this verdict seems unequivocal. ‘The place is in bad hands,’ the author writes. ‘It is impossible to enjoy [Dresden’s] beauties apart from its defects: the latter are innate, the former purely superficial.’ Therefore Dresden is all the more disappointing now that it is time to bid it farewell. Its initial promise was great. That promise, like the author’s own, remains unfulfilled. Hawthorne has neither lost himself in a distant land nor fully come to terms with the expectations that continue to rest upon his shoulders years after his father’s death. ‘The parting disappointment is the saddest of all,’ writes Hawthorne, precisely because ‘so few and slight regrets attend our last farewell!’ (451–2). But is this in fact the final impression Hawthorne wants to convey?

**Mr Hawthorne’s Secret**

Some final musings about Hawthorne’s aims as an innocent abroad will help us to address this question. Two scholarly observations on the power of Mark Twain’s writing may apply here. Arthur Miller once wrote that we keep reading Twain because he ‘wrote much more like a father than a son.’ Miller continued the thought: ‘[Twain] doesn’t seem to be sitting in class taunting the teacher but standing at the head of it challenging his students to acknowledge their own humanity, that is, their immemorial attraction to the untrue.’ But, Hawthorne did no such thing. On the
contrary: as he revealed in his *Confessions and Criticisms*, he prized imagination too highly, and he scorned ‘the rush of rational knowledge’ and the touchstone of scientific truth too consistently, to embrace plain language. Hawthorne was the spiritual son of Coleridge and Emerson: the imaginative process must begin in nature and refuse to distort it. Yet for Hawthorne, art depended not upon literal fact but upon perception of what he once called ‘the underlying truth, of which fact is but the phenomenal and imperfect shadow.’

Thus, the authorial voice towards which Hawthorne was groping in *Saxon Studies* fans out to cover a variety of meanings.

Some sixty years after *Saxon Studies* was published, close to the end of his long life, Hawthorne reminisced about his *Sturm und Drang* period of the 1870s. He disagreed with Henry James that *Saxon Studies* was the kind of book a young author would come to regret. Indeed, he claimed that it ‘was the best book I ever wrote.’ Oh dear, we shudder. Nevertheless, Hawthorne’s expression of delight that the *Dresdner Nachrichten*’s reviewer had demolished his book, like his proud claim that ‘the German emperor was moved to issue an edict forbidding its circulation in his dominions,’ indicate just how ironic the book was meant to be and just how playful he still felt about it decades later. To be sure, one cannot dismiss the likelihood that Hawthorne was making a virtue of necessity. The book had been panned, and he needed to put the best possible face on a bad business. But if we delve deeper, an alternative interpretation presents itself.

The clues are all there. The 1932 article in which he wrote about *Saxon Studies* was entitled ‘Recalling Heinrich Heine.’ In it Hawthorne explained that in 1876 he had arranged to have the *Dresdner Nachrichten* review translated and fixed to the fly-leaf of the book. As he put it, the German reviewer had ‘repaid me for the labor of composition and satisfied me that I had not done amiss.’ It was precisely the *Nachrichten*’s rant, not his own, that would ‘put the Anglo-Saxon reader in tune with my little satire.’ This half-twist did not have the intended effect when his publishers went bankrupt: ‘fate was too swift for me,’ Hawthorne remembered, and ‘the circulation of the “Studies” was naturally small.’ But as historians we must not be fooled by smallness or fate. Hawthorne, at any rate, was pleased by the little splash his little book made.

To reach this conclusion we have not so much retraced Hawthorne’s intellectual journey as taken a separate path to the same point of discovery he reached. We have learned that identity ‘is not about one’s given place, but about one’s chosen position.’ Hawthorne’s identity at
the time he wrote *Saxon Studies* was hybrid, but it held at least a kernel of universality within it – in a manner suggested by Walt Whitman in *Song of Myself*:47

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Hawthorne’s view of himself in the 1870s was still fragile and in flux; his journey to self-knowledge would continue for many years. He thought Dresden looked best when seen in the nineteenth-century equivalent of a rear-view mirror. Therefore, the close-up grubbiness he portrayed was intentionally unattractive. To the extent that he took a realistic approach at all, that realism was narrow and reductive, derivative and strained. But Hawthorne had discovered, and we along with him, that familiar objects can indeed be larger than they appear in reflection.

At the time *Saxon Studies* was written, Hawthorne probably surprised even himself in the degree to which he transcended, fleetingly, those barriers to artistic creativity that plagued him throughout his life. W.H. Auden once wrote that a poet can hope for no more than ‘to be, like some valley cheese, local, but prized everywhere.’48 Hawthorne’s final leave-taking from Dresden at the end of the book is in fact more brooding than poetic. But we should not ignore the author’s genuine expectation that *Saxon Studies* would be more popular than his novels. More important still, we must not disregard Hawthorne’s *personal* delight that he had successfully disguised his modest book’s satirical premise and its hidden ironies.

Can *Saxon Studies* be seen as an important moment in America’s literary discovery of Europe? Does it deserve a place ‘in the American-abroad genre of jaundiced realism’?49 The jury is still out. But one suspects that Julian Hawthorne would have agreed with Montreal’s irascibly hybrid Mordecai Richler, who once noted that to become a tramp abroad is to rediscover how even our most jaded senses are heightened by ‘all things counter, original, spare, [and] strange.’50

NOTES

For critical comments on a draft of this chapter I am grateful to David Blackburn, Alon Confino, Andrea Geddes Poole, and John Zilcosky.
1 Julian Hawthorne, *Saxon Studies* (Boston, 1876). Nathaniel Hawthorne, born in 1804, had died in 1864, four years before his son departed for Germany.

2 Compare Henry Mayhew, *German Life and Manners As Seen in Saxony at the Present Day*, 2 vols. (London, 1864), esp. 1:361. Mayhew (1812–87) was a founder and one of the first editors of *Punch* magazine. See also Sidney Whitman, *German Memories* (London, 1912), 16; and Whitman, *Imperial Germany* (Leipzig, 1890), 73.


6 See Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *The Natural History of the German People*, ed., trans., and intro. David J. Diephouse (Lewiston, NY, 1990), 63–77 and passim; this is an abridged edition of a German work that appeared in four parts between 1851 and 1869.


11 See Bancroft’s report to the U.S. Secretary of State on the constitution and political institutions of the North German Confederation; National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md., Record Group 59, M44, reel 14, unfoliated, report of 1 Nov. 1867.

12 See Schieber, Transformation, 19.

13 See George Bancroft writing in October 1870, cited ibid., 11.


16 See Schieber, Transformation, 27.


21 See the project outline (2005) for Imagology: A Handbook on the Literary Repre-


24 Cf. e.g. Mayhew, German Life and Manners, 1:4, and Hawthorne, Saxon Studies, 29–30.

25 For the following, see Knox, ‘Dissonance Abroad,’ 133–4.

26 Dresdner Nachrichten, 1 and 4 Feb. 1876, cited ibid.

27 Knox, ‘Dissonance Abroad,’ 136.

28 Passages from the English Note-Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Sophia Hawthorne, 2 vols. in 1 (Boston, 1871), 137 (2 Nov. 1854).

29 Knox, ‘Dissonance Abroad,’ 137.


31 Cited ibid., xxxii.


33 Hawthorne, Memoirs, 182; see also 187.


35 Bassan, Hawthorne’s Son, 91.


37 Bassan, Hawthorne’s Son, 70–1.

38 Cf. Humble, ‘Breakdown,’ 49; Collier, Germany, 599.

39 Mrs Alfred Sidgwick, Home Life in Germany (New York, 1912), 2.

40 While we have no evidence that Hawthorne had read Riehl’s Natural History, in this regard they proceeded from the same premise.

41 Cited in Shelley Fisher Fishkin, ‘Foreword’ to Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad, xxii.

42 Bobbie Ann Mason, cited ibid., xx.

43 Cited in Bassan, Hawthorne’s Son, 175.

44 See Bassan, Hawthorne’s Son, 99, 101; Knox, ‘Dissonance Abroad,’ 138.

45 These retrospective claims are cited in Knox, ‘Dissonance Abroad,’ 131.

46 This and other points raised here draw on the unsigned essay ‘Identity’ found on the website of the Imagology Handbook, cited in n. 21 above.